

**AUTO THEORY AS CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST PRACTICE: PERFORMING
THEORY IN POST-1960S FEMINIST ART, LITERATURE, AND CRITICISM**

LAUREN FOURNIER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

September 2018

© Lauren Fournier, 2018

ABSTRACT

“Autotheory” is a term that has emerged in the zeitgeist of contemporary feminist cultural production to describe works of literature, art, and criticism that integrate autobiography and other explicitly subjective modes with philosophy and theory in experimental ways. While an emergent term, autotheory—a merging of the autobiographical with the philosophical or theoretical—can be traced through earlier feminist art, literature, theory, and activism. In this dissertation, I take up autotheory in relation to a selection of post-1960s texts—choosing works that engage a practice of autotheory in particularly performative ways—to consider the politics, aesthetics, and ethics of this feminist practice across media. Moving between the disciplines of English literature, Art History, Curatorial Studies, and Performance Studies and grounding my transdisciplinary methodology in Mieke Bal’s notion of concept-based practices for interdisciplinary research, I historicize and theorize autotheory through close readings of three primary texts: Adrian Piper’s *Food for the Spirit* (1971), Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1997), and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015). As I conduct extended readings of these three works, I gesture to related texts by other artists and writers to read the given work in relation to a larger movement or community of autotheoretical feminist and queer feminist impulses. My inquiry into autotheory involves reading works that have been described as autotheoretical (like *The Argonauts*) and recasting older works in light of this new term (like *Food*). I contextualize autotheory in a larger history of conceptualism, body art, performance, and art writing practices, and I focus on the period between the late 1960s and the present (late 2010s) as a pivotal time for thinking through autotheory as an aesthetic mode. I conclude that, for feminist artists and writers working in the wake of modernism, autotheory becomes a ripe mode of practice for processing, metabolizing, embodying, enacting, wracking, wrestling with, and reiterating or performing philosophy and theory from embodied, autobiographical, and otherwise subjectivized positionings; this is often done in ways that resonate with a politics of intersectionality and the move toward integrating art, life, theory, and practice.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Lori Denise Fournier (née Bey) and Raymond John Fournier.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I would like to thank my supervisor, Marcus Boon, whose rich insights into the field of contemporary theory have resonated ever since I took his graduate courses *Love and Death* and *Theorizing Sonic Communities* in 2013-14. I appreciate all of your support throughout these PhD process, and I very much appreciate your generous feedback and brilliant conversation these past five years. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to my other committee members, Darren Gobert and Shannon Bell, for their thoughtful feedback and support, and to Andy Weaver and Dan Adler for their generosity during my coursework and comprehensive exams. Darren: I am particularly grateful for your thorough feedback on my writing and grammar, and for pushing me to compose my academic writing in the most writerly way. You have been an important source of support for me during the PhD, and I really appreciate it. Thank you also to Kathy Armstrong and Tom Loebel for your administrative support and guidance through the program.

I am grateful to Valerie Walkerdine, Luce Irigaray, and Myra Davies for having generously opened up space for me to research and be in conversation with them around autotheory as a feminist mode of theorizing during my SSHRC-funded research trip to the UK in the summer of 2015. Thank you to Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue for reminding me of what it looks like to transmute feminist theory into practice, and to David Garneau and Sylvia Ziemann for your insights into the relationships between feminism, Indigeneity, and contemporary art over conversations on your patio in Treaty 4 territory. Thank you very much to Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick for our lively conversations around contemporary art, curation, and alternative epistemologies, and for being such inspiring and generous members of this community here in Toronto; thank you especially to Dr. Fisher for mentoring me in my burgeoning curatorial practice. Thank you to Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak for supporting me as I bridged my curatorial practice with my academic research, and for supporting me in curating a video art program on autotheory at Vtape. Thank you Sarah Brophy and Suzanne Zelazo for your feedback on my research, and for your considerate guidance on professional development.

Thank you to my colleagues, fellow artists and curators, and friends for keeping me inspired and nourished and for reminding me of the importance of community; in particular, I'd like to thank MLA Chernoff, Jacqueline Chia, Eric Schmaltz, Margeaux Feldman, Evan Tyler, Daniella Sanader, Sally Morgan, Hazel Meyer, Marjan Verstappen, Juliana Zalucky, Ida Bencke, Dea Antonsen, and Jen Macdonald. Thank you to my best friends Melodie Kline and Robin Low, and to everyone else I abandoned on the west coast when I moved to Toronto to start this PhD. Thank you to the magical women of the Perch who catalyzed my consciousness-raising as a pre-fourth wave feminist, back when I was living in East Vancouver in a tumultuous, post-Masters haze and needing that community the most: Lu Lee, Carissa Reed, Tara Sue Hallam, Jenna Lee Tuttle, Becky Leyva, Jessica Pandur, and Carly Wood.

I would also like to thank those who guided my research and practice as both an academic and as an artist and curator in my time as an undergraduate student at the University of Regina and as a Masters student at Simon Fraser University: most notably, Rachelle Viader-Knowles, Carmen Robertson, Garry Sherbert, Dorothy Lane, Peter Dickinson, Christine Kim, David Chariandy, Diana Solomon, and Dara Culhane. Thank you also to Lucia Lorenzi, Gabriel Levine, and Ted Whittall for their advice on navigating the PhD process.

To my parents, Lori Denise Bey and Raymond John Fournier: thank you for teaching me about passion and kindness, and for fostering a love of reading and writing in me from a young age. You never had the opportunity to attend college or University yourselves, but you encouraged me to go on to higher learning; you never put your own motives on me, and you trusted that I knew what I was doing as I moved from the Sciences into the Fine Arts and pursued graduate school in the Humanities. I love you more than I could ever put into words. I love our working-class language and our weird ways of communicating with each other: thank you for teaching me about kindness, humour, integrity, and the fact that there is no job too “small” to do without dignity. My family means the world to me, and I want to thank my sister and closest friend Sara Joyce Mulligan for her abiding love, humour, and wisdom, without which I wouldn’t be here today, and my brother-in-law Ryan Mulligan for his brotherly love, hilarity, and support.

Last but certainly not least, I am deeply grateful for, and indebted to, my dear partner Lee Henderson, for having supported me throughout my time as a PhD applicant, student, and candidate. You have supported me in all kinds of ways over these five years, and I don’t think I would be exaggerating if I said I could not have done it without you. Your brilliant brain, your thoughtful insights, your deep generosity and kindness, your remarkable patience, and your delicious cooking have all been integral to me getting through comprehensive exams and completing this dissertation. We have managed to stay together and to love each other, even after both living and working together in a single room. I am grateful for our eccentric and cozy home on Yonge Street, and to the energies of our neighbourhood. It has been painful to witness the gentrification and upheaval happening in this community, and I am glad to have been able to call this place home for the entirety of my time in the PhD program.

Research for this dissertation was made possible by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the SSHRC Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement, the Susan Crocker & John Hunkin Award in Fine Arts, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, and the York University Provost Dissertation Scholarship. Thank you to these generous funders for their financial support. Thank you also to the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), and the Association for Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) for providing me with support to present on my research for this dissertation at their conferences in Canada and the United States.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	vi
 Introduction: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice Across Media.....	1
 Chapter One: Processing Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic through Feminist Conceptual Art: Adrian Piper's <i>Food for the Spirit</i> as Kantian Selfie.....	110
 Chapter Two: Re-Performing Poststructuralism: Phallic Mimesis in Chris Kraus's <i>I Love Dick</i>	209
 Chapter Three: The Reparative Practice of Queer Feminist Autotheory: Performing Citationality and Intertextual Intimacy in Maggie Nelson's <i>The Argonauts</i>	309
 Conclusion: Autotheory and its Discontents.....	406
 Works Cited	450

INTRODUCTION

Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice Across Media

It is not necessary to believe that theory is the property of “theorists.” Their theory (that of scientists, philosophers) is only the most abstract, purest, most elaborated form of a capacity that is the property of every human being.

- Louis Althusser, “What Is Practice?”

Theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin.

- Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*

It’s okay for Vito Acconci to do his sex thing under the floorboards--that's called conceptual art. But when I wanted to do a conceptual piece--a massage parlour with me being massaged by men—my dealer just smiled and said, 'Hannah, why don't you just come up to my hotel instead?’”

- Hannah Wilke, “A Very Female Thing”

Autotheory: A Term That Isn’t Mine

I’m walking through the AGO’s *Mystical Landscapes* exhibition with my new friend Kara, a woman I met during my time at a rural art residency in Nova Scotia back in 2015. We met in a carpool driving back from the White Rabbit Arts festival in Upper Economy to Halifax, and when we ran into each other the next morning at Java Blend in Halifax’s north end we realized that something kept bringing us together and that we should probably talk. We shared our writing on the feminist problematics of “self-care,” with me showing Kara my recent self-published curatorial project *Self Care for Skeptics* and Kara showing me her poem “Questions to Ask Yourself Before Giving Up” that had recently been published in *GUTS: A Canadian Feminist Magazine*. It was clear to both of us that “self-care” was trending in feminist art and writing practices that year, and the consensus seemed to be that a truly feminist politic of self-care was one that shifted the emphasis away from neoliberal imperatives around the individual

“self” toward collective conceptions of care that prioritize social and structural systems of support.

Kara, who had recently started her PhD in Latin in Seattle, was in Toronto for a conference and we decided to meet up at the AGO for their free Wednesday night. The blockbuster exhibition of Impressionism and post-Impressionism was on and the line up to enter the gallery sprawled down Dundas Street. Once we entered the gallery, we spent a few hours squishing past crowds of people who walked through the gallery like zombies, holding what looked like cell phones from the nineties and what were, on closer look, the AGO’s audio guide for the exhibition. Though we didn’t know each other very well, Kara and I shared our thoughts and feelings on choosing to do a Humanities PhD at this particular moment in time. I liked being able to be this vulnerable with a new friend, to be able to speak honestly and openly with someone else who was in a similar position as I was. I was quite happy to be doing a PhD, even as I often described the experience as an “emotional rollercoaster.” When asked for advice from prospective PhD students, I recommended only doing the PhD if you are able to secure a good amount of funding; even better if the PhD can feed into your already active practice—whether as an artist, a writer, a curator, an activist or community organizer, and so on. Kara and I spoke candidly about our experiences in our respective programs and, pausing next to a lesser known work by Edvard Munch, a young woman around my age, maybe a few years younger, reached out to touch Kara’s shoulder. “Ava!” Kara exclaimed. “Lauren this is Ava, Ava this is Lauren.”

Ava looks like a cool New York art girl, and I soon learn that she recently finished a graduate program in Theory and Criticism at an art college in the States, followed by a stint at a summer institute at an Ivy League university. She seems so cool to me and for some reason—

maybe it's her height—I assume she comes from money. “Lauren Fournier?” Ava asks. Yes, I say, confused. “This is so weird, but I was just googling you today,” Ava tells me. Oh? I ask. “Yes! I’m putting together a PhD proposal on autotheory for York’s Art History program and your name came up when I googled *autotheory*.” My stomach sinks and I’m not sure why. I feel a curious mix of ego gratification—being “googled”—and insecurity. That day had been particularly bad for my anxiety, a generalized anxiety that tends to flare up in art-related social scenarios as well as conversations related to academic publishing and post-PhD careers. The large art museum, with its herding of folks into endless line-ups and its swaths of didactic panels lining the walls, didn’t help my anxiety either. I had joked to my partner a few months back that I wanted to start making a series of performance videos entitled “How I feel after leaving the AGO,” which would capture a curious mix of sadness, inspiration, nervousness, and frustration.

That day I had spent hours sitting at my desk, wondering whether I even knew what autotheory was and why it was of such interest to me. Why is it so present in emergent contemporary feminist practices, and why did it suddenly seem like all of these young scholars and artists and curators around me were grasping at the term to try and define it? How can I bring together the various tensions, histories, and contexts of this term, while also resisting the neoliberal, academic drive toward singular authorship? So many of my curatorial and arts-based projects are collaborative: how could I seek to work more collaboratively as a scholar? Is my pursuit of academia a betrayal of my working-class roots? Could I, as someone who doesn’t come from money, whose parents never went to college or University, be the person to write the first book on feminist autotheory? Surely someone else is better suited, better able to ascend the ranks of academic publishing to reach that position of Professor—an attainment that seems

increasingly akin to winning the lottery. Lately I missed doing social work, working with humans in a way that felt immediate and urgent. Now, the urgency I felt to define “autotheory” and chart its discursive parameters felt somewhat narcissistic: the urgency of paving the way for my own academic career; the urgency of coining a term and claiming ownership over it as a theorist and a scholar, of staking my claim and marking my intellectual territory. It occurred to me that such an academic practice was a colonizing one—one with deep colonial roots.

Within the existing academic institutions and structures, I am encouraged to engage in these kinds of neocolonial projects even as I work in a contemporary, intersectional feminist context where terms like “decolonize” and “decenter” circulate with a certain ease. As a young feminist scholar, I am encouraged to compete rather than collaborate with women like Ava. I’m told that I must publish—or perish, and that to publish collaboratively in the Humanities and the Visual Arts continues to be less prestigious than it is in the Sciences. Academia is survival of the fittest after all: and who is more “fit” for an academic job than the person with a strong background in publishing solo-authored articles in esteemed peer-reviewed journals? I remember the words “PUBLISH OR PERISH” sprawled out across the chalkboard during my first week as a PhD student in the Performance Studies program at York University, written by the Graduate Program Director with little to no sense of irony during the first of our biweekly professional development seminars. That afternoon my friend Jen and I drove home together in a carpool, wondering to each other whether this academia thing was really what we wanted to do. I was someone who had become enthralled by performance theory after taking a course on it with Dr. Peter Dickinson during my Masters in English Literature in Vancouver, a course which facilitated my move toward frameworks of Performance Studies in my Masters thesis on performative auto-

ethnography¹ in Vancouver and, later, in my proposals to York's PhD program. Jen was a dancer who had gravitated toward Performance Studies due to its interdisciplinary positioning and its desire to integrate theory with practice. "I want to dance, I want to move, I want to be in my body," Jen said, pained. And it was becoming ever clearer to her that Performance Studies was another mode of academic study (at least at the PhD level) where one sat for extended periods of time, reading hundreds of books—many of which are theoretical—and writing essays. Although we were both pursuing work that mobilized this rhetoric of bridging theory and practice, and although we were both committed to practices of theorizing in our own ways, we found ourselves in a program bound by discourse that, during those introductions to the Department, we found disappointing; we wanted to be more physically engaged in practices of art-making, to be in the studio performing something or learning about performance art in a way that felt more embodied, rather than writing another arcane essay that one, maybe two people might read.

This wasn't altogether surprising: graduate school tends to be a place where one is immersed in theory as a way to either become a specialist in the field—as is the case in a discipline like English Literature or Art History—and/or to more strongly undergird one's creative practice—as is the case in MFA programs and, more recently, PhDs in studio art. As a field of academic study, Performance Studies, like other academic disciplines, has its own discursive frameworks that, within the context of the neoliberal university, tend to take precedent over practice-based research and research creation, at least historically. This is changing, but it is a slow change. For all of its hopeful invocations of the rhetoric of embodiment and praxis, fields

¹ My Masters major research paper, entitled "Performance Art and the Rituals of Everyday Life in East Vancouver: A Performative Auto-Ethnography of the Female Body in Public Space," engaged frameworks of performative writing (Pollock, "Performing" 86) and auto-ethnography to theorize my experiences of sexual harassment and assault in a coffeshop on Commercial Drive in Vancouver and during the 2011 LIVE Performance Art Biennale in relation to broader political and aesthetic questions related to the body, visibility, public space, and contemporary art contexts.

like Performance Studies, once they become institutionalized as academic disciplines within the university, risk prioritizing academic practices of study and more conventional modes of academic output—namely, the individually authored article—over more experimental modes of research, like making a work of body art. I am referencing Performance Studies here as an example for the purpose of illustration: this is not a problem that is specific to Performance Studies, but the stated aim of the discipline to bridge theory and practice within a fundamentally interdisciplinary mode of academic research, makes it a useful example to turn to.

As I faced Ava amongst a growing crowd of predominantly families and couples taking in landscape paintings, I resist the urge to be closed off and paranoid and possessive and instead try to be more open and trusting and receptive. “Oh, neat!” I say, somewhat strained (anxiety takes a toll on the body). We talk about some of the problems I’ve run into trying to define autotheory—for one, I note, the entire history of feminism could be described as an autotheoretical one—and how autotheory seems to be a phenomenon of particular significance to the art world. Ava expresses her view of how graduate students and professors seem to have no problem spending extended periods of time on say, object-oriented ontology, but seem all too ready to disregard autotheory as fluffy and navel-gazing. That hasn’t been my experience at York, I am quick to acknowledge: in fact, I’ve been encouraged to write my dissertation autotheoretically, something which I have been curiously resistant to (this irony is not lost on me). Still I’m reminded of the challenges set before me as I theorize this incipient term “autotheory” within the context of neoliberal academic institutions, and the imperative to read autotheoretical texts as theory in all its intellectual nuance and transdisciplinary capaciousness—to consider autotheory alongside the

particularly charged politics of intersectional feminisms and critical gender and sexuality studies today while also not limiting the relevance of the texts to those contexts.

The next week Ken, a male student in the English PhD program, sends me an e-mail asking me about feminist autotheory and stating that he wants to write his dissertation on it. Ken and I were on the planning committee for the EGSA Colloquium, though I've only spoke with him twice: first, at the one colloquium planning meeting that he came to, during which he texted the entire time, and another time on campus when he was reading Erin Wunker's *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* and telling me how he used to be a "Reddit bro." I was confused and a bit troubled, as I wondered whether this meant he used to be a member of the anti-feminist MRA activist group or if he shared their ideological impetus toward misogyny; it wasn't clear to me where he stood on the topic of feminism and how he positioned himself in these conversations, though he was excited to have recently "discovered Kathy Acker." His e-mail signalled a drive to mine me for as much information on autotheory as he could. I send a lengthy response—one that is a strange balance of indulgent and guarded—mentioning that I am in the early stages of responding to this question "what is autotheory," and I don't hear anything back. A week later, another student in the English PhD program messages me on Facebook, asking me for a reading list on feminist autotheory for him to pass on to his girlfriend, a forthcoming PhD student in the Department of Education at York. I let him know that I'm not able to share that information yet, but that once I'm a bit further in to the dissertation writing—and have a better sense of how I'm defining autotheory and its tentative canon—I'd be happy to help.

I feel shame at my feelings of guardedness; I feel conflicted about the imperatives of being a good and generous feminist colleague and prioritizing my own academic "career." When

I confess this to my friend and fellow PhD student/autotheory colleague Margeaux, she tells me: “You aren’t being selfish. You are wanting to honour all of the intellectual work that you have done.” The ambivalence I feel around sharing unpublished ideas with fellow PhD candidates in my field reminds me of a comment made by artist Alize Zorlutuna in conversation with curator Barbora Racevičiūtė. In their conversation, entitled “The Failure Project: A Conversation about Work,” the two women discuss labour, precarity, and the affects of failure through intersectional feminist perspectives, focusing specifically on the material and economic realities of working within the sphere of Canadian contemporary art and its institutions—galleries, artist-run centres, art museums, and art universities (formerly art colleges). To illustrate the feminist problematic of labour and generosity, Alize cites an anecdote of an artist asking her for guidance on writing an arts grant application—the same grant that Alize herself was applying for:

I remember feeling very protective of the labour she was asking me to do. I didn’t feel generous. I have been applying for grants for years, and I’ve failed a lot! It was going through these experiences of failure that I learned how you succeed in the process. And I just didn’t feel generous. I didn’t want to give her knowledge that I had accrued through years of labour, so that she could be awarded a grant that I was in fact simultaneously applying for. She didn’t realize the time it would take to address the details she was asking me to consider—or that these details are things I’ve been thinking and working through for several years now, and that’s how I have the knowledge I do. We had a debrief a couple of weeks later where I explained to her why I felt protective or possessive around my labour, that as an artist this is how I survive and exhibit and produce on a regular basis. I had to explain why I didn’t feel generous. (Zorlutuna and Racevičiūtė)

As their conversation continues, Alize and Barbora think through the ways in which “this type of competition can be really damaging to how we build community,” while acknowledging the validity of those feelings of competitiveness when it comes to the feminist politics of survival, exhaustion, labour, money, and sustenance (Zorlutuna and Racevičiūtė).

As scholars we make decisions, consciously or otherwise, around which objects of study we will spend time with, which theoretical frameworks we will align ourselves with, and which texts are evocative enough to hold our interest for the two or three (or four or five) years of dissertation writing. I feel deeply interested in the texts being hailed as “autotheory,” and for the potentiality inherent in the notion of autotheory as a mode for feminists and their allies to work in. There is something about this mode of practice that seems especially relevant to, and resonant with, feminist politics, aesthetics, and ethics both historically and in the present. In the following chapters, I engage in sustained readings of autotheoretical texts—either those that have been previously described as “autotheory,” or those which I frame as such—to better understand what is meant by this term, to establish parameters around how this term is used, and to consider the stakes of this mode of practice for contemporary theory and feminist cultural production today.

Theorizing Autotheory as Post-1960s Feminist Practice

I don’t make a big distinction between writing about “myself” and writing about “larger issues.” (Maybe I’m Emersonian in that way, or just feminist).

- Maggie Nelson, in conversation with Micah McCrary

“Autotheory” is a term that has emerged to describe recent works of literature, art, and art writing that integrate autobiography and other explicitly subjective and embodied modes with discourses of philosophy and theory in ways that transgress genre conventions and disciplinary boundaries. Autotheory is an emergent term, one which began to trend after the publication of Maggie Nelson’s 2015 book *The Argonauts* where Nelson, riffing on Paul B. Preciado’s use of the term in *Testo Junkie*,² inscribes a performative mode of citation alongside a post-memoir,

² Nelson notes in an interview with the *Los Angeles Review of Books*: “I flat out stole this term [autotheory] from Paul Preciado’s amazing *Testo Junkie* ... it seemed an apt description even if its [*The Argonauts*’s] form, or its particular investment in theory, is quite distinct from Preciado’s experiment” (McCrary and Nelson).

queer feminist life writing text. And yet, autotheory as an impulse can also be traced through earlier feminist performance art, body art, and conceptual art, as well as writings by women of colour like Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Audre Lorde. The practice of theorizing from the first person is well-established within the genealogies of feminist practice; as a post-1960s practice—the parameters of my focus here—it takes on a particularly conceptual and performative valence. One could argue that the entire history of feminist theory and practice is one of autotheory, though the resonances of autotheory as a twenty-first century term bear consideration, especially when it comes to the contexts of neoliberalism, late capitalism, and post-confessional technologies of social media.

I approach autotheory as a practice of performing, embodying, enacting, processing, metabolizing, wracking, reiterating, or subverting philosophy and theory from embodied, autobiographical, and otherwise subjectivized positionings. This is often done in ways that resonate with a feminist politic of intersectionality, as well as the move toward integrating art and life, theory and practice. To many, including those without higher education or a background in the liberal arts, theory and philosophy are seen as inaccessible or unintelligible discourses: like other specialized forms of knowledge, they require a certain level of learning, literacy, and contextual understanding in order to comprehend meaning. In this way, theory and philosophy have something in common, socially and culturally, with contemporary art. With the rise of autotheory as a mode of feminism, we find new ways in which artists, writers, curators, and critics wrestle with these specialized discourses through their own bodies, lives, and selves.

I historicize autotheory as emerging from post-1960s conceptual art, performance, body art, and art writing, including what Amelia Jones refers to as “self-imaging” practices (*Self/*

Image 134) such as performing for the camera and taking “selfies.” In this view, autotheory becomes a way of re-reading earlier texts, such as Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector’s musically-influenced *Água Viva* (1973) or African American conceptual artist Adrian Piper’s ritual of photographing herself through a mirrored reflection while reading Immanuel Kant in *Food for the Spirit* (1971). Given its discursive entanglement with—as well as its self-proclaimed divergence from—genres like memoir and autobiography, autotheory as a practice also warrants consideration within the scholarly spaces of autobiography and life writing studies. By beginning my theorization of autotheory with Piper’s *Food* in Chapter 1, I underline the importance of feminist conceptual art, body art, and art writing and criticism to an understanding of autotheory as a feminist mode that, up until this point, has typically been reserved for literary texts.

While I gesture to autotheory’s antecedents from the eighteenth century onward, my discussion begins in the 1960s through to the early 1970s: this is the period that sees the results of the shift from “philosophy” to the more postmodern “theory” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 187) alongside the proliferation of inter-medial practices known as contemporary art: these are practices which include, but are not limited to, video art, installation, body art, artist multiples, Fluxus, and a newly cohering feminist art movement. It is this period that I position as important to the emergence of the contemporary mode that is now being called autotheory. Following Fredric Jameson, I posit the 1960s as “a moment of a universal liberation, a global unbinding of energies” (“Periodizing” 207) that had consequential effects on the ontology and practice of both theory and art. This globalized “unbinding of energies” (207) could also be felt across the fields of literature and academic scholarship. For example, autobiography as an area of serious

academic study did not emerge until the 1960s, and has grown to become an immense field of interdisciplinary study today (Lejeune 159).

That said, many of these changes taking shape in the 1960s had been bubbling up in avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, with work by artists and writers like Claude Cahun, the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and Gertrude Stein—who could rightly be called proto-postmodernists³ in terms of their experimentation—serving as a notable examples of autotheoretical antecedents. It is imperative, therefore, that I acknowledge those historical periods preceding the 1960s as I contextualize autotheory as a conceptual and post-conceptual mode of feminist practice that continues through to the present. The importance of early twentieth century artists, such as the canonized Marcel Duchamp, to the formation of conceptualism in, or as, contemporary art is taken up in Chapter 1, with the more marginalized artists (like the Baroness) serving as spectres throughout contemporary feminist autotheoretical writing, including the writings of Kraus and Jones. Both the early 1900s and the late 1960s are rich periods of experimentation, rupture, and philosophical play that feed into the development of conceptual art and inter-medial art practices, new modes of art writing and criticism, and the larger trans-national bodies of work known as contemporary art.

This chapter serves as an introduction to autotheory⁴ as a performative post-1960s mode of feminist practice with a well-established feminist genealogy, and a contextualization of what we are referring to in the present as autotheory. Previously, autotheoretical texts were referred to

³ The sensibility of Stein's experimentation with the performativity and materiality of language, for example, or the Baroness's boundary-obfuscating Dadaist performances of everyday life, re-emerge in the postmodern era, with many feminist artists and writers engaging in an autotheoretical practice in performative and conceptual ways.

⁴ While there are variations on the spelling of the term, my preferred version is "autotheory"; with the exception of those places where I am quoting a particular source, I use this spelling of the term throughout.

by such designators as “critical memoir,” “theoretical fiction” (Hawkins, “Afterword” 263), “life-thinking” (Samatar, “life-thinking”), and “fiction-theory” (Godard 198). As a term that describes a feminist way of engaging with theory alongside life and art, autotheory is very much in the zeitgeist of feminist and queer feminist cultural production today. This dissertation is a sustained reflection on the autotheoretical impulse present within and across different contemporary feminist and queer practices—practices that span the writing of fiction, theory, poetry, art writing, and scholarly essays, the reading of astrology charts on Skype, or the staging of selfies on social media—focusing on the ways in which autotheory is a mode of practice that feminist artists, writers, curators, and critics might engage as a means of coming to terms with the “master discourse” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 149) of theory and philosophy.

What constitutes work that is properly theoretical or philosophical? What modes of working are seen as legitimately critical or sufficiently rigorous by academic institutions and related social spheres? These are questions that feminists working autotheoretically take up, often in performative and self-aware ways. One question that I return to in this dissertation is what constitutes criticality and theory at the present moment of autotheoretical practice? Who defines what constitutes theory? And, finally, what does describing a text as “theory” do to how it is perceived and understood? Part of responding to these questions requires a consideration of the contested meanings of theory across different cultural contexts, and the longstanding feminist tradition of interrogating the politics of these discourses called “theory” and “philosophy,” from Luce Irigaray’s critiques of the gendered or “sexuate” blindspots of phallogentric theory (*This Sex* 150), to bell hooks’s critiques of the hegemonies within feminist theory itself, where hooks insists that feminist theory must be accessible and grounded in lived practice (*Transgress* 70).

Autotheory can be said to be a kind of “travelling concept” in the sense defined by Mieke Bal, where Bal, working as a scholar and a filmmaker who deftly traverses disciplinary borders, makes the case that interdisciplinary scholarship might be grounded more in concepts than in methodologies: as Bal states, “interdisciplinarity in the Humanities, necessary, exciting, serious, must seek its heuristic and methodological basis in *concepts* rather than *methods*” (*Travelling* 5). The practice of theorizing is a fundamentally interdisciplinary practice that might be approached as concept-focused practice accordingly. In the section of *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* on “Performance and Performativity,” Bal describes “the practice of theorizing” as one of the ways of “dealing with concepts” (177). I consider Bal’s “concept-based methodology” as a worthwhile approach to my transdisciplinary and transmedial project of theorizing the politics and aesthetics of autotheory as feminist practice, extending this to my project as I consider the concept of autotheory as a kind of travelling concept that exists in relation to other travelling concepts like “performativity” and “theory”; this is to say that a focus on the concept of autotheory sustains my readings and reflections over the course of this dissertation and, in the absence of a singular methodological approach, I turn to different methodological practices including close reading to support my theorizing of this concept.

As a scholar, writer, artist, and curator of contemporary feminist experimental practices who is trained in the discipline of English Literature, my use of close reading provides insight into the mechanisms at work within an autotheoretical text, the ways in which an understanding of these mechanisms provides insight into the politics and aesthetics of theory more broadly speaking, and the rhetorical significance of invoking theory alongside autobiography in this nascent mode. How do neoliberal and capitalist imperatives complicate our understandings of the

place of the “self” in autotheory, particularly when it comes to a feminist politics of intersectionality and practice-based work? These are questions I return to as I read through the works of Piper, Kraus, Nelson, and others.

Like feminism, autotheory is myriad and multiple. Rather than approaching “autotheory” as a discrete genre or form, I approach contemporary feminist practices with an eye (and ear) to autotheoretical impulses at work in an artwork, a literary text, an exhibition, a movement, a press/publisher, a scene, or an artist’s practice. I am interested in how autotheory has come to describe the different ways in which artists and writers—whose work is aligned with, or otherwise sympathetic to, the concerns of intersectional feminisms—engage philosophy and theory as discourses and materials that are consequential to their lives. In these autotheoretical practices, theory and philosophy are often revealed to be an ambivalent site of desire and difficulty. As I take up in the following chapters, the body of theory that a given artist or writer engages depends on the context within which they are working: for Piper it is Immanuel Kant, whose aesthetic philosophy occupied a hegemonic place in the mid twentieth century American art world within which Piper was working as an artist; for Kraus it is the 1970s French post-structuralist thought of theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which her then husband Sylvère Lotringer is understood as having brought to America through his post-semiotic press *Semiotext(e)*; for Nelson it is the twinned lineages of queer theory represented by Roland Barthes and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick that she performatively cites throughout *The Argonauts*.

As a transmedial, transdisciplinary, and transnational mode of feminist practice, autotheory has the capacity to trouble dominant epistemologies and approaches to philosophizing and theorizing, exposing the problematics of maintaining conceptual separations between self

and theory—a project in which feminism has long been engaged. While works like *I Love Dick* and, more recently, *The Argonauts* are explicitly autotheoretical, there are antecedents to autotheory in earlier feminist practices, from the poetic experimentation of Stein⁵ at the turn of the century to the conceptual art, body art, and text-based practices of feminist artists working in the 1960s onward; as I discuss later, there are also notable antecedents to autotheory within the very male-authored philosophical and theoretical texts that feminist autotheorists subversively engage, including works by Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Kant, and René Descartes.⁶ The mention of Descartes and Kant here is notable, as their work is perhaps too easily cited as being in opposition to phenomenological, embodied, and post-structuralist feminist modes of philosophizing—something I take up in Chapter 1 as I discuss Piper’s engagement with Kant. To be sure, as I propose in Chapter 1, there might in fact be an autotheoretical impulse that moves through the larger history of philosophy—an impulse that is brought into sharper view by present-day feminist artists and writers who are coming to terms with theory as a discourse that structures contemporary art and academic life.

In the 1970s, the feminist art movement in America foregrounds women’s bodies as active and conceptual, while feminist writers and philosophers working in France sought ways to express the female body and subjectivity through writing. Work by feminist conceptual artists, body artists, and performance artists like Piper, Andrea Fraser, Hannah Wilke, Carolee

⁵ The autotheoretical impulse within Stein’s writing practice perhaps comes most explicitly into view in her 1936 *The Geographical History of America*, even as the work eludes readers with Stein’s characteristic mode of writing—where Stein performatively foregrounds the materiality of language over clarity of signification and meaning.

⁶ While I invoke Cartesian dualism in my discussion of the role that the mind/body opposition has historically played in disregarding more explicitly embodied work by women, it is worth noting that Descartes’ own work—including, most notably, his *Discourse on Method*—is grounded in his autobiography. In fact, the philosophical revelation that will come to form Cartesian dualism—“I think therefore I am”—is predicated on the self-conscious existence of the philosopher as the “I.”

Schneemann, Shigeko Kubota, Martha Rosler, Annie Sprinkle, Penny Arcade, Karen Finley, Lisa Steele, and Mona Hatoum—many of whom sustain active practices today—contribute to a rich history of feminist art attuned to autotheory as an embodied, intellectual stance in art-making. Moving chronologically from the 1970s as a period ripe both for post-1960s inter-medial art practices and the cohering of feminist art as an aesthetic movement, to the mid to late 1990s as a period in which post-third wave feminist writing practices were taking form, and finally to the present, the later third of the 2010s, I conclude my consideration of autotheory as a feminist practice with a close reading of Maggie Nelson’s 2015 text *The Argonauts*, a cross-genre work that is widely referred to as autotheory, even as that descriptor is yet to be sufficiently defined.

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I constellate different texts where an autotheoretical feminist impulse is present, before moving in to the three chapters that present sustained readings of specific works. Given the lack of scholarship on this nascent term, it is necessary to thoughtfully contextualize and historicize autotheory to better understand how it functions as a practice of theorizing, and what this mode of theorizing performs in relation to gender, discourse, language, and art. From what conditions does autotheory emerge? In what ways is autotheory a generative mode of theorizing aesthetic, political, social, and cultural issues in the present moment, given pressing concerns around intersectionality in a post-internet age of neoliberalism, hyper-visibility, populism, and disclosure? How is autotheory well-equipped to navigate philosophical, aesthetic, and political issues of concern to intersectional feminisms? Is autotheory an ethical stance or a

moral imperative? Why is this new term “autotheory” needed to describe emergent practices that resemble the sentiments and positions of feminisms past?

In Chapter 1, entitled “Processing Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic through Feminist Conceptual Art: Adrian Piper’s *Food for the Spirit* (1971) as Kantian Selfie,” I consider Piper’s 1971 conceptual art piece *Food for the Spirit* as an early work of feminist autotheory: in *Food*, the oscillation between rigorous philosophical study and “narcissistic” self-imaging (Jones, *Self/Image* 134) enables Piper to process and “survive” (Piper, *Food*) Kantian aesthetic philosophy as a racialized woman artist working in the 1960s-70s New York City art world. Reading this work provides a depth of insight into the functioning of autotheory as a performative feminist mode historically, and what the dual orientation toward the self and philosophy performs in the larger contexts of contemporary art, gender, race, and theory. Through a conceptual art practice, Piper performatively instantiates key aporias in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, including Kant’s unresolved notions of transcendental idealism and the transcendental aesthetic, revealing autotheory as a practice that newly sheds light on long-standing ontological and epistemological questions at the heart of Kantian philosophy.

In Chapter 2, entitled “Re-Performing Poststructuralism: Phallic Mimesis in Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1997),” I provide a close reading of *I Love Dick* as a text that mimetically re-casts the terms of 1970s French post-structuralism through a cheeky postmodern feminist framework that, despite its third wave context, is prophetic of fourth-wave feminist moves. Reading *I Love Dick* through Irigaray’s notion of the mimetic function, I argue that Kraus performatively instantiates the move from reproductive to productive mimesis that Irigaray describes as being necessary for women to access and transform phallocentric discourse

historically (Irigaray, *This Sex* 131). What results is a conceptual space of intertextual identification and post-confessional disclosure in which Kraus enacts a satirical send-up of post-structuralism's followers and terms from a comically brash, heterosexual, Jewish feminist positioning. I read Kraus's work within the larger context of third-wave feminist theorizing and experimentation, including the literary output of Semiotext(e) Native Agents, the performance philosophy of artist-scholar Bell, and the influential post-punk writings of Acker.

In Chapter 3, entitled "The Reparative Practice of Queer Feminist Autotheory: Performing Citationality and Intertextual Intimacy in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015)," I read *The Argonauts* (2015) as a mimetic, queer feminist iteration of Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* (1977). Positioning *The Argonauts* as the site at which two lineages of queer theory converge—a gay male-authored post-structuralist lineage and a queer feminist affect lineage—I delve into the history of queer theory as a site of important autotheoretical antecedents. Focusing on Nelson's implication of her partner, the transgender American visual artist Harry Dodge, I consider the ethics of autotheory as a citational practice that involves writing with, through, and for an other, gesturing to other works of queer feminist autotheory that engage similar problematics, including Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Are You My Mother?* (2012) and Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue's multi-media installation *I'm Not Myself At All* (2015). My reading of Nelson's performative citation practice in *The Argonauts*—one which borrows from Barthes and is found in other contemporaneous works such as Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*—provides insight into the ways in which intertextual intimacy and identification, devices that I define as a characteristic of autotheory, engender feminist, and queer feminist, modes of theorizing.

Autotheory Across Disciplines

Those who work autotheoretically often work across media, disciplines, and forms; what's more, autotheory as a practice tends to crop up as much in literary scenes as it does in visual arts contexts, and in this way, an interdisciplinary approach is one that is the best equipped to responsively theorize autotheory. I believe that, given autotheory's interdisciplinarity, my own approach as a scholar grounded in an English Literature department and a Curatorial Studies program, and as a practicing curator, video artist, and art writer working in spaces of intersectional feminist art practices and trans-medial experimentation across Canada and internationally, is better attuned to theorizing the politics and aesthetics of autotheory than if I were approaching autotheory from a single disciplinary line of thought. I return once more to Bal, who understands the importance of a concept-based approach when doing interdisciplinary scholarship in the humanities and the visual arts. My training in the inter-discipline, to use Gabriel Levine's term (19), of Performance Studies⁷ as a Masters student at Simon Fraser University also equips me with the language and theory to understand the significance of performance practices and frameworks of performativity in the twentieth through to the twenty-first century. Jones, whose scholarship and autotheoretical analyses I cite throughout this dissertation, articulates the methodological value of integrating Performance Studies perspectives with art historical ones (Jones, *Perform Repeat Record* 12) and, more recently, affirms the importance of Curatorial Studies as an adjacent, studio-based discipline amongst these contemporary modes of knowledge production (Jones, "Curatorial" 231). Given the ways in

⁷ Performance Studies developed from the joining of the theatre studies and experimental theatre practices of Richard Schechner with the contemporary ethnographic and anthropological work of Victor Turner in the 1970s-80s.

which the works I read as autotheory straddle multiple disciplines, discourses, and media, such a multidisciplinary approach is needed.

I position my research in the context of a living and evolving history of contemporary art, performance, and conceptualism while basing my analyses in literary methods of close reading. In theorizing autotheory as contemporary feminist practice, my approach is one grounded as much in contemporary art, art history, and critical art writing and Curatorial Studies as it is in English Literature. In my own experience in academia, as well as what I have gathered through scholarly reading and conversation with scholars in the respective fields, English Literature as a discipline is open to analyses of contemporary works by living (artists and) writers in ways that Art History, at least historically, is not. As Jones observes in “The Local versus the Global in Curating and Curatorial Pedagogy”:

Art history as a discipline (particularly in the United States) has become too caught up in its own boundary-guarding strategies of defining its “proper” field of practice (thereby ignoring or repressing rather than examining the pressures noted above) to assist in this project. Curatorial Studies, on the other hand, can provide an ideal meshing of intellectual, creative, and practice-based study that prepares the curators of tomorrow. (238-39)

While Jones is speaking specifically here to the importance of Curatorial Studies programs in today’s universities, her take on the disciplinary limits Art History poses to interdisciplinary and practice-based areas such as contemporary curation and studio art is relevant to my discussion of autotheory as a contemporary practice. Jones’s stance on curatorial practice brings to mind scholar-artist Bal’s own proffering of a concept-based approach to interdisciplinary research (one that shirks conventional disciplinary tropes like “methodology” in favour of something more disciplinarily fluid) (Bal, *Travelling* 13). This disciplinary guardedness is changing, especially

with the dawn of Curatorial Studies programs in Art History programs and degrees in the field of Contemporary Art History at institutions like OCADU, though it also explains in part why I continue to position myself within an English Literature department while working as a kind of *bricoleur* (de Certeau xiv) with Art History as a discipline. I believe that my deep discursive and practice-based engagement with contemporary art as a video artist, a curator, an art writer and a critic allows me to be rigorous and responsible with my transdisciplinary work as a scholar who is, as Bal puts it, “travelling with concepts” in the Humanities and Visual Arts.

Performance and Practice

Autotheory emerges during the “performative turn⁸” in theory and cultural production and continues through to the wake of this turn in the early twenty-first century: some might argue that we are still in the midst of this turn. Aligned with my emphasis on performativity in my approach to reading these texts, I propose that autotheory is better thought of as a practice rather than as a genre per se. By approaching autotheory through a framework of contemporary art as it intersects with literary and other text-based experimental practices, I am able to attain perspective on the ways in which autotheory differs from generic antecedents like autobiography and memoir. By focusing on autotheory specifically, I also distance myself from the adjacent, burgeoning field of auto-fiction which, while intersecting with autotheory in interesting ways, warrants its own thorough historicization and analysis. As I theorize autotheory as feminist practice, I keep an eye both to the past—historicizing autotheory in light of its multiple

⁸ The performative turn in theory gave rise to critical attention to liveness, ritual, play, embodiment, the everyday, and doing. In *How To Do Things With Words* (1952-54), J.L. Austin makes the distinction between constative utterances which are descriptive and representational, and performative utterances or “performatives” that are instrumental and functional—that *do* things, rather than merely represent things.

antecedents—and the future—considering how we might understand autotheory as a mode of what Nelson describes as a post avant-garde aesthetics that seeks to “dismantle(s)” or, at the very least, “poke fun at” the dominant masculinist histories of avant-gardism that have historically precluded women and the gender non-conforming (*Cruelty* 265).

My initial decision to consider autotheory in relation to performance and performativity was two-fold. On the one hand, many autotheoretical texts are themselves conducive to a reading through frameworks of performance: some works are enmeshed in performativity while also being literally engaged with performance art, either directly (with the performance artist as autotheorist, as we find with Piper, Shannon Bell, Andrea Fraser and the V-Girls, and so on) or tangentially. Writers associated with Semiotext(e) Native Agents, for example, including Kraus, Kathy Acker, Eileen Myles, and Michelle Tea, emerged from subcultural scenes in which performance and the body featured heavily—with punk, St. Marks, Riot Grrrl, and so on. In her cross-disciplinary history of the aesthetics of the New York School, Nelson chose to read Myles’s “metabolic poetry” (Nelson, *Abstractions* 171) through the perspective of feminist performance art histories from the 1970s-80s, rather than from the perspective of literary lineages like 1950s Confessional poetry (179). Correspondingly, I draw on the scholarly work of feminist art historians and performance theorists in charting the parameters of the “auto” and its politics—what Jones refers to in relation to feminist body art as a radical feminist politics of narcissism (*Body Art* 151). Just as the rise of autotheory as a multiply cohering mode of feminist practice takes place amidst the postmodern and post-structuralist performative turn, a great deal of autotheoretical texts demonstrate an explicit or self-conscious engagement with performance theory, performance art, gender performativity, and related practices and frameworks.

To describe autotheory as “performing,” then, is to acknowledge that performativity and performance pervade the forms autotheory takes and the themes it takes up. I use the word “performing” in its Butlerian sense to describe how theory is embodied, cited, and iterated through these practices. The idea of “performing theory” is not new. Drawing from the discipline of Performance Studies as a practitioner and a scholar, Bell first introduced the term in her 1992 elucidation of performance-based philosophy. Writing from the context of her own autotheoretical practice of female ejaculation, Bell writes: “Performance art is at the forefront of postmodern theorizing. Artists are performing theory: acting out theory. Performance art destabilizes the established conception of what is considered theoretical engagement and broadens the concept of theory to include new areas of life and new political subjects” (*Prostitute* 25-26). Bell’s term brings to mind the work of the V-Girls, the feminist art collective comprised of Fraser, Jessica Peri Chalmers, Marianne Weems, Erin Cramer and Martha Baer. The V-Girls⁹ made performance work from the mid 1980s through to the mid 1990s, using the form of the panel discussion to make art that performatively recast the discourse of psychoanalytic theory (which at the time occupied a hegemonic space in feminist theorizing and critique) and critiqued academia’s patriarchal foundations. I theorize the relationship between autotheory and “performing theory,” extending Bell’s “performing theory” to texts that might not be explicitly performance-based but would benefit from a reading through the framework of performativity (and the corresponding notions of citationality and iteration), as in the case of *The Argonauts*.

⁹ As noted on the artists’ website, “The group was never a traditional theater group but a ‘reading-and-performance’ group whose public presentations evolved out of private meetings and discussions. Formed in the early 1980s to read feminist psychoanalytic theory, the group ended in 1996 with *Daughters*, which charted difficulties in women’s groups and groups in general, including their own” (“V-Girls”).

Looking back on two decades of Annie Sprinkle’s work, Gabrielle Cody says: “One of the challenges and pleasures of watching Annie’s work, I think, is that it is theoretically sophisticated without appearing to be. She literally embodies theory” (Sprinkle, *Hardcore 2*). It is this enacting of theory through the body, or the self-reflexive “performing” and embodying of theory, that feminist performance art practices offer to our understanding of autotheory as a practice that performatively enacts theory in ways that are simultaneously conceptual and corporeal, critical and affective. The idea that performance art is a way of embodying theory reverberates through various art and academic practices in the 1980s and 1990s, with Richard Schechner’s newly founded discipline of Performance Studies—grounded in New York City’s experimental theatre scene and the institution of NYU—serving as the institutionalized face of such an impulse, something which I take up in Chapter 2. This tendency toward “performing theory” takes on new shapes and forms in the 2000s through to the late 2010s, as we see in post-internet practices of autotheory and performance for the camera in social media spaces like YouTube and Instagram.

With an eye to both the possibilities and the limitations that frameworks of performance provide in the current moment, I suggest that “practice” is a term that follows befittingly from “performance”; practice is a more capacious term to use for the kinds of texts and extra-textual practices that a project on autotheory is interested in.¹⁰ I believe that the shift to “practice” does not preclude performance or the performative but comprises it in generative ways. The notions of

¹⁰ Currently, “practice” seems to be supplanting “performance” and the “performative” in terms of a theoretical turn. I too am drawn to practice for what feels like its expansiveness: it is not tied to a theatre-centric history in the ways that performance (and the discipline of Performance Studies) is, and it is less loaded with the baggage of theatrical metaphor, even if such baggage is misguided, given the less theatrical definitions of “performativity” that Butler advanced. Initially, I had approached autotheory through frameworks of performance: as this project evolved, I found myself moving to “practice” as a term that more accurately describes the myriad approaches, methods, and modes that constitute autotheory in the contemporary.

“practice” and “performativity” bear resemblance to each other in that both describe an action taking place in a given space over a period of time. Both describe a mode of repetition. Butler defines gender performativity as “a stylized repetition of acts” that takes place over a period of time and is citational (referencing previous “performances”) and iterative (where out of repetition comes the possibility of difference) (“Performative” 519). It is out of these acts that one’s gender identity “sediments” over time, Butler explains (519). Similarly, to “practice” is to do something repeatedly over a period of time, with the practitioner citing past performances as part of the larger trajectory known as one’s “practice”—whether this is an art practice, a writing practice, a curatorial practice, a fermenting practice, a teaching practice, a meditation practice, and so on. Peter Sloterdijk draws on metaphors of performance to define practice as a repetitive act that qualifies the person who does the act to do it better the next time¹¹ (4). Practice, like performativity, has the potential to engender what Butler calls “sedimentation” (“Performative” 519) in the form of a skill, a career, or something that one has mastered. Just as theories of practice draw from the discourse of performance, so too does work in Performance Studies emphasize practice, enactment, and repetitive doing: from J.L. Austin’s speech act theory and Erving Goffman’s *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, where the performance of the self is a practice that one engages in each day, to the description of performance artist Linda Montano’s work as an artist who makes “living art”—theoretical, embodied art shaped by other daily “practices,” including yoga,¹² care work, and prayer (Montano, *Living* 1).

Autotheory can be approached as a practice that integrates other practices, including the

¹¹ Re-reading the entire human history and re-writing it in terms of “practice,” Sloterdijk describes practicing as “self-forming and self-enhancing behaviour” (4).

¹² Timothy Morton defines a yogi as “one who practices” (33).

practice of living, of loving, of theorizing, and of making art or writing literature. Whether it takes the form of writing fiction or theory, composing sound, making conceptual art, performing live, performing for the camera, curating an art exhibition, critically responding to an artwork, documenting one's own artwork, doing astrology, blogging, stripping or doing sex work, leaving academia or leaving one's job, saying yes and saying no—each of these are practices that can and have intersected with feminist autotheory. In my discussion of autotheory, I hone in on those practices that are explicitly tied to an autotheoretical impulse: the impulse to theorize and philosophize, to process lived experiences and affects, to engage in aesthetics and politics, and to understand one's self as part of one's practice of theorizing. Autotheory relies on theorizing and philosophizing from the particular situation one is in, drawing from one's own body, experiences, anecdotes, biases, relationships, and feelings in order to critically reflect on such topics as ontology, epistemology, politics, gender, sexuality, or art. In feminist autotheory, the practice of living is material and theoretical, and is often as important to the work as the other material practices, like writing philosophy or art criticism.

One question I ask throughout each of the five chapters pertains to the relationship between theory and practice at the heart of autotheory: is autotheory the interruption of theory by particular kinds of practices—practices that involve subjectivity and embodiment—or is it a more resonant or relevant mode of theory in which, by being “auto,” theorization becomes possible? One thesis I begin with is that, through embodied and self-reflective practices, autotheory creates new critical stances toward, and multiple ways of approaching and processing, philosophy, theory, criticism, and other related discourses in light of feminist politics and aesthetics. When considered through the historical perspective of feminism, the attempt to divide

theory from practice, and theory from life, becomes even more tenuous. As I read different autotheoretical texts, I consider autotheory as a practice that reflexively moves between the practices of living, theorizing, and art-making; in autotheory, art-making is thinking (Bal, “Autotheory” 134). Those working in an autotheoretical mode are attuned to the interrelations between these terms: living involves a practice of thinking, and both art-making and living are performative practices that are theorized and become objects of theory and sites of theorizing. In all its plurality, autotheory can be defined by this self-reflexive movement between art, life, theory, and criticism—a movement Bal describes as a “spiral-like activity” (“Autotheory” 124).

Theory and Practice

The history of feminism is one that has actively sought to bridge theory and practice. That philosophy or theory should be grounded in a lived practice is not only a feminist ideal: philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Kierkegaard have held similar views, appraising the value of a philosophy based on whether that philosopher lives according to it. Socrates is often upheld as the classic example of someone willing to live according to his philosophy, taking this so far as to die rather than be exiled from Athens: an act which would become “the founding myth of the academic discipline of philosophy” (Nails).

As a practice, autotheory demonstrates how theory and philosophy require practice: that theory and philosophy require being grounded in a material practice of living in order to be truthful or efficacious. This is one of the ways in which autotheory is indebted to a long tradition of feminist thought. hooks is one feminist theorist who emphasizes the inextricability of feminist theory and practice, going so far as to argue that theory cannot be called “feminist theory” unless

it is firmly grounded in a conjoined and consistent practice of living. What's more, for hooks, all feminist theory is autotheory in that a feminist comes to theory out of a lived sense of urgency: as a means of better understanding the realities of one's lived experience as a woman or, for that matter, as a man (*Transgress* 70). In "Becoming the Third Wave," her 1992 manifesto for third wave feminism, Rebecca Walker writes, "To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fibre of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction" (3). Walker argues that her involvement in feminism must "reach beyond...reading feminist theory. My anger and awareness must translate into tangible action" (3), emphasizing the imperative of translating the emotions one experiences in life—like anger in response to structural injustices—into social and political action.

Autotheory blurs the line between theory and practice and between life and art, and in this way it draws both from the developments of feminist thought and from post-1960s art practices. In collaboration with experimental composer Pauline Oliveros in 1975, Montano attempted to integrate art, theory, and life in a single conceptual art work entitled "Living Art: A Complex Theory That States That Life Can Be Art" (Montano, *Performance* 64). Through the practice of art as embodied philosophy, Montano and Oliveros were discovering "a new way to live" (64). More recently, queer feminist artist and scholar Mitchell proffers her framework of "Deep Lez" as "an experiment, a process, an aesthetic, and a blend of theory and practice" to inspire queer feminist ways of being in the world (Mitchell, "Deep"). A manifesto-like philosophy for living and art-making that continues to influence the work of queer feminist artists and scholars, "Deep Lez" reverberates with an autotheoretical impulse. As philosophy, it signifies the joining of "philosophies and theories, as in 'wow man, that's deep'" (Mitchell, "Deep") with Mitchell's

own experience of queer life as a white/settler lesbian woman living in Canada. Mitchell grounds the “auto” and the “theory” in relevant intertexts, or in what Mitchell calls the “herstories and theories that came before” (“Deep”), and the citational practice of shared affinity and affect that undergirds “Deep Lez” is one that I take up at more length in Chapter 3.

Just as the tension between theory and practice is present in feminist autotheory, it is also present more generally throughout the history of contemporary theory. Louis Althusser presents a complicated anticipation of feminist autotheory. His elucidation of the relationship between theory and practice in the context of 1960s liberatory movements provides an alternative both to “the primacy of theory over practice” in idealist philosophy and “the primacy of practice over theory” in Marxist materialist philosophy (Althusser 80-81); his proposition that “all human beings are theorists” (80) intersects with the legitimization of under-recognized subject positions in autotheory as a practice that includes other practices, like “aesthetic practice” (84) and activism. And yet, when we introduce the specificities of Althusser’s own personal life, things get further complicated. Althusser murdered his wife by strangulation in 1980, a point which has been surprisingly absent from any discussion of his work in my undergraduate and Masters-level courses and which seems to me a relevant ethical dilemma when it comes to the political efficacy of his work—work which emphasizes the dynamic relationship between theory and practice, as well as between politics and life. Althusser would later write about his experience of killing his wife in his posthumous autobiography *L’Avenir dure longtemps* (*The Future Lasts a Long Time*) in a manner that chillingly resembles the objectifying, existential prose of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *La Nausée* (*Nausea*) or Albert Camus’s *L’Étranger* (*The Stranger*). Whether our reception of Althusser’s theory ought to be affected by Althusser’s lived decisions—including criminal

behaviour—is, I think, a feminist question, and one that autotheory is uniquely positioned to respond to given its openness to bringing theory and practice, rhetoric and living, art and life, to bear on each another.

Publicly identifying as a feminist can open one up to a set of standards that one might not have otherwise been held up to. If a contemporary art curator describes a group exhibition that they are curating as “feminist,” for example, the communities that they are in conversation with will consider the exhibition in light of political and social concerns in addition to aesthetic ones: intersectionality might come to factor as a key standard for assessing the exhibition’s success, rather than aesthetic or formalist concerns. As a feminist working as a public intellectual in my capacities as a writer, curator, and artist, I am aware that in order to have a viable and responsive intersectional feminism, theory must be informed by—and must in turn inform—good practice. The pressures put on those who identify as feminists might in part explain why many have resisted using the feminist label, even as this tendency seems to have been changing since the fourth-wave feminist upsurge in the 2010s.

As a feminist mode, autotheory emerges from women’s lived realities, including social practices of conversing and sharing knowledge and experience. Consciousness-raising, for example, is a social practice that historically took place between women who shared their experiences of their domestic and personal lives; this social ritual is said to have catalyzed the rise of second-wave feminist theory and activism in the 1960s-70s. Indeed, the act of disclosing what was once private to other women was central to the formation of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s, where consciousness-raising came to describe these practices of disclosing lived experience as a means of becoming conscious of the ways in which so-called

personal issues were, in fact, structural and systemic. The revolution of the everyday that takes place in the 1960s leads to a recognition of the everyday as political: feminists writers, artists, scholars, and activists came to see that “the personal is political” and, in turn, that their practices (as artists, as activists) can and should engage with the particularities of their lived experience as women, as queer, as racialized, and so on. This continues through to the third wave, with hooks grounding her anti-racist feminist theory in the conviction that “The enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside” (*Everybody* 12), a sentiment aligned with the logic of second-wave consciousness-raising.

Auto-theory might describe those practices where experimental work by women blurs the lines between art, theory, and life in a way that has been suppressed or repressed, even in a post-1960s context where male thinkers and artists were espousing a purported blurring of art, life, and theory in their own work. More fundamentally, autotheory also troubles the still-present tendency of resorting to Cartesian dualisms and Aristotelian ontological hierarchies that perceive the female (and gender non-conforming) body as excessive, chaotic, non-conceptual matter at odds with intellectual form. This is a problem taken up explicitly in the autotheoretical writing of Kraus, Nelson, Jones, Dodie Bellamy, and others. In *Irrational Modernism*, Jones writes through the life and work of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven—a lost Dadaist—in WWI-era New York City, arguing for the Baroness’s rightful place as an artist in the canon of Dada. As Jones reveals in her feminist art historiography, not only was the Baroness not acknowledged as an artist of the avant-garde by her male contemporaries (the revered proto-conceptual artists Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Tristan Tzara), she was also deemed the monstrous abject woman or hysteric by the artists: what Jones describes as a “performative irritant to the male

avant-gardes” (*Irrational* 5). To make matters worse, the Baroness’s work was appropriated by the male artist who would become recognized as the forefather of both conceptualism and contemporary art as we know it today: Duchamp, whom art theorist Miklos Legrady argues took his idea of the readymade from the Baroness (2).

We can start to see how the blurring of art, life, and theory presents a range of gendered tensions of particular interest to feminist writers, artists, activists, and scholars. The act of choosing where to draw the line between the artist’s or theorist’s life and work, respectively, is a philosophical problem and a feminist issue—one that autotheoretical practices are particularly responsive to in their orientation and experimentation. Jones ultimately comes to argue that the Baroness is more of a Dadaist than her male contemporaries, because she is the only one to embody her art in a way that the men only upheld in theory. These artists were men who kept their avant-garde art practice separate from their otherwise “bourgeois” lives (Jones, *Irrational* 8). Writing this revisionist art history of Dada in a manner that is itself autotheoretical, with Jones disclosing her chronic anxiety as a point of identification with the Baroness, Jones advances a larger critique of the hegemonic mode of early twentieth century avant-gardism:

This dominant model of avant-gardism is predicated on the erasure of the subjectivity of the artist—the messy and potentially compromising aspects of her or his sexuality and other biographical vicissitudes—from the artistic encounter. (I want to stress that this erasure is a fantasy, one that inevitably fails as biographical and bodily details about the artist inevitably haunt every discussion of the work). (*Irrational* 21)

Autotheory poses an alternative to this “erasure” of the artist’s subjectivity in experimental and theoretical work, presenting an alternative model for avant-garde theory and practice.

One of the tensions that the Baroness embodies in relation to Dadaist aesthetics is what it means to actually collapse the distinction between art and life: male artists and theorists, from Tzara to Goffman, advocated for such a collapse between art and life in their manifestoes and theory, but did not live in that way. By rendering the Baroness as the abject, and by expelling her from the elevated realm of the conceptual, they reveal their own fears around these lines collapsing: at least when it is a female artist collapsing these distinctions. The problem of women artists and writers being “too much”—especially when they use their own bodies and selves in their work—is one that feminist performance scholars and autotheorists continue to take up, whether it pertains to disclosing, revealing, exposing, or otherwise being more than the patriarchy can take. Schneider describes this in terms of a “crisis of vision relative to the explicit feminist artist” (*Explicit* 76), or the feminist body artist of “the explicit body,” a term she uses to mean both nude or sexually explicit and as explicating, or literally instantiating, a concept: we find both cases in Piper’s *Food*, for example. Schneider notes how the critique of “too much” is often launched against feminist body artists, such as when Carolee Schneemann and her long-term partner had sex on camera for her 1964 video *Fuses*, or when Annie Sprinkle presented her cervix to audience members in her playfully didactic *Public Cervix Announcement* in 1989. These “dynamics of overexposure” (77) that we find in feminist body art in the 1960s-90s—which tends to be met with sexist double-standards in its critical reception—are extended in text-based autotheoretical practices as well, such as in Kraus’s performative use of disclosure in her 1997 *I Love Dick*. The act of disregarding women artists as unintelligible and, it follows, unintelligent takes various discursive forms, including the hysteric, the witch, the narcissist, the

exhibitionist, and the whore, all spectres in the history of feminism that exist at the limits of discourse and intelligibility in the context of a Western, male, philosophical tradition.

Using self-reflexivity, mimesis, intertextual identification and intimacy, academic methods of citation, and feminist aesthetic and political strategies like self-imaging and disclosure, autotheory becomes a discursive space for feminist artists and writers to performatively embody and transmute these historically abject positionings, revealing them as sites of agency, theorizing, experimentation, and play: the exhibitionist becomes a theory-savvy Instagram artist (@gothshakira), the witch becomes an internet astrologer (Reines, *lazyeyehaver*) and an embodied theorist of magic (Scott, *witchbody*), the whore becomes the “prostitute performance artist”¹³ (Bell, *Prostitute* 186) and the sex worker poet¹⁴ (Dawn, *Poetry*), and the hysteric becomes the “posthysteric” (Bell, “Posthysteria” 189). Many of these artists' works serve to advance feminist critiques of patriarchy's pasts and presents with particular attention to the tensions “autotheory”—as a term that bridges a turn to the self with a turn to philosophy/theory—presents to these histories. Through autotheoretical feminist practices, historically disparaged roles are revealed to be ripe, politically necessary, and nuanced positionings from which to theorize and critically reflect on life, art, gender, and other aspects of being in the world.

No Theory No Cry

“I haven't painted in months,” an artist friend tells me. She has just begun her MFA in Toronto, and laments the lack of time she has to create new work in the studio. “All we do is read

¹³ Bell uses this term to describe Sprinkle and her lived practice as a sex worker, a performance artist, and a sex educator and activist.

¹⁴ Amber Dawn's best known work *How Poetry Saved My Life*, reflecting on her time doing sex work in Vancouver, is subtitled “A Hustler's Memoir”; recently, in collaboration with Justin Ducharme, Dawn is editing a collection of works by sex worker poets entitled *Hustling Verse: An Anthology of Sex Workers' Poetry*.

theory,” she says. In a context where the discourses and frameworks of philosophy, theory, and criticism become an increasingly large part of the curriculum for studio art MFA and PhD programs, and as art schools become universities,¹⁵ some artists respond by working autotheoretically to make work that critically engages with the centrality of theory and discourse in contemporary art practice.

Theory itself occupies a contentious place in contemporary feminist art; ranging from something that feminist artists and collectives might distance themselves from for its perceived hegemonic, institutional power, to something that is adored as a fetish-object (as in the case of Audrey Wollen's online performances of Sad Girl Theory, discussed later in this chapter) or actively engaged with as an artist's material (which I take up in Chapter 3). In the case of the former, some feminist artists, particularly those working in social justice activism, are resistant to theory because of what they perceive to be a binary opposition between “practice”—the getting your hands dirty and doing something—and “theory”—the discursive and the academic. In this case, theory is perceived as inaccessible, both due to its advanced discourse and terminology and the resources—including time and energy—required to engage with and produce it. I witnessed this in my time on the programming and curatorial committees of the Feminist Art Collective¹⁶ in the period between 2014-18. FAC is a self-described grassroots, volunteer-run, arts collective in Toronto that, in its organizing principles, describes theory as “hierarchical” and therefore rejects

¹⁵ In Canada alone, all of the major art colleges have become Universities: the Ontario College of Art and Design (now OCADU), Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (now ECUAD), and Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (now NSCADU) have all become recognized as full universities and have changed their status to a university over the last two decades. For OCAD this change took place in 2002; for ECAD and NSCAD the change took place in 2003. When I first began this project in 2015, the Alberta College of Art was the last holdout: now, as of 2018, it too has taken on university status. Alongside these institutional changes, Doctorate in Studio Art programs now exist at two Canadian universities: York University in Toronto and Western University in London, Ontario; in the UK, comparable PhD programs have “been established as early as 1975” (Moser, “PhD in Visual Arts”).

¹⁶ The Feminist Art Collective or FAC was formerly known as the Feminist Art Conference from 2013-18.

it. On the one hand, this makes space for art works that might not make it past the academic gatekeepers of today's art institutions, and is therefore a more inclusive and, possibly, intersectional model resonant with FAC's foregrounding of social justice concerns over aesthetic and critical ones. On the other hand, an overly defensive reaction to theory and discourse can lead to anti-intellectualism within activist spaces, a complicated problem that hooks herself anticipates, based on her own experiences in feminist circles (*Transgress* 65-66). In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks draws attention to the danger of devaluing the written and spoken word in favour of "concrete action," calling for a socially engaged feminist theory that is grounded in practice, instead of a practice that rejects (or purports to reject) "theory" altogether (65). For hooks, feminist theory is first and foremost a wrestling with "the concrete," a means of making "sense of everyday life experiences": theory is a means of articulating these lived experiences in ways that are transgressive, such as in the way that Black feminist theory and practice transgresses the institutions and ideologies of white-supremacist patriarchy (70). hooks holds that one's lived experience is a rich, multifaceted, and urgent place from which to generate feminist theory, and she encourages women from diversified backgrounds to do so.

While some feminist artists approach theory with a cautious ambivalence, a great many others invoke its name across multiple kinds of practices. In the 2010s, works that once might have once been described as manifestoes—and which in many ways read as manifestoes—are positioning themselves as "theory" instead. Third-wave, post-punk, French feminist writer and filmmaker Virginie Despentes's *King Kong Theory*, for example, performs the function of a manifesto, providing succinct and sophisticated arguments around the politics of prostitution, pornography, and rape. Yet Despentes does not title her text as a manifesto or a collection of

autobiographical essays, but rather frames it as theory. In like manner, Hedva's "Sick Woman Theory" has a manifesto-like line of reasoning and tone, is explicitly politicized and connected to social justice movements, and is disseminated online in an effort toward greater accessibility of information as a manifesto is want to do—yet Hedva does not call the work a manifesto, but a theory. This distinction is worth noting when it comes to considering the politics and aesthetics of autotheory as a discursive mode, and the ways in which "theory" is invoked in contrast to the more militant "manifesto."

What do I make of this framing of texts as "theory" rather than other genres like "manifestos," where the latter tends to be more straightforwardly political? Are manifestos as a genre more characteristic of early periods in feminist history, such as those of second-wave feminists, from the collaboratively authored *The Redstockings Manifesto* (1969) or *The Black Woman's Manifesto* (1970) to the more conceptual, tangentially art-world Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* (1967)? Have feminists found it more efficacious to frame their politicized manifestoes and visions as other genres and modes, like theory or conceptual art? In the post-internet present, what does invoking "theory" as a term to describe one's work signify or perform for how that work is understood and received? A question that arises in relation to autotheory is what constitutes "theory," and what a text ought to be or do in order to rightfully claim that designation; of course, this is itself a loaded feminist question at the heart of autotheory. There are differences in theoretical rigour between the respective internet-based "Sick Woman Theory" and "Sad Girl Theory," for example, and approaching these works as existing on a spectrum of autotheoretical tendencies might be more useful than seeking a singular definition of autotheory.

There are particularly playful and even parodic responses to the contended place of theory in feminist practice in recent queer feminist artist projects, such as Toronto-based artist Hazel Meyer's *No Theory No Cry*. Taking the form of a 6 feet x 8 feet banner with printed image and text, *No Theory No Cry* uses language, imagery, citationality, and humour to represent the ambivalence toward theoretical discourse that many artists experience in contemporary art spaces, including the institutional spaces of the art college-turned-University. Meyer's work came out of her feelings of frustration with what she experienced as a lack of space for the emotional and the embodied within the discursive and the theoretical, particularly as theory was being taught in her MFA program. Written in Meyer's characteristic hand writing—a performative font that has become its own kind of character in Meyer's practice—the text re-stages the discourse of “theory”—which becomes a kind of symbolic character in the piece—as affective and affecting. The work self-reflexively proclaims the artist's feelings about theory in all its excessive ambivalence:

no theory no cry/is rigorous & articulate & assertive & obnoxious &/emotional
with a predisposition to tears/theory helps/theory hinders/a tumultuous
relationship/the artistic process / a prosthetic axis/ a simultaneous conquer and
defeat/no theory/ no cry/ is the possibility to double back/& inform the teeth that
bite your ass. (Meyer, *No Theory*)

I first came across *No Theory No Cry* in 2014 through my involvement with *Theory Boner*, a queer feminist zine curated by Toronto-based artist Mary Tremonte and writer Jenna Lee Forde. For young artists and graduate students like myself, much of the power of *Theory Boner* lies in the humour and immediacy of the title: appropriating the phallic from a queer standpoint, the title intimates that those contributing to the zine share a kind of collective “boner,” and figurative “hard-on,” for theory. Printed on risograph using OCADU's printing resources, *Theory Boner*

comprises Butler quotes alongside autobiographical and critical essays, collages, comics, drawings, manifestoes, and performance and video stills. In autotheoretical feminist practices like these, theory takes on new valence as something to be processed, transmuted, and utilized in art. Like *No Theory No Cry*, which cites theory's capacity to bring a "thrill" and a "chill" and to "make the tears flow" (Meyer, *No Theory*), *Theory Boner* makes space for an understanding of theory that is embodied, affective, and more directly relevant to queer feminist and gender non-conforming artists, activists, and thinkers in the twenty-first century.

Gayatri Spivak maintains that, "The production of theory is also a practice; the opposition between abstract 'pure' theory and concrete 'applied' practice is too quick and easy" ("Subaltern" 70). Is it possible that autotheory, as a mode that explicitly and self-reflexively links the lived, the embodied, and the subjective to the theoretical, might allow for a reconciling of scholarly feminisms and grassroots, community-based feminisms? Might autotheory assuage the tension between accessibility and theory, or between populism and philosophy? What kinds of epistemologies and ways of doing theory and practice are seen as legitimate in the context of contemporary feminist aesthetics and politics today? As a practice, autotheory navigates the fraught relations between theory, knowledge, feminism, affect, the collective, and the self in a number of ways, a matter which I unpack in the coming chapters.

While theory continues to be taken up in different ways by feminist artists and writers, some feminists working in an autotheoretical mode emphasize the reparative pleasures of reading theory. In an interview for *Bookslut*, Nelson describes her experience of reading theory as akin to "swimming in waters that are way, way over your head" (Hudson and Nelson); reading theory is

a practice that, like the Freudian experience of *jouissance*, is a kind of painful pleasure that comes with “enjoying the unfathomable deeps”:

I like sliding through a text that is beyond me. I mean, you could read Deleuze and Guattari your entire lifetime, and depending on your knowledge bank, get something different out of it each time. Ditto Barthes. That kind of depth of field is fascinating to me, and it often derives from a writer drawing upon many registers at once (psychoanalytic, scientific, mathematical, literary, and so on). Not many people are going to have mastery of all these fields. (Hudson and Nelson)

Given the issues of intimidation posed by theory as what Irigaray calls a “master discourse” (*This Sex* 149)—with its learned integration of frameworks and terminology across disciplines—the study of theory might be better approached as something you let wash over you (the deep waters) rather than something you seek to master or control. The same could be said for the process of experiencing an artwork—especially a work of contemporary art—which, like theory, suffers from being understood as something profoundly elusive save to those who have studied at length and who have the codes to unearth the singular meaning behind a given work. But what if we were to step back from this understanding of art and theory as something insular and impalpable to something excitingly complex—that brings a challenge like “swimming in waters that are way, way over your head” (Hudson and Nelson)—and that has, instead of one singular and specialized meaning, a whole spectrum of possible meanings, understandings, and ways of responding? In her interview with Helen Stuhr-Rommereim, Kraus describes reading theory as an “exhilarating” experience, one that is “very close to the experience of looking at art . . . a great, expansive high” (Stuhr-Rommereim and Kraus), and this attention to the visceral effects (and affects) of reading theory shifts the focus away from mastery and towards pleasure.

Historicizing Autotheory as a Feminist Mode

In many ways, autotheory does not mark a major break from what came before: rather it draws from developments since the eighteenth century and transmutes them according to political, aesthetic, social, and ethical concerns. While I make passing reference to the second, third, and fourth waves of feminism, I am aware of the limitations and problematics of this “wave” configuration of feminism’s development. I draw from Griselda Pollock’s 2016 affirmative theorizing of the limits of historicizing feminism by intergenerational conflict and discrete “waves”:

...each episode of the feminist revolt against phallocentrism and patriarchy is but a contingent actualization of the unharvested virtuality of feminism that is never exhausted or fully known by any of these moments, each of which is to be grasped within its specificity and understood for what it has introduced into cultural and political possibility. Writing a history of feminism as waves and generations inflicts a false sequentiality, deceptive consistency, and obligatory ruptures along a line of time, rather than holding us to moments, flashes, constellations of unexhausted and unpredictable feminist potentiality. (“Trauma” 29-30)

With this in mind, I consider autotheory as such a “flash” and “constellation” of feminist potentiality, which has bubbled up in different periods and which seems to be experiencing a resurgence in the contemporary moment of the late 2010s.

As a notion, autotheory presents a problem for feminist theory and practice, both historically and in the present: namely, the tension between the orientation toward the self —“auto”—and the production of legitimate theoretical work—“theory.” In what ways and to what extents can a theorist engage with “the personal,” or can the personal be legitimately or properly theoretical, and how does this question shift when we think about it intersectionally?

What does it mean for a feminist to engage with the self while at the same time engaging with theory, and what are the aesthetic and political possibilities therein? How personal can you get without sacrificing theoretical rigour? Are theory and the personal opposed, or are they inextricably enmeshed, as the second-wave feminist texts intimate?

Through the 1980s, with the development of Women's Studies departments and Women's, Gender, and Feminist Studies as a discipline, the number of feminist scholars incorporating personal experience in their academic writing substantially increased. While some feminist scholars and theorists have found it useful to incorporate their own experience explicitly in their academic or scholarly work—including Miller, Sedgwick, Gallop, and hooks—others have disregarded the impulse as narcissistic, lacking sufficient critical distance, or as being too professionally risky for these reasons. Reading American literature and theory in the late 1970s through the 1980s, Miller connects the emerging practice of what she calls “personal criticism” to “narrative criticism” and “occasional writing,” where the “occasional” descriptor denotes the temporality of this practice: personal criticism, Miller explains, takes place in a marginal time frame tangentially related to the more established male-authored modes of writing theory and doing scholarship (*Personal* xi). One might imagine that, in the hopes of securing a tenure-track position, a feminist scholar might write personal criticism for a low stakes conference or a newsletter, while carrying out the rest of her writing in the supposedly “objective style” of conventional scholarly writing with its “critical plausibility” upheld by their male counterparts (14). I say this not to entrench a falsely dualistic or essentialist gender binary, but to acknowledge the historical context of division between a Euro-American, male-centric academic culture of scholarship which tended to obscure its subjective inclinations and investments, and a

burgeoning intersectional feminist mode that highlighted the extant place of subjectivity and the body in theoretical writing.

Miller's *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* was published in 1991, the same year that feminist scholar Jane Gallop introduced the practice that she will come to call "anecdotal theory" in 1997, with her controversial and autotheoretical work *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. In it, Gallop defines anecdotal theory as a "practice" and a "project" which draws from the literary theory methods of psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and feminism (*Anecdotal* 2). Her first use of this practice was in 1991 with her "A Tale of Two Jacques," an autotheoretical inquiry into the relationship between psychoanalysis—Jacques Lacan—and deconstruction—Jacques Derrida. Gallop describes this text as both "a mid-seventies encounter" of dominant trends in theory at the time, and as an elucidation of "a drama I lived through" (11), underscoring both the performative and autotheoretical aspects of her practice of theorizing. This essay was followed by "Dating Derrida in the Nineties" in 1992, where Gallop thinks through the relation between feminism and deconstruction as an autotheoretical engagement with Derrida's 1972 reading of the representation of women in Nietzsche. Later, in "Econstructing Sisterhood," Gallop considers "the eroded trace of the encounter between feminism and (d)construction" through disclosures about her relationship with her mother and her sister (*Anecdotal* 4). We find this practice of disclosure across works of feminist autotheory, including in the work of Kraus, Nelson, Preciado, Rankine, and others.

Gallop seeks coalitions between the "personal" of second-wave feminism and those movements in theory that seemed to reject the personal, such as Derrida's method of deconstruction (which was seen as at odds with 1970s feminism by many of Gallop's feminist

contemporaries); that said, Derrida's own work is open to a resuscitative autotheoretical reading, which I have begun to think through in relation to Derrida's *Ear of the Other*. Observing a shift in perspective on the place of the personal in theory that took place in the time between the second wave and the third, Gallop writes:

Although deconstruction was often held to be in opposition to the sort of personal discourse favoured by seventies feminism, by the nineties it became possible to recognize a deconstructionist personal and speak a personalized deconstruction. My project of anecdotalizing theory is located very much at this intersection of the deconstructionist with the personal. (*Anecdotal* 5)

Anecdotal theory is not only a means of integrating the autobiographical into theory, but a means of reinserting the "truly literary" into theoretical writing practices (*Anecdotal* 2). Gallop cites Joel Fineman on the anecdote as a literary form, maintaining that an anecdote is simultaneously "literary and real" (3), or metaphorical and literal in the sense of the lived as "the moment...the here and now" (4-5). Gallop's reference to the "occasional" in her description of anecdotal theory recalls Miller's use of the "occasional" to describe personal criticism or "narrative criticism" in 1991 (Miller, *Personal* 1), which underscores how such a personal-critical mode of writing remains a marginalized mode—at least temporally. In *The Argonauts* Nelson references Gallop, citing an anecdote from a conference where Gallop was in conversation with art historian Rosalind Krauss: Nelson turns to the anecdote to illustrate the ways in which narcissism continues to crop up as a problem in the reception of autobiographical feminist work—even by other feminists (in this case, Krauss). I take this up in Chapter 3.

Even though it is a new term, "autotheory" is plump with philosophical problems and paradoxes that have been engaged with in different ways and at different times over the histories of philosophy, theory, literature, art, and feminism. Indeed, the history of feminism is, in a sense,

a history of autotheory—one which actively seeks to bridge theory and practice and which upholds tenets like “the personal is political.” From Hélène Cixous’s practice of writing the body and the self¹⁷ through écriture féminine and Luce Irigaray’s critiques of the phallogentrism of philosophy, to Adrienne Rich and Donna Haraway engaging a “politics of location” (Rich, “Notes” 210) and positioning (Haraway, *Simians* 3), and to Audre Lorde and other Black feminists theorizing a politics of difference, feminists have long critiqued male-authored theory for not acknowledging the subjectivity of the theorists themselves and for failing to consider issues like gender and race. “If one of the original premises of seventies feminism (emerging out of sixties slogans) was that ‘the personal is the political,’” Miller explains, “eighties feminism has made it possible to see that the personal is also theoretical: the personal is part of theory’s material” (Miller, *Personal* 21). Miller describes this move as a matter of reconfiguring what constitutes legitimate cultural material in the eyes of the academy and other audiences: “what may distinguish contemporary feminism from other postmodern thought is the expansion in the definition of cultural material” (21). Autotheory takes this to be true and extends it: the personal and the lived comprise cultural material from which a practice of theorizing can happen.

Alongside the issue of what constitutes legitimate cultural material in art and literature—a matter which swings wide open with the onset of postmodernism that occurred alongside the move from philosophy to theory (Jameson, “Periodizing” 187)—is the question of how we come to determine what constitutes theory, the question that I am particularly interested as I take up the valences of “autotheory” as a post-1960s feminist practice. As I have mentioned, the act of

¹⁷ “She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history” (Cixous, “Laugh” 880).

aligning theory and the self raises issues when it comes to the question of critical legitimacy—a matter that is complicated further for a woman working in this mode. In 1985, American literary critic Barbara Johnson writes, “Not only has personal experience tended to be excluded from the discourse of knowledge, but the realm of the personal itself has been coded as female and devalued for that reason” (Miller, *Personal* 15). Sweeping genres like “women’s writing” tend to be associated with personal content and are therefore seen as soft or limited in relevance to critical conversations—for example, women’s writing might be more readily read in relation to the domestic sphere as the site of the personal and the private, rather than the public sphere as the site where real politics and thinking takes place, a configuration that was, of course, troubled with the onset of the second wave. Under what conditions is the work of women considered critically legitimate, or as contributions to theory with a capital “T”? Autotheory is an often self-reflexive mode, where the autotheorist both creates the text and provides exegesis on that text, something that I investigate in Chapter 2 when I consider the chapter of Kraus’s *I Love Dick* entitled “Exegesis.” In this case, a dual function is being performed by Kraus, who is actively theorizing her own work as a part of her autotheoretical writing practice.

While the texts I frame as autotheory have generally been described in terms like “critical memoir,” I choose to foreground these texts’ relationships to contemporary art rather than focus solely on literature and writing practices. This is not to understate the significance of literary histories to the development of autotheory, but to pay keen attention to the liminal space between literary studies and contemporary art history, studio art, and curatorial studies as a rich site of connection that has not yet been adequately theorized from. A great deal of autotheoretical work is engaged with contemporary art, visual culture, sound, conceptualism, video, and art writing

and criticism; much of the most exciting autotheoretical work is affiliated with art writing, its own expanded field of inquiry and practice that exists in close proximity to theory and discursive programming in art galleries, public museums, and artist-run centres. This is a trait not only of recent autotheory, but in earlier autotheoretical texts as well: take for example the work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, who was writing innovative (and arguably autotheoretical) work that evaded description (Moser, “Breathing” xiii) between the 1940s-1970s and, later, artist Roni Horn’s autotheoretical exhibition *Rings of Lispector (Água Viva)* in London in 2004. Autotheory as a practice is especially present in multi-medial contexts, and in this way, it is ripe for a reading through the history of post-1960s contemporary art and its related discourses of theory, criticism, art writing, and aesthetics.

By invoking theory to describe itself (as we find in Virginie Despentes’s *King Kong Theory*, Audrey Wollen’s “Sad Girl Theory,” Johanna Hedva’s “Sick Woman Theory”), late twentieth and early twenty-first century autotheoretical texts mark a shift from work by some earlier feminist precursors, such as Cixous’s *écriture féminine*, which understood theory to be “an essentially masculine enterprise of ‘power through knowledge’” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 192). Alongside Cixous, Monique Wittig practiced *écriture féminine* as a feminist mode of writing that distanced itself from masculinist logic and signification. This mode marks a point of connection with later French feminist precursors, or more specifically, Quebecois ones, such as lesbian feminist writer Nicole Brossard’s *fiction théorique*, an experimental writing practice which found community in the collectively authored text *Theory, A Sunday* (1988).¹⁸ Brossard’s

¹⁸ Alongside writing by Brossard, *Theory, A Sunday* features work by Louky Bersianik, France Théoret, Gail Scott, Louise Cotnoir, Louise Dupré, and Rachel Levitsky; the women worked collaboratively over a set period of time in conversation with each other to develop the texts that would form this experimental anthology.

writing has been described as fiction théorique because of the ways in which it integrates philosophy and feminist theory with autobiography and fictionalization, and its status as an antecedent to, or an iteration of, what is now being called autotheory is worth recognizing. To be sure, contemporary texts described as “autotheory” are often ones that integrate disparate modes in ways that do not easily fit within established genres—an impulse found in the larger history of feminist theorizing. We find this creative shuttling between genres and modes in feminist theoretical writings in the 1980s, for example, from Brossard’s fiction théorique or fiction-theory¹⁹ in books like *The Aerial Letter* (1988), mentioned above, or Gloria Anzaldúa’s experimental code-switching between different languages, dialects, and genres in her unprecedented work of Chicana feminist theory *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). With the publication of Nelson’s *The Argonauts* in 2015, “autotheory” surfaces as a term that might better describe the kinds of feminist practices that engage with the self alongside theory in ways that exceed existing genre categories—or at least do so at first glance.

In “Is Radical Queerness Possible Anymore? Poet Maggie Nelson’s New Memoir,” critic Christian Lorentzen describes the moment of encountering a new genre as he reads *The Argonauts*:

Two words stick out on the back of *The Argonauts*, and I’m not talking about fierce or intrepid . . . The first word is autotheory. Not quite a neologism, it doesn’t have much of a life outside of academic writing. At first glance you might assume it refers to building a theory of the self, but what Nelson’s up to is

¹⁹ Theorizing the writing of Nicole Brossard, Canadian feminist critic and translator Barbara Godard describes fiction-theory as follows: “Presented as women’s words, however, and put on the page, such memories become *fiction-theory*, fiction deployed as thought experiment or hypothesis (“if...then”) to rework the social imaginary or as a writing-machine producing forms to . . . [“resolve problems of sense”] and . . . [“subject” reality “to transformation” (149)]. Such intercepting the real is performed through language and its image or figures in their function as *relays to transmission devices*” (Godard 198). Godard argues that Brossard’s mode of writing fiction-theory is “in order to shift our perceptions” and rupture “what we understand as reality” (199); Godard contextualizes Brossard’s fiction-theory in relation to her related practice of “writing as research” which she sustained throughout the 1970s (199).

something more like deploying her own experience as an engine for thinking that spins out into the world and backwards and forwards in time.

According to Lorentzen, “autotheory” does not refer to a “theory of the self” so much as theory that emerges from the self. The autotheorist shuttles between the self and theory—social theory, political theory, aesthetic theory, linguistic theory, the discursive theory of post-structuralism, affect theory, performance theory—using their firsthand experience as a person living in the world as the grounds for developing and honing theoretical arguments and philosophical theses. In addition to autotheory as a site of feminist engagement with the discourses of theory and philosophy, autotheory is also the site of engagement with the materials of the writer’s or artist’s life: embodied experience can become another text, framework, or catalyst through which to think through aesthetic, social, cultural, moral, and political issues. Entailed in the use of the self (“auto”) as a material alongside theory comes a degree of self-analysis and criticality about one’s own life as part of the practice of autotheory.

In autotheoretical texts such as *The Argonauts*, the practice of citing theory becomes a way to better understand one’s experience in the world and, at the same time, to provide theoretical insights about topics related to sexuality, politics, aesthetics, and so on, from that experience.²⁰ While Nelson’s work is described as charting the path for this emerging term “autotheory,” Daniel Peña makes the case that *The Argonauts* is heavily indebted to Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*—something which, he argues, continues to go unacknowledged in current conversations around Nelson’s work. As Chicana feminist scholars Norma E. Cantú and Aída Hurtado describe in their Introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of *Borderlands*, “Anzaldúa uses the geographical

²⁰ It is this epistemological shuttling that I term “intertextual identification” and, when it comes to the relationship between the self and an other, “intertextual intimacy”—terms I unpack in Chapter 3.

location of her birth as the source of her theorizing” (Cantú and Hurtado 5), extending W.E.B. Dubois’s theory of double consciousness to her experience as a lesbian Chicana woman who grew up in Texas in order to then theorize the politics of borders and the phenomenological states of those living in “borderlands” in relation to the particular site of the “Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border” (Anzaldúa 19). Just as Cantú and Hurtado emphasize “the philosophical conceptual significance” of Anzaldúa’s writings, so too does Peña stress the violence of erasing Chicana literature from the lineage of American writing that Nelson’s “autotheory” draws from.²¹

On October 1, 2015, British-Indian writer Bhanu Kapil tweeted: “This is the year I heard the words ‘autotheory’ and now, from Sofia Samatar, ‘life-thinking’—for the first time” (Kapil, “autotheory”). Here, Kapil is re-tweeting Somali-American writer Sofia Samatar, who describes the blogs of Kapil and Gukira as “a kind of life-thinking” (Samatar, “life-thinking”). Autotheory, Samatar explains, is “a word for writing that integrates autobiography and social criticism” (“life-thinking”). Arguably, most of philosophy and theory, as well as literature and art, are modes of “life-thinking”; and yet terms like “autotheory” and “life-thinking” are breaking new ground by foregrounding criticality alongside the personal in ways that are being received as new. Highlighting words like “critical,” “theory,” and “thinking” around texts that resemble preexisting genres like memoir and manifestoes emphasizes the intellectual aspect. The term “life-thinking” draws attention to the criticality of this mode: it signals that autotheory is as much

²¹ Peña states that “To separate Anzaldúa from the larger canon (and subsequently from those books she influenced) is to ignore her contribution to American literature. It’s to say she doesn’t belong in that kind of highbrow conversation, which she so obviously does—even Nelson acknowledges that she does.” His description of the lineage of autotheory as being part of a “highbrow” discourse is worth noting here, as it gets at a larger tension within “autotheory” as feminist practice that I take up over the course of this dissertation—namely, the power dynamics that operate within and around “theory” as a discourse.

a wrestling with, and a processing of, discourses and material realities of theory that pervade contemporary art and literature as it is an invoking of one's self as an integral part of theorizing.

In the same year, Dutch cultural theorist, curator, and video artist Mieke Bal wrote a chapter entitled "Documenting What? Autotheory and Migratory Aesthetics" for *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film* (2015). Bal defines autotheory as both a "practice" and an "ongoing, spiralling form of analysis-theory dialectic" which she turned to after being "confronted with the shortcomings of written documentation especially for the understanding of contemporary culture, which is by definition still 'in becoming'" ("Autotheory" 124). For Bal, the practice of making documentary film and then approaching these films that she has made "as *theoretical objects*" (133) in their own right is necessary for her to be able to adequately understand and theorize what she has been calling migratory aesthetics. Bal's "autotheory" describes "a form of thinking that integrates my own practice of art making as a form of thinking, and reflecting on which I have made as a continuation of the making" ("Autotheory" 134). In this way, Bal's practice as an artist and filmmaker is integral to her capacity to theorize documentary film as a scholar: there is a fluid movement between her practices making films and theorizing. Resonant with my approach to theorizing autotheory, Bal affirms the relationship between autotheory and performativity, stating that "These premises can only work because the videos are performative" (134).

This autotheoretical conjoining of filmmaking and theorizing recalls the work of Bell and Kraus, whose filmmaking practices function as theoretical practices that shape, and are shaped by, their theorizing of political and aesthetic issues. Bell's method of "shooting-theory," which she developed between 2007-2013, involves her imaging theoretical concepts through new media

technologies such as video:²² this forms part of her research-creation practice as a scholar, performance artist, and Professor of Political Science and Social and Political Thought. Self-identifying as a failed filmmaker (Kraus, *Dick* 81), Kraus's 2000 novel *Aliens and Anorexia* (the second book in her autotheoretical trilogy of which *I Love Dick* and *Torpor* are a part) centres on the act of theorizing her film *Gravity & Grace* (1996), a film which is itself autotheoretical.²³ Interestingly, both Bell's and Kraus's projects engage with the philosophy of Simone Weil the "anorexic philosopher" (Kraus, *Aliens* 51) alongside other philosophers and theorists, both hegemonic and marginalized; we begin to see the ways in which shared citations and intertextual reference points emerge across autotheoretical feminist practices.

Before the 2015 wave that saw "autotheory" surge forth in contemporary art and literary discourse, "autotheory" appeared in Stacey Young's *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*: a work of feminist social movements theory grounded in social science methodology for which Young is credited with having coined the term. Written in 1997, the same year that Kraus's *I Love Dick* was published, Young uses the word "autotheory" to describe a genre of writing that emerges from the women's movement (Young 61): she states that autotheory "combine[s] autobiography with theoretical reflection and the author's insistence on situating themselves within histories of oppression and resistance" (69), and in this way resembles auto-ethnography (Chidgey 7). Methods like auto-ethnography and performative

²² Bell's practice of "shooting theory," which she uses as a mode of research-creation in her own artistic and scholarly practices, "brings together digital video technology and print textual philosophy/theory through imaging philosophical/theoretical concepts. . . you can't think political theory simply within language. Heidegger contended that the place from which to think technology is art. I contend that the sites in which to think, produce and enliven written theoretical textual concepts are visual images and soundscapes that can be brought forth by digital video technology" (Bell, "Research").

²³ The terms that Bal sets out to describe "autotheory," where "autotheory" is "a form of thinking that integrates my own practice of art making as a form of thinking" ("Autotheory" 134), provide more evidence to my case that both Kraus's film *Gravity and Grace* and her book *Aliens and Anorexia* (which self-reflexively incorporates *Gravity and Grace*) are autotheoretical.

ethnography are other examples of antecedents to autotheory: both employ the method of engaging with the experience of the subjective self as part of the process of gathering new kinds of knowledge. In autoethnography,²⁴ one “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experiences (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experiences (*ethno*)” (Ellis et al. 1), while in performative ethnography this method is joined with frameworks from Performance Studies. The turn to personal experience as a means of more ethically and effectively understanding cultural experience resembles the second-wave feminist precept “the personal is political” and the related consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s that I discussed earlier.

Young approaches “Feminist Publishing as Discursive Politics,” reading autotheoretical texts as “counter-discourses” and as the “embodiment of a discursive type of political action, which decenters the hegemonic subject of feminism” (Young 61): the “hegemonic subject” here is the white, heterosexual, cisgender woman with class privilege. Focusing on the field of American feminist publishing between 1970 and 1990, Young cites works like Minnie Bruce Pratt’s *Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991*, Rosario Morales and Aurora Morales’s *Getting Home Alive* (1986), and the 1981 anthology *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherrie Moraga and Anzaldúa as originary examples of autotheoretical texts. Young maintains that it is because women of colour and lesbian women wrote theory from the perspective of their lived experience that the women’s movement began to address intersectionality as a feminist imperative. For Young, autotheory emerges at this point of meeting between third-wave feminism, with its moves toward intersectionality, and second-wave feminism, with its tenet of “the personal is political.” This period in American feminism between

²⁴ In autoethnography, the researcher’s personal influence on the research, including their emotionality and subjectivity, is accommodated (Ellis et al 1).

1970 and 1990 is one in which feminist scholars and writers of colour, including Indigenous women, were more empowered to use their positionings as a basis from which to theorize; some notable examples include Lee Maracle's 1988 *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* and hooks's 1981 *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism*.

Young's reading of "autotheory" is based in an analysis of the output of four feminist small presses, Aunt Lute Books, South End Press, Firebrand, and Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, and a consideration of how their publishing of this dawning genre shaped the changes in American feminism specifically in the period between 1980 and 1990. Focusing on the presses that publish autotheoretical writing, Young's decision to take this more historical materialist approach to theorizing autotheory is noteworthy. I perceive certain trends in which presses publish the texts that I am reading as autotheoretical today: they include a handful of more alternative presses, including Semiotext(e), Graywolf, and Autonomedia; Duke University Press has staked notable ground in queer feminist affect theory and other works relevant to my theorizing of autotheory in the contemporary. These presses tend to publish works that take a more experimental approach to theory, literature, and academic scholarship, and that show either explicit or tacit support of feminist and queer frameworks.

Aside from Young's coining of the term—which perhaps more closely resembles Miller's notion of "personal criticism," coined in 1991 than it does the performative,²⁵ conceptual, cross-medial works that I read as autotheoretical—the only other definitions of the term appear not in peer-reviewed academic sources, but in personal blogs. In a post from April 2017, artist Valeria Radchenko cites Young and Preciado alongside her own definition of autotheory, where "Writing

²⁵ To be sure, Miller's description of "personal criticism" and "narrative criticism" in *Getting Personal* integrates the sentiment of Stacey Young's term "autotheory" with the influence of the performative turn.

autotheory is a method of using the body's experience to develop knowledge" (Radchenko). In April 2016, a writer named KC, who self-describes as "a white, able-bodied, queer/trans/non-binary person, as a survivor, as a person navigating mental health issues, and as a person with a deep commitment to critical analysis and political revolution" (KC), wrote a blog post entitled "the academy, autotheory, and the argonauts," which opens with an anecdote from the writer's experience in a seminar class on queer affect theory at a University in the States. The post becomes KC's account of "quit(ting) the academy" or opting out of academia. Yet they concede that, despite their exit from the neoliberal University, "there was a particular genre of work that i craved ... testo junkie, ann cvetkovich's depression, s. lochlann jain's malignant, audre lorde's zami..." (KC). Put another way, it is autotheory that marks KC's point of affinity with, and desire for, theory: a discourse embedded in academic institutions that might be seen as inaccessible—at best daunting, at worst hostile—to particular publics, including those who are mentally ill, who are survivors of sexual violence, and who are unable to access higher education due to class discrimination and other forms of marginalization.

Like Young, KC understands autotheory to be a fundamentally politicized mode of feminist writing that makes space for those who have been inordinately marginalized and oppressed to engage in the practice of theorizing and to redefine what it means to theorize. This autotheoretical practice of theorizing might take place within, around, outside of, or perhaps most richly, "beside" the academy: I use "beside" in the queerly inter-subjective sense advanced by Sedgwick in *Touching Feeling*, where "beside" comprises "a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (8). In their blog

post, KC asks who has access to writing texts like Nelson's *The Argonauts*: the answer they offer is that it is only those who have already established themselves as legitimate within the terms of academia (or, relatedly, of contemporary art) who are supported in working in this mode.

Margeaux Feldman, a PhD candidate in English at the University of Toronto, raised a similar question for Ann Cvetkovich during a discussion of Cvetkovich's unpublished essay "The Feeling of Critique." We were reading this essay as part of The Affect Project, a queer affect theory reading group organized by Professor Dana Seitler at the Jackman Humanities Institute in 2015. Speaking in a gently assertive way, Margeaux asked Cvetkovich what she thought of the fact that graduate students like herself were not permitted (by their supervisors, by the University) to write in an autotheoretical mode—this mode that the group, reading works by Cvetkovich and others, were discussing, theorizing, and becoming affectively invested in as emerging scholars and as humans in the world. It was her experience at the University of Toronto, Margeaux explains, that she was not allowed to write her dissertation autotheoretically: the suggestion here was that she and other PhD candidates (or other graduate students) like herself must first prove themselves to be serious scholars adept in more conventional methodologies before moving onto this experimental way of working. After Margeaux asked her question, I thought of the professional trajectories of the queer feminist affect theorists²⁶ whom

²⁶ It is important to acknowledge queer feminist affect theory as an antecedent to recent autotheoretical texts. Sedgwick is often credited as the originator of what is now known as queer feminist affect theory. Queer feminist affect theory is distinct from the lineage of affect theory that descends from Spinoza and Deleuze to Brian Massumi; the definition of "affect" differs between these two modes, where Deleuze distinguishes affect from emotion (defining it instead as a precognitive, prelinguistic, non-subjectified sensory experience) while Sedgwick and Cvetkovich uphold affect as a category that encompasses emotionality and feeling, amongst other aspects of subjective experience (Cvetkovich, *Depression* 4). Texts characterized in the genre of queer feminist affect theory tend toward the cross-disciplinary and the cross-genre, bringing together autobiography and auto-ethnographic modes, scholarly writing and theory, and the affective drive toward extra-discursive modes to generate a contemporary mode of theorizing tied to what Sara Ahmed calls queer phenomenology. This includes works by Sedgwick, Cvetkovich, Berlant, Ahmed, Halberstam, Kathleen Stewart (*Ordinary Affects*), José Esteban Muñoz (*Cruising Utopia*), Heather Love (*Feeling Backward*), and Sianne Ngai (*Ugly Feelings*).

we had been reading: Sedgwick began as a nineteenth century scholar writing on the work of Henry James before being able to write about her own identification as a “gay man,” her lived experience with breast cancer, or the ways in which queer configurations of pleasure drive her objects of theorizing. For whom is autotheory a reparative practice, and to what end?

To consider autotheory as feminist practice, we must also consider the politics of access and power around the production of theory and the reinscription of what constitutes acceptable knowledge in spaces of “higher learning.” As we left the room, Allyson Mitchell, a Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at York University and a practicing artist, turned to me and her partner Deirdre Logue and said: “she should have gone to York.” We agree that the willingness to have graduate students working in unconventional modes such as the autotheoretical seems to depend in large part on the particular institution and Department within which one is working; both York University as a university—which is the modernist-brutalist, one-time Marxist haven to University of Toronto’s classicism and old money, at least historically speaking—and Women’s and Gender Studies as a discipline seem somewhat more open to experimental and contemporary approaches to scholarship.

Not a Memoir: Autotheory as Performative Life-Thinking

The mid to late 1990s saw the publication of scholarly anthologies like *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* and *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, edited by Sedonie Smith and Julia Watson in which they trace the development of autobiography studies and criticism since 1980 (*Reading* 193). They use language from the performative turn to describe what they call “autobiographical acts” (63) and look to cross-

medial and post-digital spaces as contexts in which “self-presentation and self-narration” feature widely, including “Autographics. Installations. Performance art. Blogs. StoryCorps. Facebook. MySpace. PostSecret. LiveJournal. YouTube. ‘This I Believe.’ SecondLife. OpenSocial. Web cam documentaries” (167). Yet the notion of “autotheory” is absent from these texts. What are the politics and aesthetics of describing those practices that might have once been contained under generic descriptions like women’s writing and life writing as “autotheory”? Does the invocation of “theory” lead to the work being perceived as more critically legitimate than softer designations? If “theory” is historically coded as male or masculine—especially compared to the feminized genres of life writing and memoir—what is the gendered politics of “autotheory” as an emergent term in feminist spaces?

Many of the texts that I read as autotheoretical have been described—either by critics or by the authors themselves—as “critical memoir,” including *The Argonauts*, Cvetkovich’s *Depression: A Public Feeling*, and Kate Zambreno’s *Heroines*. As a term, critical memoir embodies this conjoining of life writing practices and perhaps a more ‘distanced’ criticality and in this way bears resemblance to autotheory. Guided by Sedgwick’s elucidation of Butler, as well as the work of other queer feminist affect theorists such as that of Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Sianne Ngai, Anna Poletti theorizes life narrative as performative—as enacting or constructing the life through the act of “life writing”—rather than expressive—as describing “a life” that exists prior to the performative act of writing about it. Experimental writers in the late twentieth century mobilize this postmodern approach to the self or “I” in their work, having inherited the post-structural lineage of performativity from Butler who convincingly articulates the mechanisms of performativity that structure the subject in discourse.

Even as terms like “critical memoir” circulate in relation to these texts, those working in an autotheoretical mode often emphasize their desire to differentiate what they are doing from preexisting genres. “*I Love Dick* happened in real life,” Kraus explains in her 2017 article for *The Guardian*, “but it’s not a memoir.” Nelson articulates what she understands to be the distinction between memoir and “autotheory,” a term which she describes as having been “cribbed from 1970s feminists by way of Beatriz Preciado,” the author of *Testo Junkie* (Brushwood and Nelson). Nelson supplants “memoir” with “life-writing,”²⁷ where “life-writing” is distinguished from memoir by virtue of its ontology as a practice—as something active that one does in the present, rather than a genre, where genre is more static and fixed, shaped by preexisting categories and generic expectations. “It couldn’t be called memoir or nonfiction or autobiography,” Sheila Heti says of first reading *I Love Dick*, “but it wasn’t an essay, nor was it fiction. It seemed to be a form I hadn’t encountered before, and a persona I hadn’t encountered before” (McBride). In the book, Kraus describes the genre she’s creating as “Lonely Girl Phenomenology” (McBride), deliberately creating a new term in an effort to distinguish her cross-disciplinary experimental writing practice from past genres and modes.

Taking place in the wake of the aesthetic and discursive transformations brought on by postmodernism and the ways in which postmodernism destabilized singular and stable notions of the writing/speaking/creating “I,” autotheory’s “self” is often performative, iterating itself to new effects; in this way, it is different from the more conventional approaches to the self that we find

²⁷ “CBR: The jacket cover of the book describes it as ‘autotheory.’ How does it describe what you are trying to do in this book better than the idea of ‘memoir’? MN: The word ‘memoir’ has connotations about ‘taking stock of a whole life via the act of memory’ that don’t appeal to me, and don’t seem germane to the different kinds of life-writing that I’ve set forward. So I prefer life-writing, or here, ‘autotheory,’ which is cribbed from 1970s feminists by way of Beatriz Preciado, as it points to the theoretical nature of the autobiographical ruminations at hand. And for all those who say, ‘I didn’t like all the theory, I just wish she’d told us more about *her*,’ I can at least say, you were warned!” (Brushwood and Nelson).

in autobiography and memoir. Citing Smith and Watson, Poletti uses “life narrative” as “a general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media” (Poletti 361); that life writing encompasses “acts of self-presentation” brings to mind the practice of body art and performances for the camera—from Piper’s 1971 *Food for the Spirit* to Audrey Wollen’s 2014 web-based “Sad Girl Theory”—and works of performance theory, such as Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Attention to the ways in which performativity, post-confession, and shifting notions of “the personal” shape contemporary feminist practices better equips us for a consideration of how autotheory functions as a contemporary mode of aesthetics.

Guided by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s elucidation of Judith Butler, as well as the work of other queer feminist affect theorists such as that of Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Sianne Ngai, Anna Poletti theorizes life narrative as performative²⁸—as enacting or constructing the life through the act of “life writing”—rather than expressive—as describing “a life” that exists prior to the performative act of writing about it.²⁹ Experimental writers in the late twentieth century mobilize this postmodern approach to the self or “I” in their work, having inherited the post-structural lineage of performativity from Butler who convincingly articulates the mechanisms of performativity that structure the subject in discourse. In Language poet Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life* (1980) and *My Life in the Nineties* (2013), Hejinian inscribes a performative subjectivity in

²⁸ In “Peripformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages,” Poletti argues that “Current theorizing about life narrative commonly situated the act of presenting a narrative about one’s life as a performative utterance through which having a self and a life, and its value, is produced (Smith and Watson 2010: 16)” (364).

²⁹ Poletti explains that “The performative construction of the subject changes the understanding of the role of the author of life narrative by shifting our understanding of life narration from an act that ‘expresses’ and ‘documents’ a subject and a life to one that creates that self and life through narration (Smith 1998)” (359). This is the same mechanism that Butler uses to describe her theory of gender performativity, wherein one’s gender is produced through “a stylized repetition of acts,” as opposed to something that exists prior to the performance of it.

contemporary poetry as part of her practice of re-materializing language and discourse in experimental ways: both the subjectivity of the writer and the writer's life are performative in the sense that they are constituted as an effect of the text, rather than as something that coherently precedes the text. Hejinian incorporates de-constructed elements of autobiography within the context of a largely anti-confessional Language poetry movement: as American poetry critic Hank Lazer explains, "While the title *My Life* has the ring of fact and contemporary confession about it, it evades and deconstructs such a limited view of autobiography in favour of a life, our life, as emerging from acts of composition, perception, and construction" (29). As we see in the case of Hejinian and a great many others, including poet-artists Caroline Bergvall and Harryette Mullen, the performative impulse that we find throughout twentieth and twenty-first century performance art and body art practices is manifest in contemporary literary practices as well.

Those who write in ways understood as autotheoretical have also described their work in such performative terms. Nelson articulates what she perceives as the difference between memory and "performative writing," where memory is associated with genres of autobiography and memoir while performative writing practices approach memory with more of a sense of instability and play. She emphasizes that she aligns her own practice with the latter:

For a lot of people who write autobiographically, memory becomes the main subject, rather than actions. I don't mean that in a derogatory way. It's just that memory is not very interesting to me as a subject. I'm interested in performative writing, I guess—I like it to have heat, or to feel like you're moving with something. . . It's like, let the writing perform that the memory is false, but I don't need to tell you that in words. (Prickett and Nelson)

Tied in to this distinction between memory and performativity is the distinction between being driven by the psychological—a characteristic of much of the innovations in the early to mid-

twentieth century—and being driven by the aesthetic as a philosophical practice. Nelson claims that “I focus on aesthetic problems as I work, rather than on psychological ones. Because in my experience, if you resolve the aesthetic issues in any given piece, you’ve also worked out the psychological ones” (McCrary and Nelson). The performative function of memoir as explored in recent autotheoretical texts comes to a head with Nelson’s description of herself as being “in drag as a ‘memoirist’” from time to time (*Argonauts* 114).

Narcissism: A Gendered History

The ease with which the label “narcissistic” is deployed to condemn a particular cultural practice relates to its conventional link to a specifically feminine degradation of the self.

- Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*

For Freud, narcissism is associated with the feminine (*Standard* 14:89); to call something narcissistic is to associate it with pathology, passivity, ignorance, and failed development (89). In Freud’s schema, women’s narcissism functions as both “self-contentment and inaccessibility,” an ouroboros-like reflexivity that makes one both self-contained and impenetrable to the outside world. Freud configures narcissism as childlike naïveté, which precludes the narcissist from philosophy and critical thought. Simone de Beauvoir’s reading of the narcissistic woman bears some resemblance to Freud’s: “It has sometimes been asserted that narcissism is the fundamental attitude of all women ... What is true is that circumstances invite woman more than man to turn toward the self and to dedicate her love to herself” (*Second* 756). Consistent with her approach to feminist theory, which focuses on the role of material circumstances in perpetuating women’s

subjugation, de Beauvoir acknowledges that women's propensity toward narcissism is a matter of "circumstances" rather than an inherent characteristic of femininity.³⁰

As narcissists, de Beauvoir argues, women take pleasure in the solitary activity of witnessing themselves reflected back in the mirror: the splitting of the self into subject-object that takes place within the narcissistic mechanism of looking at oneself in a reflective surface provides a false sense of coherence, and "the narcissist refuses to accept she can be seen other than as she shows herself" (770). For the narcissist to see "herself" (her mirror image, inverted) reflected back to her is to see a version of reality in which, she believes, she has control and a sense of understanding and identification. Men do not see themselves in their "immobile image" because they are always already "activity and subjectivity" (757); woman, on the other hand, "knowing she is making herself object, really believes she is seeing *herself* in the mirror: passive and given" (758). The self-portrait or, more recently, the "selfie" is another "instrument of doubling" (759) that women use to enact the splitting into subject-object.

While Freud and de Beauvoir conceive of narcissism as feminine, Irigaray understands it as a fundamentally masculine way of being in the world. Turning to the subordination of the feminine in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Irigaray states that "the feminine is defined as the necessary complement to the operation of male sexuality, and, more often, as a negative image that provides male sexuality with an unfailingly phallic self-representation" (Whitford 119). Here the woman is configured as a photographic negative for the man's positive image, a reading consistent with Freudian psychoanalytic conceptions of women as lack; or, woman is configured

³⁰ According to de Beauvoir, it is women's social, economic, political, and philosophical status that leads women to see themselves as objects more readily than as subjects; Irigaray would take a different view and argue that it is because the very basis of subjectivity and language is masculine.

as the mirror which the male depends upon in order to have a sense of self—he defines himself against her as other. In her later work, Irigaray develops the notion of “self-affection³¹”—which might resonate with the self-care politics of fourth-wave feminism, or what Sarah Sharma refers to as “selfie-care” (14)—as a way of moving away from the masculine ocular-centrism that narcissism is predicated on towards other sensorial experiences like touch.

There remains an unresolved paradox in Freud’s writings on narcissism and women. In Freudian psychoanalytic thought, women are associated with narcissism by virtue of their femininity and simultaneously distanced from the very possibility of being narcissistic due to them not having access to their own subjectivity via discourse in the Lacanian sense. In “An Ex-orbitant Narcissism,” Irigaray observes the passivity and lack that Freud grants to women, arguing that women are not given the freedom to actually be narcissistic in the phallogentric system we operate in; she points to Freud’s theory of penis envy to drive her point home (*Speculum* 68). Irigaray makes clear that, while Freud might claim that narcissism as a feminine perversion, narcissism is in fact phallic in the context of our phallogentric economy of subjectivity and signification (18): it is the male philosopher who is narcissistic, Irigaray states (*This Sex* 151), but this narcissism is not pathologized by Freud so much as upheld as it implicitly undergirds the production of philosophy. I take this up at more length in the opening of Chapter 2, when I discuss Kraus’s evolution from philosopher’s wife to feminist autotheorist

³¹ Irigaray’s theory of auto-affection is in some ways a response to the Mirror Stage in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. In the Mirror Stage, the mirror image provides the baby with a totality: the baby experiences himself as autonomous, as separate from the mother, through the narcissistic sight of himself. But to constitute one’s totality through a mirror image is both an illusion or fantasy and a trap, Lacan and Irigaray note, as the mirror image is only an image—it is not a real totality. What’s more, the image in the mirror is inverted, and it is therefore “a double trap” (Irigaray, “Seminar”). Self-affection, rather than narcissism, is a way of giving oneself totality at the level that is most dependent on touch.

through Irigaray's notion of mimetic transformation, grounding my discussion of autotheory in this thorny history of narcissism, gender, and philosophy.

The feminist politics of narcissism is as much a problematic in the fields of theory and scholarly writing as it is in art histories of conceptualism, performance, and video. In the 1960s art world, co-existent modes of production—video art, performance art, body art, conceptual art, installation, happenings, sound art—intersected with the politics of feminism, gender, race, and sexuality, leading to a feminist art movement that reaches a peak in the 1970s. With body art and conceptualism serving as crossover modes of art-making, women artists could create critically engaged work with their own bodies; whether and to what degree their work was seen as valuable to conceptualism and critical work more generally is an ideological issue that will be considered throughout this dissertation. Under the logics of patriarchal philosophy as historically understood, which includes Descartes' dualism and Aristotle's Chain of Being, women's bodies have historically been configured as irreconcilable with the rational mind. In art history and visual culture, this has led to women lacking agency of their own and existing primarily as “the unspoken objects of representation” (Jones, *Body Art* 157) rather than as active subjects who make art, theorize, and reflect on their own ontology. Jones argues that feminist body art and performance art of the 1960s onward is a condition of possibility for the female artist to be “both body and mind, subverting the Cartesian separation of cogito and corpus that sustains the masculinist myth of male transcendence” (157).

In recent years, performance artist Carolee Schneemann has reflected on her 1960s works, making an argument that sounds remarkably similar to the one Kraus makes in *I Love Dick*: “To deal with actual lived experience—that's a heroic position for a male and a trivial

exposure for a woman,” Schneemann states. “A woman exploring lived experience occupies an area that men want to denigrate as domestic, to encapsulate as erotic, arousing, or supporting their own position” (*Imaging* 32). This problem of the gendered politics of who has access to incorporate lived experience into their work in conceptual, critical, and aesthetic ways is visible in the context of both 1960s-70s feminist art-making and continues through to the autotheoretical practices of the 1990s-2010s. In the chapter “The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art,” Jones defends artist Hannah Wilke’s work against the critiques of narcissistic self-indulgence she has received from both the patriarchal art world and from other feminist artists (*Body Art* 151). As Jones argues, both audiences tend to read Wilke’s body—conventionally attractive and figuratively wounded—as being complicit with patriarchy rather than being subversive in a feminist way; Jones provides a convincing reading of Wilke’s work as subverting the tenets of high modernism and Kantian aesthetics, and I extend this problematic to Piper’s engagement with Kant in Chapter 1.

Certain media, like performance for video, are particularly well-suited to the autotheoretical mode due to their being enmeshed in aesthetic issues related to self-imaging and the history of conceptual art. In “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” feminist art historian Rosalind Krauss argues that the medium of video art is not a particular material or technology, but is in fact the psychic mechanism of narcissism itself: Krauss explains how her essay “attempts to tie the essence of video to the specular nature of mirrors” (Krauss, “Video” xiii).

Narcissism and “the specular nature of mirrors” (xiii) haunt works of performance and body art³²

³² Jones distinguishes body art from performance art: the latter is necessarily performed live before an audience (even if that is an audience of one), while the former can take place either live or in an artist’s studio in front of a video camera, for example, with no live audience at the time of recording (*Body Art* 13). The shared criteria of both is that both performance art and body art takes place “through an enactment of the artist’s body” (13), yet we see the ways in which the camera and therefore the screen inform the history of body art in general.

more generally, and I take this up in Chapter 1 when I read Piper's *Food*. Like Jones, Kraus repeatedly turns to Wilke as exemplary of a feminist artist who used her body in her own work in ways that were perceived as too transgressive—unintelligible in its supposedly uncritical narcissism—by both male critics and feminists.³³ Kraus proclaims, "Hannah Wilke is a model for everything that I hope to do" (*Dick* 172), positioning her autotheoretical practice in *I Love Dick* as an extension of the theoretically-informed work begun by feminist body artists and conceptual artists before her.

From Philosophy to Theory

Fredric Jameson locates the discursive shift from "philosophy" to "theory" in the 1960s, explaining how "theory" displaces "philosophy" with the onset of postmodernism. Tracing the waning of philosophy and the waxing of theory over the course of the twentieth century, Jameson moves from Sartrean existentialism as the peak of high modernism and the last notable example of "philosophy,"³⁴ to structuralism and poststructuralism, highlighting the influence of such factors as the linguistic turn, Barthes's "The Death of the Author,"³⁵ and the emergent small "p" politics of the personal in this evolution. As the shift from philosophy to theory takes place, theory emerges as what Jameson calls "metaphilosophy," or "the transformation of philosophy

³³ Kraus notes how Wilke received hostile reception from both the patriarchal art establishment and from other feminists. Kraus's praise of Wilke's self-reflexive feminist body art practice resembles that of Jones, who argues for an understanding of aesthetics that upholds so-called "narcissism" as part of a critically rigorous feminist art practice.

³⁴ "The crisis of the philosophical institution and the gradual extinction of the philosopher's classic political vocation, of which Sartre was for our time the supreme embodiment, can in some ways be said to be about the so-called death of the subject: the individual ego or personality, but also the supreme philosophical Subject, the cogito but also the *auteur* of the great philosophical *system*" (Jameson, "Periodizing" 187).

³⁵ Barthes's "The Death of the Author" shifts the emphasis away from the author as originator of a text's meaning to the reader, where the reader becomes a kind of author in a text (6). Barthes' essay paves the way for other post-structuralist approaches to reading texts, from Best and Marcus's "Surface Reading" to Sedgwick's "Reparative Reading" as counters to the hegemonic "depth-models" and "paranoid reading" in literary studies.

into a material practice” (“Periodizing” 193). For Jameson, Sartrean existentialism in the 1940s-1950s marks the climax of philosophy before the dawn of postmodern theory; others like Arkady Plotnitsky point to earlier shifts, such as that prompted by Nietzsche, as having lead to “the death of philosophy, at least as hitherto understood” (250). Interestingly for a historicization of feminist theory, Plotnitsky credits de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* as marking “the first sign of the second death of philosophy,” after Nietzsche (250).

The shift from philosophy to theory brings along with it a shift in the ontology of the speaking, writing, performing, or theorizing “I.” In contrast to the monadic subject of modernism who can organize the world around himself using methods like stream-of-consciousness, the postmodern subject is a fragmented, decentered subject—a simulacrum of subjectivity—who can only engage in “the imitation of dead styles” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 18). As Jameson explains, the postmodern subject does this through pastiche, as the writer can no longer assume access to a supposedly unmediated stream-of-consciousness technique that the modernists had access to. Defining theory as a fundamentally postmodern form, Jameson conceives of theory as fundamentally intertextual, citational, and appropriative in contrast to philosophy, which generates monolithic and authoritative “truths” (“Periodizing” 194). The postmodern or “schizophrenic³⁶” subject no longer controls the signification of what he says; postmodern cultural production, in Jameson’s view, is composed of “‘heaps of fragments’” (*Postmodernism* 25), or what Barthes refers to as a “tissue of citations” (“Death” 4). The crisis of philosophy,

³⁶ Jameson discusses Lacan’s schizophrenia as an aesthetic model for postmodernism, where schizophrenia denotes a breakdown in the signifying chain: “Language poetry (or the New Sentence) seem to have adopted schizophrenic fragmentation as their fundamental aesthetic . . . What I have been calling schizophrenia disjunction or *écriture*, when it becomes generalized as a cultural style, ceases to entertain a necessary relationship to the morbid content we associate with terms like schizophrenia and becomes available for more joyous intensities, for precisely that euphoria which we saw displacing the older (modernist) affects of anxiety and alienation” (*Postmodernism* 38-39).

then, is spurred by this “so-called death of the subject,” which Jameson describes as “the individual ego or personality, but also the supreme philosophical subject, the cogito but also the *auteur* of the great philosophical *system*” (“Periodizing” 187): in Jameson’s rather cynical conception of postmodernism, “the subject” is displaced by “ideology” and the discipline of philosophy is displaced by “praxis and terror” (188).

In the West, contemporary theory tends to be associated with the three dominant lineages of “Marxism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism,” as well as with the post-structuralist work of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Althusser, and Baudrillard (Macey 379).³⁷ There are historical antecedents to autotheory in canonical philosophical and theoretical texts; works by Nietzsche, Freud, Derrida, Fanon, Barthes, and Deleuze bear traces of an autotheoretical impulse. In *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (1982), Derrida acknowledges how Freud and Nietzsche are exceptions to what seems to be the rule in philosophy that one must maintain a separation between the self (auto) and the work (philosophy, theory). Derrida deconstructs philosophy’s supposed preclusion of the “I” through a reading of Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (1888), a text that integrates autobiography and philosophy through what Derrida calls “auto-engendering” (Derrida, *Ear* 43). In like manner, Derrida considers the role “autoanalysis” plays in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, considering the place of Freud’s family in his work and the ways in which works like *The Interpretation of Dreams* are autobiographical (61). As a practice, autotheory is aligned with the post-structuralist move of critiquing universalizing claims of Enlightenment-based forms of knowledge, such as claims of objectivity and abstraction from the particular. Nietzsche incorporates his own “I” and

³⁷ Of course, there is also a feminist canon of theory that I discuss as I take up contemporary autotheoretical texts.

his lived experiences³⁸ into his philosophy in ways that transgress what had heretofore been understood as properly philosophical (6). Derrida acknowledges that such blurring of the self and philosophy could have precluded Nietzsche from being recognized as a philosopher, scholar, or scientist in his time (7), which might in part be why it remains latent in Nietzsche's work.

Reading *Ecce Homo*, Derrida maintains that "The utterances I have just read or translated do not belong to the genre of autobiography in the strict sense of the term. To be sure, it is not wrong to say that Nietzsche speaks of his 'real' father and mother. But he speaks of them 'in Ratselform,' symbolically, by way of a riddle; in other words, in the form of a proverbial legend, and as a story that has a lot to teach" (16). Derrida's description brings to mind Audre Lorde's practice of "biomythography," seen most clearly in her 1982 genre-bending text *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Described as a performative work of "collaged self-construction" (Alexander 696), Lorde's *Zami* transmutes the autobiographical into the mythological, borrowing from different genres "according to how well they help tell the story of a particular African-American woman's life" (696). In this way, Lorde engages a postmodern practice to make the materials of her life into a kind of myth, reframing it so that it might be received in a fresh, perhaps distanced (from the seemingly uncritical "memoir" genre) way; the method of "biomythography"—a particular form of fictionalization—has a performative impulse that makes it different from genres like autobiography, memoir, or confessional writing.

Derrida reads Nietzsche's incorporation of the "I" through notions of performativity (*Ear* 7), while Claude Lévesque describes Derrida's incorporation of the self in theory as similarly

³⁸ "Nietzsche appeals to his 'experience' and his 'wanderings in forbidden realms'. They have taught him to consider the causes of idealization and moralization in an entirely different light. He has seen the dawning of a 'hidden history' of philosophers—he does not say of philosophy—and the 'psychology of their great names'" (Derrida, *Ear* 10).

performative (Lévesque 71). In *The Ear*, frameworks of performance and theatricality supplant discourses of confession in a manner similar to my consideration of autotheory as contemporary feminist practice; Derrida describes Nietzsche's performance of multiple selves within his philosophical writings, for example, through the metaphor of "masks" (*Ear* 7). Lévesque emphasizes how, in Derrida's writing, "we must always consider the possibility that a confession may be a quotation, a pose, a feint, or a parody" (71). Similar to Lorde's biomythography, the autobiographical is rendered anew through the distancing mechanisms of citation, fictionalization, performativity, and play, charging the autotheoretical text with conceptual meaning (in addition to the perhaps more straightforward knowledges of memoir, such as "facts" about the writer's life). Echoing once more the performative impulse found in postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, Derrida emphasizes that while the autobiographical is very much present in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, "We would again be mistaken if we understood it as a simple presentation of identity, assuming that we already know what is involved in self-presentation and a statement of identity" (*Ear* 10). Derrida is careful not to disregard the more straightforward presentations of the self, even as he acknowledges the different charge that the autobiographical takes on when contextualized within the philosophical or when rendered performatively.

As I will discuss at more length in Chapter 3, in autotheory the relationship between the "self" (auto) and the "other" is as important to the politics, aesthetics, and ethics of autotheory as the constitution of "the self" is. Derrida's reading of *Ecce Homo* provides insight into how the "auto" and the "other" are mutually constitutive: he concludes that "it is the ear of the other that signs. The ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the *autos*..." (*Ear* 51). Through a conceit that brings "autobiography" into discursive relation with "otobiography," Derrida reveals

the role that the “other” plays in the constitution of the self. Interestingly for my discussion of contemporary feminist autotheory, where autotheoretical texts such as Kraus’s *I Love Dick* engage Irigarayan mimesis as a performative and subversive strategy, Derrida perceives “a performative discourse with a mimetic structure” in Freud’s philosophical practice of “auto-hetero-bio-thanatography” (61), underlining the antecedents of a performative, autotheoretical impulse in the history of Western philosophy.

While Derrida acknowledges the presence of the autobiographical in the philosophy of Nietzsche and Freud, Irigaray is quick to point out how her “auto” or self is nowhere to be found in Western philosophy—at least not before the 1960s—because she is a woman and the “auto” of Western philosophy is that of a European man (Irigaray, “Seminar”). Writing in France in the early 1970s, Irigaray’s contributions to Continental philosophy and French theory function as a feminist counterpoint to Derrida’s theses, revealing the need to acknowledge the role that “sexuate difference” (Irigaray, “Seminar”), or what we commonly refer to now as gender, plays in the relationship between philosophy or theory and the presence of the autobiographical self. Irigaray describes the impulse that drove her to write her 1974 work *Speculum of the Other Woman* in an autotheoretical way: “I wrote *Speculum* because I was a woman and the Western story of philosophy did not correspond to my autobiography or lived experience. Obviously myself-as-woman has been woven into the fabric of *Speculum*” (Irigaray, “Seminar”). Until then, Irigaray argues, her self was precluded from accessing philosophy as a woman and as a philosopher; she could enter it if she were to shroud her own “sexuate identity” or, at least discursively, become like a man (Irigaray, *This Sex* 76). I take this up at more length in Chapter 2, when I discuss the mechanism of Irigarayan mimesis in relation to *I Love Dick*.

When theorizing the relationship between the philosopher's life and their work, there is another layer of gender politics which autotheory as a feminist practice is well-positioned to respond to. To what extent should Althusser's lived action of murdering his wife shape how we receive his theory on ideology and praxis? If autotheory is an ethical imperative, how does this shift our thinking about the relation between a theorist's life and their lived practice as a human being living among other human and non-human beings? Miller poses a similar question when she turns to the case of literary theorist Paul de Man, whose writings upheld the imperative of remaining impersonal in theoretical writings and maintaining a firm divide between one's life and one's work, and whose reputation later suffered when there was reason to believe De Man was a Nazi sympathizer (*Personal* 20). Recalling the arguments of feminist theorists like Irigaray, Miller states:

It seems to me that the efflorescence of personal criticism in the United States in the eighties—like the study of autobiography—has in part to do with the gradual, and perhaps inevitable waning of enthusiasm for a mode of Theory, whose authority—however variously—depended finally on the theoretical evacuation of the very social subjects producing it (the upset and uproar surrounding the revelations about Paul de Man's biography figure, I think, both the limits and the costs of this fiction. (20)

Nietzsche is another figure whose reputation as a philosopher suffered in part due to his rumoured associations with Nazism and fascism, an association that resulted largely from his posthumously published *The Will to Power* (1902), edited and disseminated by his sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Derrida deconstructs this association at length, considering how “the discourse bearing his (Nietzsche's) name” has wrongfully “served as a legitimizing reference for ideologues” (*Ear* 30-31). Acknowledging as both a feminist and a Heideggerian, philosopher Avital Ronell takes issue with Acker's refusal to engage with Heidegger's work

based on his presumed association with Nazism, taking a different approach to understanding the politics of theory and describing this rift between herself and Acker as their irreconcilable “differend” (“Hell” 17).

Where is the line dividing the work and the life, and how is this line complicated in a post-1960s context that follows the revolution of everyday life and the integration of life and art across trans-medial feminist art practices? This is one of the questions that artists working in an autotheoretical mode engage, where a proposition at the heart of “autotheory” seems to be that the lives and lived decisions of the theorist matters to the work. In their practices, writers like Nelson and Rankine exemplify how the theorist can engage the material of their lives—however complicated or contentious—and self-reflexively produce theoretically resonant work from the particularities and problematics of their lived experience. This autotheoretical gesture can be seen as a move toward greater transparency and accountability when it comes to theory and the interrelatedness of ethics, politics, and aesthetics, even as disclosures about one’s life and self might be performative or pseudo-fictionalized. In some cases, an autotheoretical feminist practice involves disclosure of details about one’s self; in other cases, it involves disclosure of details about others. One question that emerges is how far this move of integrating one’s life and one’s work should extend, and what the stakes are when it comes to issues of disclosure, truth, and legality. Disclosures about sexual misconduct, harassment, and assault by fourth-wave feminists and others online often leads to the reputation and work of the person in question being comprised, an issue that continues to be divisive—even within feminism.³⁹ The feminist outing

³⁹ In the recent case of the CanLit controversy at the University of British Columbia, which center on allegations against UBC Professor of Creative Writing Steven Galloway, the tensions between Margaret Atwood and younger feminist writers and scholars reveal what looks to be a generational divide within feminism (Tremonti).

of the bad behaviour of men (and others, including women in some cases) who possess cultural capital and influence in spaces of art, literature, and theory as a kind of vigilante move is found in some autotheoretical texts, which I take up at length in relation to Kraus's work in Chapter 2.

Post-Theory

The shifts toward the contingent, the local, the contextual, the personal, and the political in practices of theorizing seems also to describe the very character of feminist theory historically, especially as it came to be institutionalized in Women's Studies departments in the 1980s through the 1990s. "By the '90s," Di Leo explains, "cultural studies had broadened to include postcolonial, queer, and media studies, while theory was showing only the faintest signs of development" (175). Where does autotheory fit in relation to Jameson's conceptualization of the move from philosophy to theory in the 1960s, or in Di Leo's conceptualization of a binary dividing "theory" from "cultural studies" and the latter's fixation on so-called "identity politics" in the 1990s? Jameson's hybridization of philosophy and theory into a "philosophico-theoretical" ("Symptoms" 405-6) system provides a way to understand autotheory as existing in the liminal space between the postmodern and metamodern.⁴⁰ Jameson's description of the problem of the universal and the particular as not so much a problem to be solved or a dialectic to be synthesized as it is a theoretical system that has transformed the realm of the political in theory is relevant in a discussion of autotheory as a contemporary, cross-medial mode of practice. As a

⁴⁰ Autotheoretical texts like *I Love Dick* and *The Argonauts* are postmodern: fundamentally intertextual, often performative in their citationality, these texts are self-aware of their status as coming *after* "the death of the author." Yet these texts also often involve a writer who precedes the text, albeit one whose singularity and origins is unstable. The self or "I" of autotheory is one shaped both by the fragmentation, decentering, and self-reflexivity of postmodernism and a kind of "New Sincerity" of the metamodern.

feminist practice, autotheory re-animates “subject-centred inquiry⁴¹” in a way that engages the “master discourse” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 149) of theory—contemporary theory via Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, 1970s post-structuralism, and what Di Leo calls “high theory” (which supposedly disclaims subjectivity)—and that positions subject-centred and politicized feminist work as theory.

Given this contemporary climate in which terms like “post-theory,” “anti-theory” and “the death of theory” circulate with a certain ease, I consider the ways in which autotheory as feminist practice offers up different ways of approaching the work of theorizing or producing theory, whether it is through trans-medial studio art practices, art writing and criticism, sound, curation, comedy, social media, poetry and poetics, and other modes of writing and art. I contextualize autotheory in light of the recent discourses of “posttheory” which, like the alleged deaths of the avant-garde, of the author, and of transgression, are fraught with unchecked baggage relating to gender, race, and other intersectional feminist issues relating to inclusion. As we see with Di Leo’s comments above, feminism, postcolonial and critical race, and queer “studies” has been, and in some fields continues to be, seen as something different from the more intellectually elevated “theory,” especially when it engages with the personal in ways that have been reduced to so-called identity politics. Put another way, feminist and critical race theory is considered “low theory,” with its crude engagement with the gendered, racialized, affective, sexual self and its association with cultural studies (Di Leo 175). Di Leo describes a shift that takes place in theory during the 1980s, when “theory came to encompass a widening field of

⁴¹ In “Conceptual Art and Feminism,” Jayne Wark notes how feminist conceptual artists resisted male conceptualism’s precluding of “subject-centred inquiry” (42).

perspectives”⁴²; during this time, Di Leo explains, the “low theory” of the 1980s like feminist theory (Di Leo does not name it as such, but it is implied in his description) starts to supplant the “high theory” of the 1970s (175). This de facto association of feminism, critical race, and queer theory with “low theory” is problematized and performatively reclaimed by queer theorist Jack Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure*: “Low theory might constitute the name for a counter-hegemonic form of theorizing, the theorization of alternatives within an undisciplined zone of knowledge production” (18). The positioning of feminist theory in opposition to the “high theory” of 1970s post-structuralism sets the stage to better understand the problematics relating to gender, theory, and discourse that Kraus engages in *I Love Dick*.

Incorporating different theoretical turns, including post-structuralism, the affective turn, the queer turn, and the performative turn, autotheory presents the question of whether it constitutes a theoretical turn itself. Writing in 1991, Nancy K. Miller considered the possibility that “personal criticism”—a mode of feminist scholarship that bridges the personal and the political—had already become an academic trend (3). At the time of my writing, autotheory is gaining traction, especially among young feminist artists and writers who work between academia and the contemporary art world, or who otherwise move between the realm of theory and artistic, literary, or curatorial practice. The history of feminist theory and practice has been one that encourages an exploration of the personal and the embodied alongside the critical and the theoretical in ways that are explicit; autotheoretical texts extend this, explicating the

⁴² As Di Leo states: “Race, class, and gender studies began to eclipse the more formalist theories of the *literary* which dominated the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. Structuralism and deconstruction were becoming *traditional* and even *reactionary* in comparison to the progressive, emerging discourses of cultural studies. . . emphasis was being placed by theorists on the personal, social and political dimensions of interpretation. . . The *high* theory of the ‘70s which was coming to acquire a timeless, ahistorical, permanence in the ‘80s through its codification in *method* was giving way to the *low theory* of cultural studies which re-emphasized the contingent, local, historical, and contextual character of all cultural artifacts” (175).

relationships between theory and the subjective, embodied, self. With autotheory, the “master discourse” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 149) of theory as ““power through knowledge”” (Jameson, “Periodizing” 192) is processed and iterated to feminist, queer, de-colonial, and other ends.

Autotheory as Counter-Practice

Describing her conceptual approach in writing *Fast Feminism*, Bell states that “The underlying contention is that feminism needs to be infused from non-obvious philosophical locations” (*Fast* 12). She goes on to explain that, “The most non-obvious site is the work of Paul Virilio, the hypermasculinist philosopher and technologist of speed” (12). For Bell, the most efficacious way to engage a practice of feminist theorizing is to start “from non-obvious philosophical locations” (12) which are, in her view, the “hypermasculinist” one that Virilio represents. Positioning her own performing body—which engages in sexual activity with queer partners and joyfully ejaculates for the camera—next to Virilio’s speed theory, Bell introduces an autotheoretical practice, something which she terms “Fast Feminism.” She inscribes this new mode of theorizing both in the form of a written theoretical text (which was first set to be published through the University of Toronto Press and, after being seen as too radical, was taken up by Autonomedia) and by literally branding it into the skin of her arm as “FF”—which she photographed for images included in the book.

Historically, theory and philosophy have been associated with the masculine, the abstract, the conceptual, the cognitive, and the intellectual. Subjugated peoples must position themselves against or in counter to their subjugators, at least at first, and arguably feminists working autotheoretically continue to position themselves against male-centric lineages of philosophy,

theory, literature, and art. In Bell's view, the unexpected juxtaposition she performs in *Fast Feminism* is something that her feminist mode of theory and practice will critically, conceptually, aesthetically, and politically benefit from—as something that feminist theory and experimentation in a sense requires. In *I Love Dick*, Kraus infuses feminism from similarly “non-obvious philosophical locations” (Bell, *Fast* 12) of male-authored philosophy, just as Piper infuses feminism from a the “non-obvious philosophical locations” of Kant's first *Critique*. On the one hand, these are the contextually relevant bodies of theory that, as good contemporary artists and theorists, they are accordingly responsive to: meaning is context-bound, after all. On the other hand, these might at first seem like strange coalitions but are, upon reflection, understood to be meaningful allegiances and deliberate conversations that the autotheorist stages.

As a feminist practice, autotheory uses strategies like mimesis, performativity, irony, satire, iteration, self-imaging, embodiment, repetition and ritual to engage with predominantly male-authored theory in the tradition of Continental philosophy and enact new forms and practices of theorizing. In the 1960s-70s American art world, it is Kant—whose aesthetics holds a hegemonic place due to the influence of formalist art critic Clement Greenberg—that Piper must come to terms with. In the 1990s American art, literary, and theory scene, it is the work of post-1970s French post-structuralists such as Deleuze and Guattari—and those whom they are influenced by, including Bataille—that Kraus confronts. In the 2010s, with its ever-evolving queer theory scene, it is the dual lineages of queer theory that Sedgwick and Barthes represent, that Nelson takes up through a performatively citational practice. The feminist autotheorists engage with thinkers whose theory holds a particularly influential place in the contexts they are

working, to generate works attuned to—and perhaps diverging from—these primary source texts and their discursive, material, and social contexts.

Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock describes feminism as a trauma “because it emerges repeatedly as a contestation of the entire symbolic and imaginary orders of meaning and subjectivity” (“Trauma” 27). Indeed, feminist theory and practice is defined by its “critical-political” stance (28) and its orientation as “a contestation of the entire symbolic and imaginary orders of meaning and subjectivity (27). What I propose over the course of my readings is that autotheory as a feminist practice presents different ways of processing, wrestling with, making use of, and transforming terms, frameworks, and discourses of male-authored theory in ways that are embodied, rigorous, affective, and ambivalent.⁴³ As I theorize autotheory, I consider the tension between critique and a more affirmative resentment, holding space for both as I read.

Constellating Autotheory as Feminist Practice

As mentioned, the history of feminism in the west is one that could be described as auto-theoretical, and this term “autotheory,” while garnering a great deal of scholarly interest at present, is the latest name for movements, texts, and trends that are part of a much longer genealogy. With practices ranging from performance art, video art, and conceptualism to “intersectional feminist memes” (@gothshakira) and novels that read as performative memoirs with footnotes, autotheory presents across different modes of feminist cultural production today.

⁴³ When I say that autotheory is a feminist mode, this is not to say that it is necessarily concerned with women so much as that it is concerned about the often unevaluated gendered implications of theory and philosophy and that it approaches gender in critical ways.

Autotheory, auto-fiction, theoretical fiction, ficto-criticism, critical memoir, queer phenomenology, queer affect theory, and performance philosophy are all terms that have been used to describe the kinds of works that I am describing as autotheoretical. These are works that engage in modes of producing theory and/or criticism that are engaged in the autobiographical, the fictional, and the performative to varying degrees and effects. Often in autotheory, particularly in works of autotheory written at the end of the twentieth through to the twenty-first century, one's lived, embodied, subjective, relational experiences in the world become the grounds for developing a theory. The theory is then "tested," as it were, against other writers' and artists' experiences that resemble it, a practice which I'm describing as intertextual identification. We see this in work by Kraus, Preciado, Nelson, Bellamy, Masha Tupitsyn, Walter Scott, Hilton Als, where other texts—from the history of art, literature, theory, and film, as well as popular culture—are cited alongside the writer's or artist's own life-text, to advance a theory resonant with particular feminist concerns: be they aesthetic, political, moral, epistemological, ontological, and so on. In autotheory, not only is the self performed and/or performative, but that self and life become material through which to unpack theoretical questions, form theories, and test those theories against different kinds of evidencing, whether that be personal or anecdotal, political or social, art historical, pop cultural, and so on.

Autotheory, like theory more broadly, often makes use of illustrative examples or anecdotes to concretize an abstract idea or to work through a philosophical concept: take, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre and the ways in which he sets out situations like waiting for the bus to illustrate ideas of existential philosophy in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). What stands out about certain autotheory texts is the use of examples that are explicitly or transparently from

one's life—or the lives of those one identifies with—in a way that foregrounds the self alongside theory. This practice can be found to some extent in the history of philosophy and theory more broadly—in Freud, for example, or in Barthes—though it takes on a self-reflexively autotheoretical charge in these contemporary feminist practices.

In the following section, I distinguish between different groups of autotheoretical feminist texts in order to trace a chronology of autotheory as a conceptual, performative, cross-disciplinary practice and to describe different clusters of texts according to similarities in context, media, aesthetic movement, or theoretical turn. These categories are not absolute, and many of the texts can be read across different groups. My division of the texts into these groups is a provisional move to provide a sense of the scope of autotheory across different spheres of contemporary feminist practice, more than it is an attempt to silo these texts off from each other. In some works, there is a rigorous engagement with existing discourses of theory; in other works, theory is invoked more superficially, to buttress a poetics of autobiography or self-imaging. The question of what autotheory performs for theory and feminist practice is one I return to.

1700-1950s: Feminism and Confessionalism

In a sense, autotheory is a characteristic of Western feminism from its earliest moments in history, with works like Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) bringing the personal, the philosophical, and the political together to form a work of political theory. The nineteenth through to the early twentieth century is ripe with examples of literary and philosophical precursors to autotheory as a feminist practice, as feminist writers found the most pressing concerns to write about in their own lived experiences. In 1892, Charlotte Perkins

Gilman wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a short story inspired by the writer’s personal experience of so-called madness; Gilman disclosed the autobiographical nature of the story in her 1913 “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper.” Another thinly veiled autobiography of a woman’s experience of madness under patriarchy is Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* which, like Gilman’s story, is welcomed in feminist literary canons. Relatedly, the presence of diaristic and epistolary practices in literary and art contexts has been evidenced from the dawn of the novel in the eighteenth century to recent publications of artists’ diaries.⁴⁴ My discussion of post-1960s autotheoretical texts as “post-confessional” is predicated on them deviating from the confessional poetry movement of the 1950s, in which poets like Sexton and Plath explicate their lived experiences in lyric. Alongside the Confessional movement as a condition of possibility for autotheoretical practices, diaristic and epistolary writing has been part of literary practices—sometimes fictionalized, often feminine—since at least as early as the eighteenth century.

1960s-1980s: Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism

Phenomenology, which emerges from a Kantian philosophical tradition, is a condition of possibility that foregrounds autotheory across feminist practices, whether it is the high modernist existential phenomenology of de Beauvoir, the phenomenological modes of feminist body art, or the psychoanalytic phenomenology of feminist film scholars working in the 1980s. Works by artists like Piper, Fraser, Wilke, Sprinkle, Schneemann, Shigeko Kubota, Ana Mendieta, Martha Rosler, Penny Arcade, Karen Finley, Joan Jonas, Lisa Steele, Sophie Calle, Vaginal Davis, Coco

⁴⁴ For example, with the 2016 publication of Eva Hesse’s *Diaries*, the collected diaries and journals of German-American artist Hesse, contemporary readers are encouraged to read Hesse’s self-reflections in light of the lasting contributions her pioneering post-minimalist practice in the 1960s American art world have had on contemporary art, sculpture, feminism, and abstraction, as well as “personal” themes similar to those taken up by Hesse’s contemporaries, like Plath.

Fusco, and Mona Hatoum—many of whom sustain active practices today—contribute to a rich history of feminist cross-medial contemporary art attuned to autotheory as an embodied, conceptual stance. As Jones argues with regards to the deconstruction of binaries such as mind and body, these artists instantiated the terms of post-structuralism and other theory through feminist frameworks and the artist's body.

In the 1960s-70s, some feminists working in a French tradition sought to inscribe the particularities of the female body and female subjectivity in text as an alternative language positioned in opposition to phallogentric discourse. Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) and Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973) engaged *écriture féminine* as a new practice of writing that sought distance from masculinist logic and signification through writing the female body. In the following decade, Brossard's *The Aerial Letter* (1988) functions as an *arrière-garde* work of the French feminist tradition, as Brossard uses feminist theory and formal experimentation to wrestle with the question of how one might inscribe the experience of women—in her case, of lesbian women—in text. In works like *The Aerial Letter* Brossard begins with literary criticism and the particular relationship and critical distance that she has, as an avant-garde lesbian feminist writing in the context of French Canada, to the second-wave French feminist experimentations of *écriture féminine*, to theorize questions related to gender, writing, subjectivity, and the body.

Post-structuralism's influence on contemporary theory contributes to the deracination of the "I" and a deconstructed understanding of subjectivity as something that is constituted in complex ways through different linguistic discourses and material practices. In the late 1970s, amidst this post-structuralist turn, a postmodern sensibility comes to the fore in literature and theory, with literary, performance, and sound-based work by Acker leading the way for a post-

punk feminist sentiment of appropriation and cross-genre play. Acker's work is shaped as much by the avant-garde movements of the past as the emergent feminist theories of the 1980s through the early 1990s, such as those of Butler, Haraway, Lorde, and Anzaldúa, whose writings mark consequential shifts in cultural understandings of the category of "woman." In 1978, drawing on William S. Burroughs's and Brion Gysin's cut-up method and the explicitly sexualized themes in feminist performance art, Acker writes *Blood and Guts in High School*, a theoretically-charged and perhaps allegorically autobiographical novel that violently inscribes a fragmented female subjectivity while appropriating patriarchal source texts in destabilizing ways.⁴⁵ Acker's writing, sound, and performance practice is in dynamic conversation with other feminist performance and body artists and writers working in post-porn, sex-radical, and queer feminist modes, including Sprinkle, Bell, Finley, Davis, and Virginie Despentes; Acker's work would go on to influence the next generation of feminist writers, including Tea, Bellamy, and Kraus, who would in turn respond to Acker's life and work in their own autotheoretical work.

The role of Acker's work in the development of autotheory as a performative and conceptual feminist writing practice that weaves together a vast variety of intertexts, genres, and artistic modes is gestured toward by Kraus and Michael Bracewell; Bracewell argues that until Acker, "There had not been a writer, a contemporary writer living in our midst, who united the world of pop culture and music and post-punk to the world of literature, let alone the world of critical theory" (Kraus, *Acker* 218-19). Concluding *After Kathy Acker* (2017), a work which makes even thornier the feminist politics of disclosure in Kraus's work that I discuss in Chapter

⁴⁵ Reading through Kraus's *After Kathy Acker* provides insight into how strategies Kraus employs in her work draw heavily from those of Acker. On Acker's feminist mimesis, for example, Kraus explains how *Empire of the Senseless* appropriates William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (*Acker* 225).

2, Kraus states, “Incredibly, critics of all kinds have embraced discursive first-person fiction in the last years as if it were a new, post-internet genre. These contemporary texts owe a great debt to the candor and inventiveness of Acker’s work and the work of her peers and progenitors” (*Acker* 279). Kraus might be referring to autotheory here, though she does not mention this term; auto-fiction continues to be used in lieu of autotheory, with writers of auto-fiction like Heti being placed alongside writers of what might more accurately be described as autotheory, like Nelson.⁴⁶

New Narrative, Auto-Fiction, and the Post-Confessional

In the early 1990s, Acker’s experimental writing practice finds company in the auto-fictional, performance-based work published through Native Agents, a Semiotext(e) sub-press that Kraus founded while married to Semiotext(e) founder Lotringer. Native Agents became a home for women writers like Fanny Howe, Ann Rower, Cookie Mueller, Lynne Tillman, Jane DyLynn, Myles, and Tea. In *If You’re a Girl*, Rower writes in a mode she terms “transfiction,” or the transcribing of real-life dialogue in fictionalized contexts (Rower 1). The texts in Native Agents share a post-confessional,⁴⁷ trans-medial, third-wave feminist ethos and converge around shared themes, including sex work and pornography, madness and mental illness, sexual violence and transgression, performance art and music, and post-punk subcultures—all written from female-identified perspectives. Under Kraus’s direction, Native Agents positioned itself as a

⁴⁶ For an event at the AGO in November 2017, *Canadian Art* organizers chose Sheila Heti to be Maggie Nelson’s conversant, since both writers are described as working across the genres of fiction and nonfiction and as writing in an “autofictional” mode (*Canadian Art*, “Encounters”).

⁴⁷ In *You Must Make Your Death Public* (2015), the first book-length analysis of Chris Kraus’s work, the rhetoric of “confession” is disavowed in exchange for “candour” (Meunier 75) and “disclosure” (Morris 113) as new ways of approaching Kraus’s mode of writing through the first person and the autobiographical in her work.

space for an experimental feminist counterculture within the context of Semiotext(e)'s radical theory; while it made space for working-class and lesbian women exploring transgressive themes around sexuality and identity, it remained predominantly white, a matter which has been remedied in recent Semiotext(e) projects which publish more works by women of colour, including artist-writers Jackie Wang and Veronica Gonzalez Peña.

There is a dynamic interplay between the writing published through Native Agents and the literary movement known as New Narrative, which began in San Francisco in 1977. New Narrative has been used to describe the works of writers like Acker, Tillman, Carla Harryman, Gabrielle Daniels, Gail Scott, Camille Roy, Laurie Weeks, Gary Indiana, and Bob Flanagan, amongst others (Killian and Bellamy i). A mode of writing that traversed genres, New Narrative was influenced by avant-garde developments in poetry, including the burgeoning Language poetry of the mid-1970s which engaged the materiality and politics of language in self-reflexive ways and was, as Bellamy and Killian note, in continual conversation with theory: to poets working at the time, Language poetry was seen as “poetry conversant with Continental theory, and that was scary, repellant even, to the ideologies that had dominated the poetry world” (viii). In this way, New Narrative and related practices of poetry in the mid to late twentieth century can be seen as conditions of possibility for autotheory as a mode of feminist practice, with some autotheoretical antecedents found throughout New Narrative, auto-fiction, and related modes of experimentation in writing. In their recent historicization of New Narrative, Bellamy and her husband Kevin Killian, both of whose writing is included in the New Narrative canon, posit that the publication of Kraus's *I Love Dick* in 1997 marks the end of the New Narrative movement and the beginning of something else (505).

New Poetic Practices: Poetry, Lyric, Performance, Sound

Just as autotheory is shaped by histories of performance, body art, and conceptual art practices, it is also shaped by the histories of avant-garde literature and experimental poetry movements, including that of the New York School, the St. Mark's scene, and the Language poetry or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement. In each of these, poets began to engage with the writing self and everyday life as materials to work with rather than as a straightforward site of confession or authentic disclosure. Across these movements, poets engage with the "I" in experimental ways; we also find engagements between literature, writing practices, and visual and performance arts, from the ekphrasis of the New York School poets to the performance poetry of the St. Mark's scene. We find an autotheoretical thrust in the work of Language poet Hejinian, as well as artists, writers, and poets like Nelson, Rankine, Myles, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Bhanu Kapil, Sofia Samatar, Harryette Mullen, Hannah Black, and Ariana Reines.⁴⁸ There is also a strong tradition of experimental feminist poetry practices in Canada that have an autotheoretical impulse, as found in the work of poets like Lisa Robertson, Erin Mouré, Anne Carson, Sina Queyras, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Nicole Brossard, to name a few. While the expansive field of poetry and poetics is not the focus of my dissertation, it is necessary to at least make mention of the ways in which the history of modern and contemporary experimental poetry practices are conditions of possibility for recent autotheoretical works, and the ways in which an autotheoretical impulse is present across contemporary feminist poetry practices.

⁴⁸ Reines is an example of someone working across multiple practices, recognized for her work as a poet and a performance artist—both practices that can be described as autotheoretical; her own documentation of her performance work, which includes adjacent pieces of writing such as in *The Origin of the World*, can be read as autotheoretical.

The autotheoretical impulse pervading contemporary feminist culture can also be found in sound, spoken word, electronic music, and other rhythmic or vibratory writing and arts-based practices, including that of Jenny Hval, Maria Minerva, Yoko Ono, Regina de Miguel and Lucrecia Dalt, and Myra Davies and Gudrun Gut. Many of these artists approach theory and philosophy from the context of electronic music and sound. These are sonic feminist practices that engage with the discourses and frameworks of theory—feminist theory, but also semiotics, Marxism, aesthetics, phenomenology, posthumanism, speculative materialism and speculative realism—in ways that have been described as avant-garde, experimental, synth pop, art pop, and post-punk. These contemporary autotheoretical sound practices are part of a longer history of feminist sound and performance work that includes the electronic spoken word live performances and recorded electronic albums of 1980s performance artists like Finley and Laurie Anderson, and the related phenomenon of feminist conceptual artist bands, such as The Clichettes with Johanna Householder and DISBAND with Martha Wilson.

Lispector's *Água Viva*, originally written in Portuguese, did not “resemble anything written at the time, in Brazil or anywhere else. Its closest cousins are visual or musical,” Benjamin Moser explains in his introduction to the English translation (xiii). The musical resonance and relevance of the work is summarized by Moser in the paratextual story surrounding *Água Viva*: “The famous [Brazilian] singer Cazuza . . . read it one hundred and eleven times” (xiv). The title of *Água Viva*, which translates as “living water,” “fountain,” or “jelly fish⁴⁹,” was originally entitled *Beyond Thought: Monologue with Life*; as Moser explains,

⁴⁹ “As ultimately published in August 1973, the book was called *Água Viva*. This is the only one of Clarice’s titles that offers no ready translation. Literally ‘living water,’ the words can mean a spring or a fountain, a meaning often suggested inside the book, but to a Brazilian the words will first of all refer to a jellyfish” (xii-xiii).

“In the drafts, doubts about how to use her [Lispector’s] personal experience lead to repeated meditations on the creative process itself” (“Breathing” x). The text exceeds preexisting categories of genre, and incorporates a postmodern, self-reflexive subjectivity alongside citations of philosophy and theory of the time—specifically French existentialism and French feminism. “There is much I cannot tell you,” Lispector’s narrator states, “I am not going to be autobiographical. I want to be ‘bio’” (29). In the text, Lispector cites key ideas from theory and philosophy at the time of her writing—from Barthes’s “Death of the Author”⁵⁰ to Sartre’s existentialism⁵¹—writing the narrator’s phenomenological present through a choric invocation of the living and breathing body, theory, and sound. Relevant to feminist theory from the 1970s through to the present, Lispector’s work has sparked the interest of Cixous, who wrote on her own experience of reading Lispector in *Reading with Lispector: Theory and History of Literature* (1990), and conceptual artist Roni Horn, whose 2004 exhibition “Rings of Lispector (*Água Viva*)” at Hauser and Wirth in London engaged autotheoretically with Lispector’s text, referencing it explicitly and using it as an artist’s material within the larger installation.

Estonian-born and Los Angeles-based musician Maria Minerva’s 2011 album *Cabaret Cixous* references both Cixous’s canonical French feminist theory and the predominantly male-directed avant-garde and experimental traditions that “Cabaret Voltaire”—as the Dadaist venue in early twentieth century Zurich and as the post-punk industrial English band in the late twentieth century—represent. In 2012, a male music critic writing for *Pitchfork* wrote a review

⁵⁰ Lispector’s statement “You who are reading me please help me to be born” is a similar thesis to Barthes’s in “Death of the Author,” where the reader plays a key role in giving the text meaning or, in this case, giving the speaking “I” life (29). This also resonates with Hejinian’s *My Life and My Life in the Nineties*, where the life is constituted through the material act of writing and reception.

⁵¹ “And when I am born, I become free. That is the foundation of my tragedy” (Lispector 28).

that critiqued Minerva's *Cabaret Cixous* for being too intellectual⁵² (Gaerig)—a strange critique made all the stranger in light of how Minerva's lyrics are barely decipherable over the heavy reverb and clouds of crackly synth. To be sure, the lyrics in Maria Minerva's first two albums are, for the most part, indecipherable, with her "state of mind and being veiled behind diaphanous layers of echo" (Herrington). In her review of Minerva's *Will Happiness Find Me?* critic Lindsay Zoladz acknowledges the irony of Minerva's repetition "I don't want my voice to be heard," given how this lyrical motif is more intelligible to the listener than the lyrics uttered in previous albums like *Cixous*; she describes Minerva's music as "a place where academia and pop culture commingle in a hazy, libidinous swirl" (Zoladz).

One wonders what effect this synth pop transmuting of feminist theory has in the context of a post-pop underground music scene taking place in the 2010s between northern Europe and downtown LA. American political theorist Wendy Brown has problematized the conflation of voice and agency⁵³ in histories of feminism, and this problematization is of vital importance to a consideration of contemporary sonic practices, given the tendency in feminist theory historically to configure the woman's voice as the seat of her subjectivity and presence,⁵⁴ where subjectivity and presence are assumed to be politically desirable and efficacious. What does the invocation of theory in the space of hypnagogic pop do to how we read—or hear—*Cabaret Cixous*? Is the

⁵² *Pitchfork's* Andrew Gaerig gave *Cabaret Cixous* a rating of 6.8/10, saying: "Maria Minerva is begging you to think about her music. And not just think about it: pick it apart, deconstruct it, comb it for references. *Overthink* it, even. Hot-button issues both musical and not-- hypnagogic pop, 90s revivalism, feminism-- are baked into *Cabaret Cixous*." He concludes that he likes the album, "despite its partly academic birth."

⁵³ Wendy Brown states that "'expression is cast either as that which makes us free, tells 'our' truth, and puts our truth into circulation, or as that which oppresses us by featuring 'their' truth.' Both positions 'equate freedom with voice and visibility, both assume recognition to be unproblematic when we tell our own story, and both assume that such recognition is the material of power as well as pleasure. Neither confronts the regulatory potential of speaking ourselves, its capacity to bind rather than emancipate us'" (83-84).

⁵⁴ The equation of speech with presence has been deconstructed in the work of Jacques Derrida. For Derrida, the fundamental fact of difference is what constitutes the possibility of meaning.

invocation of feminist theory within Minerva's tracks betrayed by its discursive illegibility as hypnagogic pop, or is Minerva enacting Cixous's call for a mode of women's writing through the media and forms of her own context—namely, the experimental, indie music of the 2000s-2010s Los Angeles scene. Like other contemporary feminist artists working in autotheoretical ways, Minerva complicates our understanding of what constitutes a practice of theorizing in the present: theory becomes a material amongst other materials through which to transmute one's experiences and engender new meanings and resonances in relation to aesthetics and politics.

In Jenny Hval's *Apocalypse, girl* (2015), the fifth full-length studio album by the experimental Norwegian musician and writer, the lyrics are more discernible than they are in Minerva's albums; Hval uses much less reverb even as the otherworldly feminine vibes of hypnagogic electronic pop persist. Hval invokes the affects of a post-feminist moment in history, in which the gendered body continues to present certain problems and demands that, it seems, are difficult to respond to without the frameworks of intersectional feminist theory. Over the course of the album, Hval emphasizes how the gendered question of self-care in a late capitalist, neoliberal, patriarchal, and globalized world becomes a consequential question of ontology—one to be approached autobiographically and philosophically. Written poetically, Hval's songs shuffle between theoretical, intertextual first person narrativizing and figurative devices like metaphor. She works across media, including writing novels. In 2012 she wrote the Norwegian language book *Inn i ansiktet* that has not yet been translated outside of Norway: in it, she is in

conversation with writers and artists who work autotheoretically, including Kraus, Carson, and Lispector, whom she cites as formative influences on her literary work (Pelly and Hval).⁵⁵

Critical Art Writing, Auto-Criticism, and New Art Historians

Writing about art is part of the larger history of philosophical writing. The legacy of Continental philosophy, for example, involves incorporating discussions of particular works of art as a way of illustrating, or otherwise engaging with, philosophical ideas. This tendency continues through to autotheory as a contemporary feminist practice that often involves an engagement with both philosophy or theory and contemporary art. To be sure, autotheory is often tied to contemporary art and its contexts, so it is perhaps not surprising that an autotheoretical impulse can be found throughout the work of art historians, art writers, and art critics—particularly those who are invested in taking up aesthetic issues in feminist ways.

Works by modern and contemporary art historians, performance theorists, poets, artists, experimental writers, and scholars engage in art writing, art criticism, art historiography, and art historical writing that are autotheoretical and feminist, and that engage with contemporary art practices—including conceptual art and performance. These include works by Jones (*Irrational Modernism; Self/Image; Body/Art*), Jennifer Doyle (*Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art; Sex Objects*), Rosalind Krauss (*Under Blue Cup*), Kraus (*Lost Properties; Where Art Belongs; Video Green*), Nelson (*The Art of Cruelty; Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions*), Myles (*The Importance of Being Iceland*), Bellamy (*When the Sick*

⁵⁵ On her artist website, Hval writes “You can’t read my books if you don’t read Norwegian...I’d recommend books by these excellent writers instead: Chris Kraus, Maggie Nelson, Clarice Lispector, Elfriede Jelinek, Anne Carson, Irena Haiduk, etc. etc. etc.” (“More Work”).

Rule the World), Rankine (*Citizen; Don't Let Me Be Lonely*), and Kim Gordon (*Is It My Body? Selected Texts*). As a contemporary art historian, critic, and a Professor of English Literature at UC Riverside, Jennifer Doyle exemplifies the tendency for autotheory to emerge in actively cross-disciplinary, and generically liminal, critical practices: moving between disciplines, Doyle is able to write cutting-edge scholarship as an art historian working within an English department, a positioning that I find personally resonant. Similarly, art historian Jones is one of the foremost authorities on the history of feminist performance and body art practices, as well as the history of the artist's body in contemporary art: now, she has moved from working in Art History departments to working in a studio-based program of art, design, and curation at USC.

There are notable precedents to autotheory in the history of contemporary art writing and criticism, not least of which is Canadian theorist, performance artist, psychoanalyst, and art critic Jeanne Randolph's practice of what she terms "ficto-criticism" (Randolph, "Psychoanalysis" 232). Materializing from the art world of the 1980s Queen West scene in Toronto, Randolph's ficto-criticism is a "method" or practice—rather than a genre per se (232)—that, through strategies of performativity, disclosure, and fictionalization, makes explicit the kinds of subjectivities, relationships, and personal investments underlying the supposedly distanced practice of art criticism. Relishing in the liminal space between art and life, Randolph describes her ficto-criticism through frameworks of Michel de Certeau: ficto-criticism, for Randolph, is "the deliberate play of a psychoanalytic bricoleur with the structure of formal art criticism" (231). Using a theatrical metaphor, she describes ficto-criticism as dramatizing the liminal space between subjectivity and objectivity (232). By performing art writing and criticism as "subjectivized," Randolph reveals that "*all* art critical texts inherently act out a subjectivized

rhetorical form” (232), which is to say that no art criticism can purport to be objective, no matter how disinterested it claims to be. The claims to “disinterestedness” come from Kantian aesthetics, which—as resurrected and reiterated in the high modernist art world by critic Greenberg—continue to occupy a central place in the discipline of art history and, relatedly, criticism; I take this up at more length in Chapter 1.

Randolph’s ficto-criticism is aligned with the efforts of post-1960s feminist artists who incorporate the subjective, embodied, multi-sensorial, and affective in theoretically informed and conceptual work. Both Jones’s and Doyle’s autotheoretical moves go beyond a feminist politics of inclusion (making space for the affects of shame, or the mental health issues of anxiety, for example), to having their own experiences provide the basis of authority and insight alongside theory, research, and other more empirical modes of evidencing. In the case of Jones’s *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* and Doyle’s *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, it is the transparency of the writer’s own emotions, investments, and limits that are central to the critical viability (and argumentation) of the text rather than an exception to it. This shift in the hierarchy of theory and emotionality, or theory and the personal, is a characteristic of feminist thought historically that contemporary artists, writers, critics, and scholars working in an autotheoretical mode extend and hone.

In these autotheoretical, critical art writing practices, the anecdotal is often employed as a way in to the text’s pertinent problematics and themes. *Hold it Against Me*, for example, opens with a recollected scene of anxiety and shame, in which Doyle states “I begin this chapter with a story about hitting my own wall” (1). The anecdote that follows is from her experience of bailing on a private appointment to participate in British artist Adrian Howells’s relational performance

Held in 2007, and it comes to form the basis from which Doyle presents the thesis at the heart of her text: that when it comes to understanding contemporary art and its reception, “emotionality” and “difficulty” ought to supplant the existing discourse of “controversy.” Writing from the perspective of her experience as a scholar of contemporary art as well as a person who experiences contemporary art, Doyle shifts the discourse away from universalizing (and often uncritical and politically stultifying) generalizations, toward specifically located stances: what is difficult for one person, Doyle reasons, is not necessarily difficult for another—and controversial work is not necessarily difficult (4).

Similarly, in *Irrational Modernism* Jones states early on that “Anxiety is my mode of being” (28). Jones centres her discussion on the life and work of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a historical figure who embodies the gendered politics and aesthetics of the early twentieth century avant-garde. Theorizing Dadaism from the perspective of the Baroness, Jones proposes a theory of what she calls “neurasthenic irrationality” as a discursive means of disrupting claims to objectivity that the discipline of art history continues to be invested in. As she writes, Jones incorporates her own self as a female contemporary art historian and as someone who lives with an anxiety disorder, framing her autotheoretical incorporation of her own anxiety as a way of making transparent “this author’s particular investment in the Baroness’s irrationality. The Baroness will be interpretively performed here through the eyes/mind/heart of a fellow neurasthenic” (*Irrational* 24). This impulse can even be found in the works of feminist art historians who eschew an autobiographical approach to scholarship. Krauss, who studied under Greenberg and whose work in many ways continues Greenberg’s formalist project, chooses to work in this mode after experiencing a severe aneurysm. The

resulting text is *Under Blue Cup*, a work of art historical and art critical writing grounded in Krauss's newfound position of the "aneurystic subject" (Krauss, *Blue* 50): the Greenbergian notion of "The medium is the memory," an aesthetic thesis that Krauss expressed in her past work, takes on new resonance in the context of her own reflexive memory loss (127).

Contemporary Art History, Curation, and Research-Creation

Autotheory, particularly as it manifests in art writing and criticism, is an important term for curatorial scholars, contemporary art historians, and practicing artists to be cognizant of given how integral art writing practices are to curatorial practice and the production of exhibitions, as well as the ways in which artists, writers, curators, and critics alike have expanded the field of art writing to encompass various kinds of experimental and critical modes. As a practice grounded as much in the work of artists (whether living or dead) and the specificities of arts institutions (from publicly funded artist-run centres and art museums to privately run commercial galleries) as it is in theoretical frameworks and one's own research, curation is both a physical/material and a discursive practice that continues to expand as the role of the curator changes from a custodial role to a more epistemological one. As Christian Nagler and Joseph del Pesco explain in their 2011 article in *Fillip*, the role of the curator has shifted in recent decades "from a caretaker of collections to a producer of exhibitions" (53). In *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak take up the question of whether the curator ought to be thought of as an *auteur* (166), drawing on the history of film theory when considering the curator's role of authoring/directing and/or producing an exhibition: today, exhibitions have become the primary medium for the public distribution and reception of art.

As a practice that brings the material of one's subjectivity and lived experience alongside a long history of intertexts—including literary, artistic, philosophical, and theoretical ones—autotheory allows the writer or artist to, in a sense, try out a theory or hypothesis by bringing their lived experience and intertextual inquiry to bear on the question or issue at hand. In a way, this is not unlike contemporary curatorial practice of the *auteur* school, where the curation of a group exhibition (an exhibition featuring works by more than one artist) around a certain theme or problematic becomes a means of engaging with existing theory and of generating new theory, knowledge, or insight on a topic. On her practice of curating visual art, Indigenous curator and writer cheyanne turions explains: “Art was a way for me to practice philosophy. I could put forward a hypothesis about the world, and the exhibition could test whether the hypothesis meant anything to other people” (“MVS”). My experience of curating art has been similar to the way turions describes curatorial practices here: as a curator, I contribute to knowledge-sharing in and around contemporary art by organizing exhibitions; a given exhibition becomes a way of practicing philosophy, both by framing artists' practices in relation to a given theoretical concept or theme, and by contextualizing a given artist's practice in relation to another artist's practice.

Considering the specific contexts of university institutions, disciplinary borders, and emergent modes of research and cultural production provides insight into understanding autotheory as a mode of feminist practice across media—practices that are multi-disciplinary; that shuttle between the academic and the artistic; between research and creation; and between theory and practice. The rise of PhD programs in Studio Practice is one contextual cue, as is the accompanying turn in research institutions and funding bodies—such as the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in Canada—toward recognizing “research-creation” as a

legitimate mode of academic output. Over the past few decades, Fine Arts programs at a handful of universities in the UK and, later, in the US and Canada, began to welcome PhD students into practice-based Studio Art programs: these programs are founded on the premise that the artist's own art practice constitutes academic research. The doctoral candidate in Studio Art has the task of theorizing, articulating, and defending their art practice into theoretically informed, academic language, drawing on the discourses that they engaged with during MFA studies and PhD coursework, and refining these discourses in the form of their doctoral thesis and graduating exhibition. Alongside the emergence of Doctoral programs in Studio Art is the transformation of Canadian art colleges into universities, such as with the Ontario College of Art and Design into OCAD University in 2010 or, more recently, the Alberta College of Art and Design into ACAD University in 2018 (ACAD).

The existence of these PhD programs is not without contention, both from the perspective of artists and academics. Anecdotally, I've heard from professors in these programs who lament the PhD candidate in Studio Art's inability to adequately articulate their practice in the required theoretical terms. I've heard from practicing artists who refuse to do the PhD in Studio out of their own convictions around the incommensurability of one's own art practice and the more empirical research output that academia requires. I've heard from artists working in these PhD in Studio programs who claim that their Department has a particularly difficult time securing SSHRC funding for its projects. And finally, I've heard from artists who have completed the PhD in Studio, only to find that they are no longer interested in—or capable of—having an active art practice due to factors such as burn out, newfound academic careers, and the differential demands of academic professionalization. Of course, for all of these examples there are as many

examples of artists who gladly move through PhD programs and who emerge from them with still active—and perhaps even stronger (in the eyes of the major art institutions)—practices.

Even as academic disciplines, from Performance Studies to Women and Gender Studies, encourage the integration of theory and practice to varying degrees, the question of how far one can (or should) take this—particularly within the parameters of a given department or institution—is open to debate. The increasing existence of Studio Art PhD programs—which, from their inception, displace those artists with MFAs from their once-held status of holding a “terminal degree” (and, thus, change the politics of who is “hireable” when it comes to practicing artists who teach art colleges-turned-universities)—stands as a more extreme example of practice as research, where the integration of theory and practice in the context of studio art is tantamount. As transdisciplinary and transmedial feminist practice, autotheory might provide insight into the different ways in which artists, writers, curators, and other theorists and practitioners bring together theory with their practices. Autotheory emerges alongside broader discursive, material, social, and institutional shifts in how we think about the production and mobilization of knowledge and “theory” in twenty-first century institutions, including art colleges-turned-universities and public art galleries and museums.

Sick Woman Theory

Queer feminist affect theory creates a context in which contemporary feminist writers and artists can unpack their own experiences of illness and mourning through an autotheoretical practice grounded in the contributions of theorists that precede them. There is a whole cluster of autotheoretical texts that engage with the politics, aesthetics, and ethics of illness, injury, and

grief and which could be described as—to take Johanna Hedva’s term—“Sick Woman Theory,” and which take influence from the autotheoretical writing of Sedgwick. These include works by artists, writers, poets, and scholars, from Jamison, Rankine, Zambreno, Kapil, Amy Berkowitz (*Tender Points*), Johanna Hedva (“Sick Woman Theory”), Carolyn Lazard (*In Sickness and Study*; “How To be a Person in the Age of Autoimmunity”), Bellamy (*When the Sick Rule the World*), Gillian Rose (*Love’s Work*), Eula Biss (*On Immunity*), Susan Brison (*Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*), Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (*Bodysmap*), S. Lochlann Jain (*Malignant*), as well as earlier works by Lorde (*The Cancer Journal*), Susan Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others*), Elaine Scarry (*The Body in Pain*), and Lisa Steele (*Birthday suit with scars and defects*). In these works, the artist or writer engages in a practice of autotheory to make visible and theorize experiences of illness, disease, pain, trauma, and grief—either as experienced by oneself or through the experiences of others—and to connect these experiences to political, social, and structural issues of concern to feminists, including the delegitimization of women’s pain and the interrelatedness of sexual trauma with mysterious, feminized illnesses like fibromyalgia.

Feminist theory, critical disability and crip studies, mad studies, and critical race theory converge in Hedva’s “Sick Woman Theory,” an autotheoretical text that resembles a manifesto. Hedva’s title was inspired in part by three other autotheoretical works—Wollen’s “Sad Girl Theory,” Zambreno’s *Heroines*, and Christine Miserandino’s *The Spoon Theory*—and draws from autobiographical contributions to the thinking and advocacy around invisible disabilities, autoimmune diseases, and the feminist politics of illness, wellness, and ability. “Sick Woman Theory” has come to term a larger autotheoretical zeitgeist of feminist and queer feminist

practices⁵⁶ that include Lazard’s *In Sickness and Study* (2015-16) and Zorlutuna’s *Labour for the Horizon* (2016), web-based art projects that advance the ideas that Hedva articulates in her autotheoretical manifesto. In Lazard’s project, which comprises a series of digital photographs posted to Instagram, the artist metaphorically arms herself with her favourite books of contemporary theory (feminist and queer theory, as well as works which engage with biopolitics, medicalization of bodies, and related issues) each time she is in the hospital receiving blood transfusions for an autoimmune disorder. Lazard repeats the series over the course of two years, with her arm—bandaged and connected to an IV drip—holding books like Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings*, Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*, and Alison Kafer’s *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. This act of posing with books of theory on Instagram and related platforms like Tumblr and Twitter is a growing trend among post-internet feminists, to varying effects. Wollen (@tragicqueen), who is credited with coining the term “Sad Girl Theory,” engages in a similarly iterative performance as Lazard does, taking selfies of herself with theory books during her recurrent visits to the hospital. These practices publicly mobilize one’s lived experiences of illness, disability, and trauma to generate theory that is resonant with, and relevant to, intersectional feminisms: the making-visible of femme and other bodies who move through the world as “sick” fosters different forms of community and identification, helping those who might feel isolated or alone in their experiences to find agency through shared experience.

In the twenty-first century, social media platforms enable a widespread, daily narcissism, with the majority of the human population having access to writing their own Facebook statuses

⁵⁶ In collaboration with Margeaux Feldman, I am organizing a symposium and exhibition entitled *Sick Theories: On Sickness & Sexuality* through the Mark S. Bonham Center for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto to be held in November 2018. We are bringing in Hedva as one of our two keynotes.

and Tweets, posting images to their Instagram pages, and responding to posts on their news-feeds. In light of our post-internet, neoliberal capitalist context of new media technologies and social media, how do we understand the politics and aesthetics of autotheoretical practices? Does a white-passing woman with class privilege taking a selfie with a book of feminist theory and posting it to Instagram constitute an autotheoretical feminist practice? What if she is in a hospital bed (@tragicqueen)? As I make space for a consideration of these post-internet practices as engendering a different way of theorizing that is resonant with the media and forms of twenty-first century life, I am cognizant of potential critiques of such modes, including Sharma's coining of the term "selfie-care" to critique the individualistic compulsion to publicly display one's own self-care rituals at the expense of cultivating "the conditions of possibility for people to be cared for in common" (14). As a practice that integrates self-imaging and public acts of self-display with the criticality of theoretical discourse and a more politicized or "woke" self-reflexivity, autotheory has the potential to resist such ossification as "selfie-care" (Sharma 14) and stand as a mode of theorizing that is accessible beyond the borders of academic institutions.

Neoliberal Feminism and Intersectional Memes

Reflecting on Canadian feminist performance art of the 1970s through the 1980s, Johanna Householder notes the expediency of the medium and how women turned to performance art because they had immediate access to the required materials—namely, their bodies (13). It is conceivable that selfies are a similarly "expedient, almost involuntary" (Householder 13) practice for young women artists in the twenty-first century, given their access to their iPhones and the various social media platforms to produce, present,

and disseminate these images. The “selfie” debate is not unlike the debate that feminist performance artists have faced over the past century: how to comprehend the willing self-objectification that women engage in through these media, especially in a context in which women are always already commodified; and whether such “narcissistic” work can also be conceptually rigorous. There is a spectrum of autotheoretical feminist practices within this cluster of texts: in some work, the theory becomes an accessory or a fetish object in service of the selfie—making the selfie appear to be more intellectual, or to have the cultural capital that certain reading practices connote.

This is the case in much of Wollen’s (or @tragicqueen’s) work, where selfies by a white woman with class privilege are repeated in a context that uncritically, and vaguely ironically, accepts neoliberal capitalism’s grip on culture. Wollen’s work engages aspects of living under neoliberalism, beginning, for example, with how you can formulate your identity based on the things you consume—including theory and feminism. In Wollen’s “The ‘Sad Girl’ Starter Pack” collage, for example, she includes fashion accessories like a dog collar choker and a plaid skirt and commodities like a car (Prius) and Moon Juice with theory and feminist theory texts: Solanas’s *SCUM* and The Invisible Committee’s *The Coming Insurrection*—the latter of which has been détourned by Wollen, with Sailor Moon supplanting the original cover art (@tragicqueen, “Starter Pack”). The motif of juxtaposing Sailor Moon with texts of (most often feminist) theory is one seen throughout Wollen’s Instagram feed:⁵⁷ while intelligible as a postmodern gesture, it does not feel particularly complex or interesting. The work, like much of

⁵⁷ In her @tragicqueen Instagram feed, Wollen juxtaposes images and characters from the animated series *Sailor Moon* with such texts as Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Valerie Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto*, and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*.

the general tone of Sad Girl Theory, is suffused with irony and implicit capitalist critique: the whiteness and class privilege (disposable income) that Moon Juice functions as a metonymy of is placed alongside The Invisible Committee's French theory tract which "predicts the imminent collapse of capitalist culture" (Moynihan). Reading her work as performative and self-aware, it is possible that Wollen is instantiating the theory that she is taking up—The Invisible Committee on capitalism reaching a limit-point where it will collapse—while at the same time acknowledging her own ambivalent desires and complicity. She includes the caption "is seeing yr own starter pack the Internet version of the mirror stage???" ("Starter Pack"), which reads as a playfully memetic riff on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as refracted through the crystal of post-postmodern feminism.

There is a feminist politics to the affect of Sad Girl theory: the claiming of women's right to not smile, to be a kind of cute feminist killjoy, to use Ngai's and Ahmed's terms, and the affirmative saying no to capitalism's hailing of the happy and productive neoliberal subject. But the question remains as to the efficacy of this kind of work and the role that theory plays in this work's production and reception. Given the history of feminist performances of the self in art, one wonders what it is that Sad Girl Theory brings to feminism other than what appears to be a savvy move at self-branding in light of the influence that framing one's work as *theory* has in a context of young women with class mobility who have been exposed to theory in art school. Another question concerns the making of theory or philosophy into a fetish-object in the service of a selfie that contributes to one's cultural capital, and how this compares, for example, to earlier autotheoretical works like Piper's 1971 *Food*.

There are other examples of millennial feminist artists who work with selfies in autotheoretical ways, including Montréal-based Instagram artist @gothshakira's production of what she calls "intersectional feminist memes." As a self-identified "latinx" woman who positions herself as a "meme administrator"—with "GRAN SACERDOTISA DE LOS MEMES" as the headline on her Instagram—she produces lengthy autotheoretical memes involving the juxtaposition of appropriated/found imagery of Latina women—Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, Selena Gomez—with selfies (images, GIFs) that she takes of herself or, more often, photos of herself posing that have been taken by others. @gothshakira's work is simultaneously confessional⁵⁸ and theoretical—that is, informed by ideas from feminist theory and literature, including hooks, Angela Davis, and Lorde. It is politicized as explicit and articulate feminist and Latinx representation on the internet today, often functioning in direct confrontation with anti-feminist internet trolls who target meme administrators like @gothshakira for articulating feminist positionings in the viral form of memes.

@gothshakira attributes some of the vehemence of the anti-feminist backlash she receives online to her work being both explicitly feminist and explicitly intellectual (@gothshakira "Keynote"). The text element of @gothshakira's memes or image macros is longer and more intellectual or theoretically informed in its language than internet memes generally are, a matter which @gothshakira argues fuels the backlash and vitriol she receives online from anti-feminist

⁵⁸ In her keynote address at the "no neutral art, no neutral art histories" symposium in Montréal (January 2017), @gothshakira describes her work as "confessional femme memes" (@gothshakira, "keynote").

trolls.⁵⁹ Some of her strongest memes, in my view, are ones that bring together theoretical insight and a feminist politics of accessibility to problematize academic buzz words and the discourse of progressive leftist, feminist culture. In Xspace's group exhibition, "What would the community think?" (2015), curated by Emily Gove, a @gothshakira meme is printed out large scale as a text and image pairing and matted to the wall. Paired with an image of Jennifer Lopez, who looks toward with the camera with a soft gaze, the black vinyl text on the white gallery wall reads:

when you realize that aggressively and abrasively shaming everyone who does not share the same fourth-wave feminist views as u and/or has not been liberally educated and/or has not spent copious amounts of time on tumblr or in other social justice-oriented places whether tangible or intangible is classist, counter-productive, and is employing the same subversive strategies of the very systems of oppression that ur trying to circumvent and that, although the emotional and social labor reserves required from u may be great, the answer lies in compassionate understanding and patient dialogue in the interest of coexistence/ the forward progression of humanity as a whole. (@gothshakira, Xspace)

This meme demonstrates @gothshakira's characteristic rhetorical form, beginning with the meme conceit "when you realize..." and concluding with an abbreviated intersectional feminist analysis of the accessibility and class issues around the discourse used by liberally educated fourth-wave feminists; in this way, it is simultaneously humorous, self-reflexive, and self-aware. Using the form of the meme,⁶⁰ the personal experiences fuelling the content of the memes become, by virtue of the form, collective, social, and de-personalized. The focus of her work is

⁵⁹ @gothshakira speaks of her experience being trolled and threatened by "self-identified beta males" who organize in underground internet spaces like 4chan and target feminist meme administrators as part of their larger attack on feminism. Writing through her own experience, alongside the evidence she has acquired through direct messages or DMs and comments on her account, @gothshakira explains how these men "feel very alienated, very threatened, by the existence of left-leaning feminists"; some of the trolling she has received, she explains, specifically attack her memes for being "too personal" and for being "too intellectual" (@gothshakira, "keynote").

⁶⁰ In order to be a "meme" rather than an "image macro," the meme must be distributed virally through social media: in this way, wide circulation of the image-text pairing defines the meme as such (@gothshakira, keynote).

not on her self so much as using her self, as a Latinx woman, as a performative positioning from which to produce theory resonant with political, social, aesthetic, and cultural concerns.

Conclusion

As a performative practice of theorizing, autotheory allows feminists to better understand questions prompted in philosophy/theory and in their own lives in relation to a vast array of theoretical, philosophical, artistic, literary, pop cultural, and personal intertexts. As a term that encompasses a spectrum of post-1960s feminist practices, autotheory signifies a feminist mode of wrestling with, processing, metabolizing, engaging, and re-performing or iterating theory through subjectivity, experience, affect, and the body. Autotheory presents a contemporary mode of aesthetics that, while marking some divergences, is very much indebted to past feminist practices: it is, to take Nelson's term, a "post-avant-garde" (*Cruelty* 265) practice and mode of theorizing or philosophizing that reverberates with political, aesthetic, and ethical concerns for intersectionality, feminism, contemporary art, and critical-experimental writing practices today.

CHAPTER 1

Processing Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic through Feminist Conceptual Art:

Adrian Piper's *Food for the Spirit* as Kantian Selfie

My whole problem with theoretical structures has to do with their displacement of physicality, as if there is a seepage or a toxicity from the experience of the body that is going to invade language and invalidate theory.

- Carolee Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics*

Reality could be rearranged, relocated, varied, shot through with metaphysics. I was drunk on intellectual construction, theory, abstract structure; swooping and swerving crazily through uncharted sky.

- Adrian Piper, "Flying" in *Adrian Piper: Reflections 1967-1987*

Kant, pronounced 'can't'.

- Fred Moten, "Black Kant (Pronounced Chant)"

Adrian Piper's 1971 performance *Food for the Spirit* engages with Kantian philosophy through a work of body art that involves reading and self-imaging (Jones, *Self/Image* 134). As a biracial woman artist and philosopher working in the mid-twentieth century American art scene when Kantian aesthetics held sway, particularly as it was understood by American art critic Clement Greenberg, Piper presents an early example of a feminist artist working autotheoretically. Piper's experimentation metabolizes dominant art discourses, generating work that is both rigorous philosophical practice and resonant with a feminist aesthetics of self-imaging. Riffing on the conceit of sustenance at the heart of Piper's *Food for the Spirit* (hereafter referred to as *Food*), I use the word "metabolize" to describe Piper's process of physically engaging with Kant's philosophical work through her body. Staged in the artist's studio, *Food* involves the artist monastically reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and ritualistically taking

selfies¹ using a Kodak Brownie camera and a mirror. Piper processes fundamental tensions that exist in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, specifically, the ontological relation between appearances or representations and "the thing in itself," and the relationship between sensibility ("transcendental aesthetic") and understanding ("transcendental logic"). This oscillation between philosophizing and self-imaging makes *Food* a prescient example of feminist autotheory as a post-1960s practice with roots in conceptual art, body art, and performance.

Over the course of *Food*, an embodied and performative conceptual art piece that took place as a private performance staged over a set period of time in the artist's private studio in New York City, Piper metabolizes the philosophical problems with which Kant is engaged. Engaging in physical practices of fasting, yoga, and social isolation, Piper performs the event of reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as an ascetic ritual. By punctuating her dedicated reading of Kant's first *Critique* with the repetitive act of taking what I somewhat anachronistically describe as selfies, I argue that Piper's self-images epistemologically function not as a supplement to her rigorous Kantian philosophizing but as a necessary part of an autotheoretical practice. As a formative work of autotheory—one which explicitly engages both the embodied self and the discourse of philosophy—Piper's *Food* provides an ideal starting place to think through the ways in which autotheory has taken shape as a post-1960s feminist mode of engaging with, processing or metabolizing, and wresting with the discourses of theory and philosophy in ways that are performative, conceptual, iterative, and transformative. The selfie

¹ A selfie is, most simply, a photograph that one takes of oneself. As a term that emerged in the 2000s-2010s, the "selfie" is a term typically used to describe photographic self-portraits taken with a digital camera or a mobile phone, given the ease of use that these often light-weight cameras have for holding the camera up to capture one's self-image. I describe what Piper is doing in *Food* as a proto-selfie, given both the potential anachronism of describing her 1971 piece made with a Kodak brownie camera as a "selfie" and the clear similarities between what Piper is doing in *Food*—holding the camera up to the mirror and capturing her self-image in a manner that resembles "selfies" that circulate widely on Instagram and other social media platforms today.

becomes a space for Piper as a woman of colour and feminist conceptual artist—a subject positioning Kant has precluded in his own writings, which remain Eurocentric and phallogentric—to be present in a way that complicates the dominant understandings of Kant that had been held up to that point, including but not limited to the influential interpretation of Kantian aesthetics held by Greenberg. What results is a work that recognizes within Kant’s philosophy its own autotheoretical resonances, while at the same time affirming a particularly gendered, racialized, affective aesthetic through the presence of Piper’s body as a philosopher-artist on the photographic paper that, in effect, instantiates a kind of sympathetic confrontation with Kant.

By unpacking the autotheoretical mechanism at work in Piper’s *Food*, I suggest that we can better understand the history of “autotheory” as a feminist practice—one which seeks to articulate the ambivalent stance of many feminist artists and theorists in response to patriarchal histories of philosophy. With this in mind, my reading also considers how Piper’s work reveals alliances between Kantian philosophy and the concerns of feminism that are often overlooked. As a Kantian philosopher as well as a racialized feminist conceptual artist who consistently uses her own body in her art practice, Piper exposes the insufficiency of simply declaring an antagonistic opposition between feminist theory/practice and Kantian philosophy. The foregrounding, within feminist politics, of the gendered, racialized, sexual body—a body with physical and mental capacities and limits—as an integral aspect of the philosophical process has historically been seen as at odds with Kantian philosophy: and yet, Kant emphasizes the interdependence of embodied intuition and logical understanding (Piper, “Intuition” 8) and, in this way, ought not be seen as antithetical to embodied feminist practices of auto-theorizing. With this in mind, I read Piper’s *Food* and her sustained engagement with Kant’s philosophical

oeuvre over the course of her own life (through to the present day) as a resuscitative engagement with Kant's philosophy in *Critique of Pure Reason* that reveals Kant as an antecedent to her own work and, perhaps, to feminist theory and experimentation more broadly.

With Piper's *Food*, autotheory as feminist practice becomes a means of working through problematics present in both the history of Western philosophy and the late modern through to the contemporary art world. The documentation of Piper's *Food*—in the forms of the artist's photographic self-images and the heavily marked up copy of Kant's *Critique*—come to stand as traces of Piper's conceptual metabolizing. In the process, the artist extends the conceit of her *Food for the Spirit* to describe Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as the aforementioned “food.” I draw on existing scholarship on Piper's art and philosophical practice and extend it through a close reading of archival performance documentation in order to position Piper's *Food* as a performative processing of Kant's *Critique*. Specifically, I show how Piper fleshes out Kant's notion of the transcendental aesthetic and the corresponding critique of “pure reason” through a feminist practice that is as embodied as it is conceptual. Considering both the 1971 work itself and paratextual elements, including Piper's own philosophical writing² and art writing, I consider how Piper engages feminist traditions of critiquing the modernist, Greenbergian manifestations of Kant as aesthetic disinterest, and how she reconciles doing so while also undertaking a lifelong engagement with the terms and structures of Kantian philosophy.³ Reading Piper's *Food*

² My discussion of Piper's *Food* is supplemented by a discussion of her philosophical writing, specifically her self-published electronic and open-access tome *Rationality and the Structure of the Self Volume II: A Kantian Conception*; in addition to these texts providing further insight into the questions that *Food* takes up, these texts also emphasize Piper's dual status as an artist and a philosopher/scholar and the ways in which Piper's thinking on Kant has evolved over the last decades.

³ I interpret *Food for the Spirit* to be a cheeky title, functioning in a manner not unlike Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* written over two decades later. And yet, it is not as simple as reading Piper's work as a satire or send up of Kantian philosophy, as Piper herself has been engaged in a long-term philosophical project that has resulted in the publication of two undoubtedly serious tomes: *Rationality and the Structure of the Self Volume I: The Humean Conception* and *Rationality and the Structure of the Self Volume II: A Kantian Conception*.

as a significant early work of feminist autotheory, I suggest that Piper performatively processes key aporias within Kantian philosophy. These include: the transcendental aesthetic—which pertains to “the science of all principles of a priori sensibility” (Kant, *Reason* A21/B35) (where everything we perceive can only be known through sensibility), transcendental idealism, which holds that everything we perceive and can know are to be regarded as “mere representations and not as things in themselves” (Kant, *Reason* A369), and the tension between the “transcendental subject of apperception” and the “empirical subject,” respectively.

I begin by situating Piper’s work in the contexts of the history of Black feminist conceptualism and Black feminist body art; the history of self-imaging practices in feminist body art; and the history of feminist responses to Kantian philosophy. While Piper’s works have been engaged with by performance scholars,⁴ art historians, and fellow artists,⁵ there is a lack of sustained engagement with Piper’s *Food* that strikes me. In particular, scant attention is paid to Piper’s engagement with Kant; the thin scholarship on *Food* confirms the importance of this chapter, as does the need to acknowledge the rigorous contributions of Black feminist artists to both conceptual art and contemporary theory broadly speaking. I am indebted to the scholarship on feminist and Black performance and body art by performance scholars and art historians like

⁴ While Jones includes *Food* in her discussion of the history of body art, she does not focus at length on the Kantian problematics within *Food*; she reads it, instead, with an eye to the tension between subject/object in the feminist sense of being objectified and feminist critiques of the gaze. I take Jones’s observations—that Piper’s *Food* threatens the logic of the white male gaze through its presence simultaneously as body/object and philosopher/subject and a racialized woman—and extend it to consider the specifically Kantian registers of *Food*.

⁵ Civil includes a brief discussion of Piper’s *Food for the Spirit* in her *Swallow the Fish: a memoir in performance art*, but similarly pays little attention to the nuances of Piper’s engagement with Kantian philosophy. Similar to Jones’s reading, but informed explicitly by Civil’s positioning as a Black woman, Civil focuses on the dynamics of the gaze in Piper’s work and the ways in which the work is empowering for Black female artists in its assertion of a self-contained Black female presence. Her argument broadly speaking is very similar to Jones’s, and like Jones there is a possible misreading of Kant; on Piper, Civil states: “That she is not just a mind and that she even has a body. That she is not just a mind and that she can’t just live or exist on ideas alone. In this way, the artist is insisting on embodiment, in its subtle resistance to the force of Western European philosophy” (173).

Uri McMillan, Rebecca Schneider, Amelia Jones, and Jayne Wark who have focused on Piper's performance practice in relation to the politics of visibility and presence, and the poststructuralist deconstruction of the subject/object binary with regards to questions of representation and agency. Principally, my own contributions build on Schneider's notion of the "explosive literality" in feminist performance and Jones's assertion that body art destabilizes modernist conceptions of the white male transcendent subject⁶ as scholarly background for my theorizing of *Food*, particularly when it comes to *Food for the Spirit* instantiating a kind of conceptual-literal conceit around Piper's metabolizing of Kantian philosophical work. Ultimately, I argue that Piper performatively redeploys the material of Kantian philosophy to feminist effects of note both to the early 1970s context within which the work was made and to present-day conversations around aesthetics and embodiment, and that *Food* provides fresh insight into the often thorny and unresolved philosophical questions with which Kant is concerned.

Art after Philosophy: Conceptualism, Theory, and Critique

Most simply, conceptual art is art in which the idea or concept behind the work takes precedent, often over the physical art object. In conceptual art it is the conceptual framework that the artist establishes for the work that in many ways defines the piece as a work of art, rather than any particular formal style or set of materials. By framing the work as art, it becomes a work of art. As Sol LeWitt explains, "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair" (79). In the

⁶ Where the white male transcendent subject exists in opposition to the female immanent object.

mid-1960s through to the mid-1970s, texts by male American conceptual artists, like LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art"—published in *ArtForum*'s Summer 1967 issue on "American Sculpture"—and Joseph Kosuth's "Art After Philosophy," are among those that are seen as having founded conceptual art as a coherent aesthetic movement and conceptualism as a legitimate mode of making art.

As an integral part of "twentieth-century expanded art practice" (Jackson, *Social* 15) which has also been described in the contemporary as "post-media, interdisciplinary art practice" (Drobnick 26), conceptual art intersects with related movements like Fluxus and the Art & Language collective. French-American artist Duchamp, working in the early twentieth century as part of a trans-national (Paris-New York City) Dada movement, is often pointed to as the originator of both conceptual art and, it could be said, contemporary art, where contemporary art often is conceptual. Duchamp's "readymades," as everyday objects that are re-framed as art objects, destabilize the criteria of aesthetic value—including form—that had until then governed Western art history, and make way for artworks that are first and foremost conceptual or concept-based. The best known example of Duchamp's readymade work is his 1917 porcelain urinal *Fountain*,⁷ signed by the artist as "R.Mutt." With its further articulation in the 1960s by American artists like LeWitt, conceptual art continued to destabilize traditional notions of aesthetic, including beauty and form. In conceptual art, "What the work of art looks like isn't too important" (LeWitt 79). In the present, contemporary art is perhaps better described as being "post-conceptual": as art critic Jeni Fulton notes, "The art world of today is post-conceptual. It is

⁷ Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain* is often cited as "the first conceptual artwork" (Tate).

generally assumed that all artworks have conceptual elements, and therefore rely on chains of explanation that either supervene upon or have equal status to the work itself.”

Conceptual art takes shape across media, with conceptual artists working freely across different mediums, materials, and forms, choosing whichever is most conducive to the given concept or idea that they are working with at the time. Piper, for example, has worked extensively in performance and body art, drawing, painting, photography and other photo-based work, video, installation, collage, and other media, including language and text-based work on blackboards (*Everything #21*) and business cards (*My Calling (Card) #3*). This comprehensive range of Piper’s art practice was on view at the Museum of Modern Art in 2018, with the landmark retrospective “Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965-2016.” Writing in response to this landmark exhibition, Holland Cotter describes Piper’s oeuvre in terms of a “Thinking Canvas”—one which is multi-dimensionally political—with its sustained wrestling with issues of “racism, misogyny, xenophobia.” Reading through the works on display, Cotter notes how Piper’s work is less about “smoothness and symmetry, whiteness” than it is about the rough “corners and edges” that cannot, or ought not, be sanded down by institutions like the MoMA which, historically, might have tried. Spanning fifty years of Piper’s work, the retrospective emphasizes the transdisciplinary, transmedial, and conceptual nature of Piper’s practice as someone who is “both, and equally, a visual artist and an academic scholar” (Cotter).

In “Periodizing the 60s,” Fredric Jameson argues that, with the end of High Modernism and its philosophical embodiment of French existentialism came the 1960s and a postmodern turn to what could better be called “theory,” rather than “philosophy” per se (194); similarly, Kosuth acknowledges that, from the view of the 1960s and its aesthetic-political sentiments,

“The twentieth century brought in a time that could be called ‘the end of philosophy and the beginning of art’” (2). Both Kosuth and LeWitt understand conceptual art to have effects similar to philosophy, and, in some cases, to be a philosophical practice informed by ideas from philosophy and theory. LeWitt sees philosophy as implicit in a given work of conceptual art, though he is of the view that the role of an artwork should not be to illustrate a particular system of philosophy or theory (79-80). With its rise in the mid twentieth century, conceptual art can be understood as one space where the work of philosophy was being taken up, at a time when philosophy’s influence and cohesion as a field was waning.

The relationship between theory, philosophy, and art both historically and in the post-1960s context is a matter which continues to be taken up by scholars, curators, artists, and critics alike. As part of London’s *Frieze* talks in 2009, *Frieze* co-editor Jörg Heiser lead a panel discussion entitled, “Scenes from a Marriage: Have art and theory drifted apart?” between philosopher Simon Critchley, curator and critic Robert Storr, and artist Barbara Bloom. The provocative panel title suggests that art and theory have become figuratively “divorced” after a long “marriage” or “happy period of co-habitation”:

In the 1980s, buzzwords like “semiotics” and “simulation” became prevalent in the art world, and since then theory has played an important role in the interpretation and making of art. Yet, after all these years, it seems that the odd couple “art and theory” have drifted apart. It has become more and more common that theory is on most art school curricula. At the same time, a lot of artists have a complicated relationship to theory in terms of distancing themselves, sometimes attaching themselves, to theoretical models and concepts, trying to make clear what their work means in the midst of all of that. (Heiser and Critchley)

Heiser points to the 1980s as a time when, following the dawn of postmodern theory in the 1960s and the post-structuralist turn in the 1970s, theory crystallized and became central, or at the very

least “prevalent,” in the art world—both in the processes of making art and critically responding to and contextualizing art as curators and critics. Today, Heiser explains, some artists are distancing themselves from theory, while other artists continue to “attach” themselves to it. Critchley states that “Yes, a certain model of theory has become tiresome,” but that this model of theory is the “top-down model, or theory as legitimation of the artist” that has grown old.

To illustrate, Critchley turns to the 1990s as a time that he observed as being dominated by a “terroristic model” of theory, in which artists were “made to feel stupid by their inability to master theory with a capital ‘T,’ with which is meant a stack of texts usually translated from French, by authors whose names start with a D, sometimes an F or a T.” As he speaks, you can hear laughter bubbling up around the room. “Without wanting to insult anybody in particular,” Critchley concedes, he points to particular MFA programs like that at Goldsmiths in the 1990s as being especially pernicious for fostering this kind of relationship between theory and contemporary art; it is this period which Kraus responds to in her autotheoretical feminist art writing and criticism, which I take up in Chapter 2, where Kraus references MFA programs and contemporary art institutions in the specific cultural space of 1990s Los Angeles in her critique. This “terroristic model” of theory that Critchley describes lead to a situation where the artists who were subjected to this model, artists whom Critchley describes as being “often very good” as artists, were “cowered into submission and driven in some cases to distraction, in some cases nervous breakdowns” (Heiser and Critchley). In this way, Critchley gestures to the anxieties that a certain manifestation of theory, or as he put it, “theory with a capital T,” provokes in artists—especially those artists pursuing graduate degrees in their field of practice. Of course, what Critchley is stating here is something that many feminist artists are acutely aware of, and have

been aware of for some time. This issue of a “top-down model of theory” that exists as discursive legitimization for an artist’s work is something that feminists contest through autotheoretical practices.

These very anxieties and problematics that Critchley observes are explored in Piper’s early 1970s work *Food*. As I discuss later in this chapter, Piper came to Kant after she was making art in art school and was told that Kant is someone she should engage with given the kinds of questions she is invested in. Alongside Piper, who invokes a feminist practice of self-imaging as an attempt to “ground herself” from the transcendentalizing effects of reading Kant, there is a long history of feminist practices that respond to theory with wariness and hesitancy such as Canadian, queer feminist Hazel Meyer and Iranian feminist Sona Safaei-Sooreh. But even more generally, we see the feelings of alienation, frustration, and anger that women and gender non-conforming folks experience with the kinds of hagiographic cult followings that form around certain schools of patriarchal theoretical thought, like the one Chris Kraus highlights in her descriptions of the “the Bataille Boys” who cling to her husband (Kraus, *Dick* 33), cultural critic Sylvère Lotringer, in her autotheoretical novel *I Love Dick*. For some feminist artists, such as those who organize as the Feminist Art Collective (FAC, formerly the Feminist Art Conference) in Toronto, all theory is perceived to be this kind of “top-down” theory that Critchley describes, and FAC distances themselves from it accordingly as part of what they see as being a more egalitarian, anti-authoritarian mode of collective feminist organizing. This latter case is more rare, but it points to a defensive stance in feminist art and activist contexts where “theory” is rejected outright due to its perceived opposition from “practice” and its historically patriarchal, insistent grasp on discourse and art.

Moving from the 1980s-1990s, a period characterized by an increasingly dominant place of theory in visual arts contexts, to the present, Critchley asks “How does one approach the way art thinks in its own terms without drowning the art in theory?” Art is neither purely conceptual nor purely intuitive, something which Critchley acknowledges (Heiser and Critchley), and Piper’s practice as an artist exemplifies the capacity for an artist to work between these two poles. Piper, for example, is rooted in the work of philosophizing and understanding philosophy as an integral part of her conceptual art practice. I contextualize feminist autotheory in the lineage of feminist conceptual and body art practices, which brought politicized feminist stances into play with self-referential conceptual critiques. I observe a move toward autotheory in the history of feminist conceptualism: specifically the ways in which women and feminist artists perceived a need for “subject-centered inquiry,” autobiographical content,⁸ and the blurring of art and everyday life to be integrated into a predominantly male-directed tradition (of conceptualism, of philosophy, of theory). In addition to bringing together the conceptual and the political in a given work, feminist conceptual artists also reveal the potential to incorporate “subject-centred inquiry” (Wark, “Conceptual” 46) into idea-based art which had, in the hands of male artists, prohibited such blending—at least in theory.⁹

Writing on feminist conceptual art practices in the 1960s-70s, Wark describes how the politics of “the New Left,” which includes feminist politics, led to a “skepticism” among notable

⁸ Lippard emphasizes the ways in which women artists were largely responsible for this shift toward art as everyday life in conceptual art, noting how they introduced “new subjects and approaches” like “autobiography, performance, daily life, and ... feminist politics” (*Six* xi).

⁹ It is interesting to consider the different approaches to criticality between feminist and non-feminist artists. On the feminist conceptualists, Wark goes on to note that “They did, nevertheless, recognize the potential of subjecting Conceptual art’s strategies and methodological premises to modifications that would advance the fundamentally different critical ethos informing their work” (“Conceptual” 44). That the “critical ethos” of feminist artists would be “fundamentally different” than the critical ethos of their male and/or non-feminist contemporaries is worth keeping in mind, especially as I consider the various ways in which autotheory as feminist practice advances a different set of terms, orientations, and concerns than other modes of theory.

feminist conceptualists, including Piper, Eleanor Antin, and Martha Rosler, “about the adequacy of Conceptual art, with its insular focus on aesthetic debate, to articulate their emerging concerns with problematic social relations” (“Conceptual” 44). Put another way, the concerns of feminist conceptual artists extended beyond the concerns of their male counterparts, who seemed content to focus on “insular” issues related to “aesthetic debate” at the expense of engaging other issues related to, say, the politics of aesthetics or issues relating to the social. Like autotheory, feminist conceptual art involves both the autobiographical (or the lived), and the theoretical (or the abstract). While conceptual art is heady and self-reflexive, it also involves the blurring of art and life and an emphasis on process; Lippard notes how, in conceptual art, “artists often make art out of unadulterated life situations” (*Six* 7). Feminist conceptual artists resisted the poststructuralist “death of the author” that began to circulate post-1968,¹⁰ just as women artists and artists of colour were beginning to gain entrance into these scenes,¹¹ a problem of concern to autotheory as a feminist practice more broadly.¹² Wark refers to the “vital interaction between the precepts of Conceptual art and emerging feminist efforts to challenge prevailing values and authorities within and beyond the art world” (“Conceptual” 48). We see this dynamic in feminist autotheory, like Kraus’s conceptual and humorous “feminist efforts to challenge the prevailing values and

¹⁰ Where 1968 marks the year that Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” essay was published, and a time of substantial social and political upheaval in both France and America.

¹¹ Referring to the theoretical writings of feminist scholar Nancy K. Miller, Canadian art historian Jayne Wark states: “Miller also noted that the death of the authorial subject was aligned with the decentered, disorinated, and deinstitutionalized position of the feminine at a time when, for women, ‘the condition of dispersal and fragmentation that Barthes valorizes (and fetishizes) is not to be achieved but to be overcome’” (“Conceptual” 46).

¹² As Wark notes: “Indeed, given that women were seeking political emancipation and agency just as the privilege of subjectivity and authorship was being disclaimed within artistic and intellectual circles, what was at stake was not simply the right to reassert that privilege but the need to forestall closure on subject-centred inquiry itself” (“Conceptual” 46). Wark configures subjectivity and authorship here as “privileges” that women and artists of colour have not been warranted historically: what’s more, just as women and artists of colour were beginning to be seen as legitimate artists (in the 1960s-70s), “subject-centred inquiry” was falling out of fashion. This is a central problem to consider when theorizing autotheory through an intersectional feminist perspective.

authorities” (Wark, “Conceptual” 48) both in the art world and in academia, using her own experiences in and complicity with these systems as a site to generate new knowledge and insight. As part of her feminist autotheoretical practice, Piper subtly subverts conceptualism’s terms by visually incorporating her body into her work.

Feminist autotheorists hone the power and affect of theory as it comes to interact with one’s body, one’s subjectivity, and one’s experience of living in the world. In this way, these works are not necessarily “drowning” in theory in the sense Critchley describes, but are, instead, finding ways of treading water, swimming through, and otherwise surviving theory from various feminist, racialized, and queer positionings. In my theorizing of autotheory as a performative mode of post-1960s feminist practice, I am interested in works of art, criticism, and literature that explicitly and self-reflexively engage the discourses of philosophy and theory, whether it is Piper’s engagement with Kant in *Food* or, as I discuss in Chapter 2, Safaei-Sooreh’s rendering of the names of contemporary theorists into brand names on designer handbags in *V+I* and Meyer’s similarly desirous lamentation of the centrality of theory and discourse in MFA programs in *No Theory No Cry*. In this way, autotheory provides another way of approaching these pressing questions of concern to art historians, literary scholars, curators, artists, and critics, such as what is the relationship between philosophy, theory, and art today, and what might the future look like when it comes to the relationship between art, theory, life, and the self in relation to others.

Black Conceptualism

When discussing Piper’s practice as an artist, I choose to approach her work specifically as a conceptual artist rather than as a performance artist—a move resonant with Piper’s own self-

identification (McMillan 113-14). Doing so also makes space to read her work through the specific context of conceptual art, rather than the more well-trod path of performance scholarship. There is a rich history of both feminist conceptualism and Black conceptualism in which I contextualize Piper's work: significant artists include, but are by no means limited to, female artists Coco Fusco, Kara Walker, Chakaia Booker, Lorna Simpson, Martine Syms, Hannah Black, Gabrielle Civil, Fatimah Tuggar, Nicole Miller; male and queer male artists Glenn Ligon, Adam Pendleton, Hilton Als, Jayson Musson aka Hennessy Youngman; Mendi and Keith Obadike, and others. Writers and poets play a key role in experimental, conceptual Black practices, like Harryette Mullen and Claudia Rankine, as do scholars and theorists who have engaged with histories and problematics of Black conceptualism, like Kara Keeling, McMillan, Nicole R. Fleetwood, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Moten. While it is important to contextualize Piper's work in light of the work of critical race scholars and the histories and practices of Black conceptual practices, McMillan acknowledges the risks we run in reducing Piper's practice as being primarily or only about race "at the expense of what it began as: a bodily and psychological experiment in transcending the boundaries between subjecthood and objecthood to become an art object" (McMillan 101). It is this aspect of her work that McMillan highlights—the tension between "subjecthood and objecthood" (101)—that I hone in on in my discussion of *Food*: that Piper's practice instantiates and, in turn, fleshes out philosophical problems related to metaphysics and ontology, such as the status of the subject and the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in representation.

Focusing on the work of a non-white conceptual artist makes space to consider the problems that race and Blackness present to questions of visibility, presence, and the subject/

object dialectic. Piper describes the early days of conceptual art as "...a white macho enclave, a fun-house refraction of the Euroethnic equation of intellect with masculinity" (Piper, *Order Vol I* xxxv), emphasizing the imperative for bridging conceptual art practices with an intersectional feminist framework attuned both to the politics of representation and to the unique history of Black conceptualism. But what constitutes Black conceptual practice and what constitutes Blackness? To answer this, I turn to Martine Syms's "Black Vernacular Reading New Media," a performative lecture given at SXSW Interactive 2013 and now housed on the web.

Syms, a contemporary artist and self-defined "conceptual entrepreneur" based in Los Angeles, proffers a definition of Blackness in relation to art-making: "The essentialist in me thinks that a thing is Black if a Black person makes it, but experience tells me that it's Black when Black people name it as such. We recognize it in dialect, symbol and rhythm" (Syms, "Vernacular").¹³ "Blacks are not monolithic, but race is a shared social condition," Syms explains, going on to state that "Blackness is a set of common experiences that inform an aesthetic" ("Vernacular"). Syms approaches Black cultural production as something that stands in contrast to "conventional, segregated channels of distribution" ("Vernacular"), and this distinction is further complicated when it comes to interracial artists and issues of colorism (Fleetwood 29).

Exploring the slippages around her dual-identity as mixed race forms one of the many dimensions of Piper's conceptual art practice, and it gestures toward earlier explorations of mixed-race identity in discourse: W.E.B. DuBois's notion of the "twoness" of African Americans

¹³ Syms writes, "What does it mean for a Black woman to make minimal, masculine net art? What about this piece is 'not Black?' Can my identity be expressed as an aesthetic quality? As a Black artist I'm regularly asked to dissect my practice in terms of race. Sometimes I'm happy to oblige, but other times it feels like a trap..." ("Vernacular").

(2), for example, informs the work of contemporary African American artists like Syms. Reading Piper’s work in terms of Blackness is complicated by the artist’s conceptual move, in 2012, to “retire from being Black” (Piper, “NEWS”). Piper’s 2012 self-portrait *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, a Moment of Embarrassment*, framed as a gift to the artist on her 64th birthday, raises the question of what a given racial or national “designation” serves in an artist’s practice while outlining her decision to retire her Blackness.¹⁴ Performance artist and scholar Gabrielle Civil asserts that the particular body of the artist—whether it is Black or “light-skinned,” fat or thin, “conventionally attractive,” and so on (all matters, to some extent, of perception and ‘passing’ more than, as Piper’s work underscores, any fixed and biologically-based essence)—consequentially shapes what the work performs and how the work is received (174). But as Piper’s work reminds us, once we begin to speak of an artist’s practice in terms of “racial designations,” we can quickly find ourselves qualifying to a percentile one’s ancestral data.¹⁵ Piper ultimately comes to the conclusion that her English and German ancestry “preponderantly” outweighs her “African heritage,” and so chooses to re-frame herself in an act of “pointless administrative precision and futile institutional control” (Piper, *Thwarted*). If I were to abide by the rules set out by Piper’s own conceptual practice—articulated by Piper in the artist statements that frame her works, and archived on the APRAF website—I would refer to Piper not as a Black artist but as “The Artist Formerly Known as African-American” (“NEWS”). For the purposes of

¹⁴ In the digital self-portrait *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, a Moment of Embarrassment* (2012), Piper’s face is distorted through a digital colour filter making the artist’s skin appear as a shade of purplish grey. Piper overlays explanatory text atop the image which outlines her decision to retire from being Black. The title of the work heightens the ambivalence at the core of this work: was Piper’s identity as a Black artist a “thwarted project” that the artist, in “embarrassment” or shame, has failed at attaining or sustaining?

¹⁵ This is further complicated by the corporate industry of data mining ancestral data: Julia Creet’s 2016 documentary *Data Mining the Deceased: Ancestry & The Business of Family* “examines the motivations of individuals and industry with respect to the collection and use of genealogical information” (Creet).

my discussion here, Piper's status as half-Black—and her appearance as not exactly white in the documentation photographs of *Food*—is considered consequential to the work.

A consideration of Piper's racialized, female body is imperative to understanding the ramifications of Piper's conceptual transformation within and through Kantian philosophy with her selfies in *Food*. At the same time, Piper's own ambivalence around ontologically affirming a particular racial identity must be emphasized here; indeed, as Holland Cotter writes, echoing many other critics, in his review of Piper's history-making¹⁶ MoMA retrospective, in Piper's work "her aim is not to assert racial identity but to destabilize the very concept of it" (Cotter). Piper has gone so far as to conceptually "retire" from being Black (Piper, *Thwarted*), a move that takes place in a context of work by other Black conceptual artists, like Keith Obadike, who in 2001 made the piece *Blackness for Sale* in which he "auctioned his Blackness on eBay" (Syms, "Vernacular"). Obadike's Black.net.art¹⁷ piece, like Piper's *Thwarted*, demonstrates a self-reflexive awareness of both the capital that comes with one's "Blackness" in the art world—articulated by Obadike in the list of "Benefits"—and the problems such Blackness brings to the bearer in structurally racist societies—listed by Obadike in the "Warnings" (*Blackness*). Among other things, Obadike's work reminds us of the need to interrogate how a white-dominated art world perceives and treats Blackness as an ontological category.

Just as Piper uses humour and irony in her work, so too do we see the use of humour and irony in works by Black conceptual artists like Obadike and Jayson Musson as a means of both engaging with and subverting the discourse of the white-dominated art world. In *Art Thoughtz*, a

¹⁶ Piper's 2018 retrospective at the MoMA marks the the very first time that the museum has "given over all of its sixth floor special exhibition space to a single living artist" (Cotter).

¹⁷ *Blackness for Sale* is described as "part of Mendi + Keith's Black.net.art actions" on the artists' website (Obadike).

series of performances on video housed on *YouTube*, Musson in the persona of his performative alter-ego Hennessy Youngman uses self-defined Black dialect “to take control of art world discourse” through a parodic performance that makes accessible—or reveals the terms of—contemporary art codes via an “excessive” Black hip hop persona (Syms, “Vernacular”). Youngman’s post-internet conceptual performances function as both explanations of, and alternatives to, hegemonic art discourse.¹⁸ By breaking down the elusive terms of contemporary art world discourse and post-structuralist theory,¹⁹ as well as the predominantly Western canon of notable figures²⁰ and notable practices²¹ of the American art world, Youngman shows to what extent access is central in considering structural racism in relation to art institutions.

Performing for the Camera: Self-Imaging as Feminist Practice

In addition to access, visibility is a key issue when it comes to race, gender, and representation. The feminist body artist is faced with a double bind: to be visible and present, we often presume, is to have agency; but to be visible and present can also open you up to violence and harassment. The racialized feminist art is, we could say, faced with a triple bind.²² The politics of visibility that feminist artists who use self-imaging must navigate has been theorized

¹⁸ Arguably, Youngman's episode "How to Make an Art" summarizes Kantian aesthetic theory and its view of art advanced in *Critique of Judgment* (where art serves no purpose outside of itself), even though Youngman does not explicitly name the philosopher Immanuel Kant in his performance for video.

¹⁹ See Youngman: “Post-Structuralism,” “The Sublime,” “Institutional Critique,” “Relational Aesthetics.”

²⁰ See Youngman: “Damien Hirst,” “Beuys-Z,” “Bruce Nauman,” “Louise Bourgeois.”

²¹ See Youngman: “The Studio Visit,” “How to Make an Art,” “How to Be a Successful Black Artist.”

²² Feminist performance scholars like Phelan have noted how the female artist is faced with a double bind: to be visible and present, we often presume, is to have agency; but to be visible and present can also open you up to violence and harassment. Fleetwood takes up the politics of Black female visibility in *Troubling Vision*, a significant addition to the canon of performance and visual art scholarship that focuses on the feminist politics of visibility, presence, and absence, often written by white women like Phelan and Schneider.

by Schneider,²³ Phelan,²⁴ and Fleetwood.²⁵ In the predominantly white space of 1960s-70s conceptualism, the relative blackness of Piper's body can be understood as "disruptive" in the sense unpacked by Fleetwood in *Troubling Vision*, where Fleetwood theorizes the politics and aesthetics of Black visibility in American culture from the nineteenth through to the twenty-first centuries. As mixed race and as female, Piper's body as an artist and as philosopher fits the categories of otherness that Jones outlines as having the potential to subvert the tenets of Western hegemony by exposing "the hidden logic of exclusionism underlying modernist art history and criticism" through its presence and visibility (Jones, *Body Art* 19). Drawing on a history of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) feminist scholarship, Civil makes a similar argument on the status of the Black woman as "the ultimate Other" in the fields of representation and discourse (168). With autotheory, the body once again "offer(s) itself up as a site of

²³ Schneider describes the paradox at the heart of feminist performance art of the explicit body as follows: "the female body in representation has emblemized both the obsessive terrain of representational fantasy and, as empress/impress of the vanishing point, that which escapes or is beyond the representational field" (6). The body of the feminist artist, in this view, is at the same time too present and always already absent, standing in as the focal point and as that which perpetually recedes.

²⁴ In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Phelan outlines the tension between presence and absence, where presence is the state of being "marked" and absence is the state of being "unmarked." Performance art serves a vital function in Phelan's theory, as she points to its liveness and subsequent disappearance in arguing that it is "the least marked of all the texts I consider here" (31). She discusses how women have historically been marked as defective in relation to patriarchal standards of value—the male principle. This stems from the constructed nature of Western epistemological, psychic, political, and metaphysical binaries in which "The male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning" (31). Consequently, Phelan insists that women should resist being "marked." She proposes, quite radically, that it is "the staging of disappearance" that becomes the signature expression of women's subjectivity—that a feminist aesthetics might ground itself in absence rather than presence (Phelan 31). And yet Phelan's argument is fundamentally ambivalent, as she admits "the price of that disappearance is difficult to calculate" (31).

²⁵ Fleetwood's work provides important insight into the performative effects of Blackness in representation, or "what Blackness does—in the visual realm" (Guzmán). Fleetwood's thesis on Black presence and "visuality" in *Troubling Vision* holds a similar ambivalence to Phelan's, but is grounded specifically in the politics of race, Blackness, and (in)visibility: "Given the historical associations between Blackness and (in)visibility in racial discourse, the viewable Black body holds a privileged place in Black cultural criticism on performance and representation. At the same time, the Black body, as Black performance theorists have articulated, has been bound by notions of its performative abilities (i.e., the Black entertaining body)" (Fleetwood 20). Fleetwood's analysis of Blackness and visibility oscillates between Black marginalization and "(in)visibility," on the one hand, and "The Black female body as excessive body" on the other, a matter which Fleetwood acknowledges as "a widely explored topic in scholarship, artistic production, and larger cultural debates about representation, race, and gender" (105). Fleetwood focuses on work by artists like Renée Cox and hip hop performers like Li'l Kim to consider how contemporary Black women artists re-perform hyper-visibility to subversive effect (105).

spectacular ambivalence,” as Doyle says in her description of feminist art-making throughout history (“Intimacy” 154-55).

In Civil’s recent book *Swallow the Fish* (2017), an archive of Civil’s performance art alongside autotheoretical reflections on her art practice, she responds to the problematics of Black visibility and display in the history of feminist performance art, focusing on the particular problems posed by her representing herself as a self-described fat, Black, female artist. Referencing Piper’s work as influential to her own practice, and upholding the importance of Piper’s *Food* in its instantiating of a Black female gaze,²⁶ Civil also concedes that, when looking at Piper’s actual, specific body, “we see her, the Black woman performance artist, as young, light skinned, thin, and conventionally beautiful” (174). “What would it be like if she were fat and coal Black, I wonder?” Civil asks (174), to which her own performance practice—and its self-documenting and processing—becomes a response. We find in *Swallow the Fish* an archiving of Civil’s work as a self-identified “fat Black woman” (111) making work in the age of Black Lives Matter and a Trump presidency. Civil makes multiple works “after Adrian Piper” (and other BIPOC artists and theorists, including Glenn Ligon, Mona Hatoum, and Frantz Fanon), re-iterating and, in turn, transforming concepts through her particular body.

There is a rich history of selfies and “self-imaging”²⁷ practices in feminist art, one that has been extensively written on by scholars of performance, visual culture, and art history. Jones has been particularly comprehensive in her writings on what she calls “self-imaging” (*Self/Image*

²⁶ Civil takes the following stance on Piper’s *Food*: “I love this piece—the fact that she has the authority over her own body, that reading became a mechanism for a kind of transportation of the self, that she holds the photograph in her own hand. In that way, the work is oppositional to Western white notions of Black women as forever subject to only the white gaze, or as being only body as opposed to mind” (172).

²⁷ I take this term from Amelia Jones’s *Self/Image* (134).

134) practices in feminist art and the history of art broadly speaking. Jones returns to the problem of “narcissism” and its gendered dynamics throughout her work,” and her reclaiming of “narcissism” as an aesthetically and politically agential stance in feminist body art has been formative in my thinking around autotheory.²⁸ Even as narcissism paradoxically²⁹ continues to be a charge that critics wield—especially against women artists and artists of colour whose work has historically been inordinately read through the limiting lens of “identity politics”—feminist scholars like Jones have offered evocative readings that reclaim narcissism as a politicized aesthetic orientation with the potential for subversion.³⁰ Jones politicizes narcissism as a self-aware post-structuralist stance in feminist aesthetics that “opens out the self-ascribed ‘plenitude’

²⁸ To develop her argument, Jones returns to the original Greek myth of Narcissus, reading the myth alongside psychoanalytic and feminist psychoanalytic theory. The originary myth of Narcissus is one of male subjectivity, male homoerotic, and male heteroerotic desire: Narcissus is a beautiful man who saw his image in a pool of water and was fixated by his own self; he rejected male and female suitors alike, choosing instead to pine for his own (male) self until he died. Psychoanalytic accounts of narcissism deploy Narcissus, in his tormented and alienated yet conflated relationship to himself, as exemplary of female subjectivity in all its self-destructiveness and irrationality: “Thus Narcissus has predictably enough glided into the pathological realm of feminine (or feminized) perversion” (*Body Art* 178). This pathologization of the female—so central to histories of hysteria, to name but one example—has been widely critiqued by feminist scholars and will be considered throughout this project.

²⁹ It is paradoxical that art that engages with so-called identity politics (feminism, queer, black, critical race, indigenious) can be critiqued through the charge of narcissism by the hegemonic modernist art and theory establishment—represented here by Greenberg, Krauss, *Artforum* (pre-1974), and *October*—that upholds “medium specificity,” a kind of formal and conceptual “narcissism.” Krauss’s work on medium specificity and her resistance to the so-called “post-medium” age (in postmodernism) draws on “Greenberg’s dictum that painting should refer to the flatness of its canvas surface”—that the essence of a modernist artwork is the “pointing-to-itself” configuration (*Perpetual* 41). In “Video Art: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” Krauss wields the psychic mechanism of narcissism as a means of inscribing the postmodern medium of video art into the high modernist apparatus of “medium specificity” or the pointing-to-itself self-referentiality tantamount to American modern art under Greenberg). That feminist body art is threatening to this establishment—the point made by Jones above—is demonstrable in the case of Krauss’s decision to leave *Artforum* and start a new journal (*October*) after an explicit work of feminist body art by Lynda Benglis was featured in the December 1974 issue of *Artforum* (Smith, “Infuriates”).

³⁰ Jones defends performance artist Wilke’s work against the negative critiques of narcissistic self-indulgence it receives from both the patriarchal art world and from other feminists. Wilke’s body—conventionally attractive and figuratively wounded—is read as complicit with the patriarchy, and yet Jones provides a convincing reading of her work as subverting the tenets of High Modernism and Kantian aesthetics. Jones takes Wilke as an example of how narcissism might be reclaimed as politically efficacious feminist practice. Wilke’s white, heterosexual, cisgender female body faced particularly vehement criticism due to her seemingly shameless and uncritical engagement in the patriarchal status quo: as a so-called conventionally attractive woman with a relative degree of privilege taking pleasure in her body and approaching her own body *as* her work—a body that is already consumable and desirable under the logic of what bell hooks refers to as “white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (*Everybody* 4)—she is seen as being complicit with patriarchal ideology rather than critically resisting it. It is this reading of feminist self-imaging work that feminist art historians and art historiographers like Jones and Anna Chave take issue with.

of Narcissus (who would love no one but himself) to the radical contingency of self/other relations” (*Body Art* 151). Referring to Wilke’s “embodied narcissistic subjectivity” (180) in the context of 1970s body art, Jones theorizes narcissism as a performative, feminist strategy: one that has the potential to subvert the terms of patriarchy and high modernism, specifically the high modernist approach to aesthetics as “disinterested” espoused by Kant and Clement Greenberg.³¹

Piper’s *Food* emerges at a time when consequential changes were taking place in the art world at the level of medium, content, demographics, and form. Even as the late 1960s-early 1970s began to give way to a fairly coherent feminist art movement³² and other explicitly politicized and countercultural art practices, including the Black Arts movement and emergent LGBTQ+ art movements, the modernism of art critic Clement Greenberg—with its Kantian view of aesthetics as disinterested and its consensus of a supposedly apolitical formalism—still wielded considerable power in the art world. High modernist practices of abstraction, minimalism, and abstract expressionism that Greenberg’s formalist schema valued above other aesthetic modes existed in a mid-twentieth century art context that saw the rise of the “dematerialization of the art object³³” (Lippard, *Six*): practices like body art and conceptual art

³¹ Jones’s discussion of body art in the 1960s-1970s is grounded in an awareness of the art world context in which Greenberg’s formalism and high modernism still held influence, and Jones herself acknowledges the potential misreadings (or “mystified” versions) of Kantian philosophy that Greenberg popularized in art discourse. Jones perceives the suppression of embodiment in Kant-as-taken-up-by-Greenberg, and continually refers to Jackson Pollock as the masculine artist who is upheld for his presumed aesthetic capacity for “transcendence”: “In the account of Greenberg, whose formalist conception of abstract expressionism has become hegemonic and whose philosophical roots are in the works of Marx and Kant (with the latter emerging triumphant), the body of Pollock is scrupulously suppressed. In its mystified Kantianism, Greenberg’s tale of abstract expressionism as the triumphant climax of great European modernist painting takes its authority directly from his denial of the body, of subjectivity, of sensuality and desire” (*Body Art* 74).

³² Like Lynn Hershman Leeson (*Women*), Wark points to 1970 as a time that saw “the advent of the feminist movement in the arts” (“Conceptual” 47). Feminist performance art and conceptualism advances in the 1970s as well, with the advancement of the feminist art movement that continues through to subsequent decades.

³³ In *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, feminist art historian Lucy Lippard historicizes the evolution of conceptual art between the formative years of 1966 and 1972.

began to supplant traditional art media like painting and sculpture and emphasized the more ephemeral—and at the risk of sounding repetitive, conceptual—elements in the creation of artwork, including time, space, and context.³⁴

Alongside Piper, there are a number of other feminist artists working with self-imaging in their practices, including Cahun, Anderson, Benglis, Schneemann, Yayoi Kusama, Sophie Calle, Coco Fusco, Shigeko Kubota, Mary Kelly, Linda Montano, Marina Abramović, Ana Mendieta, Cindy Sherman, and Pipilotti Rist. Jones argues that, across these feminist body artists' practices, we find the “dynamic merging of body (the rhetoric of the pose) and mind (the ‘I’ of cultural production)” (*Body Art* 157) in a way that synthesizes what has previously been viewed, with the holdover of Descartes in patriarchal philosophical schemas, as dualisms. Both Schneider and Jones have theorized the potential of feminist performance art and body art in functioning as critical counter-practices that embody post-structuralist tenets, like the deconstruction of binaries such as subject/object, mind/body, and male/female.³⁵ For Jones, feminist body art allows the artist to constitute herself as both subject and object,³⁶ body and mind.

³⁴ Duchamp is often revered as the grandfather of conceptualism, and “his work enacted the philosophy that contemporary art is no longer a set of materials as much as it is a context” (Fournier, “Rosefeldt” 1).

³⁵ Jones describes her decision to focus on body art as feminist practice to problematize the history of art and criticism more broadly: “When it is engaged with through a phenomenologically informed feminism, body art can open up the entire domain of art interpretation, encouraging the development of a new reading praxis that acknowledges the masculinist, racist, homophobic, and classist assumptions underlying the disciplines of art history and criticism and their rhetoric of ‘disinterested’ aesthetic judgment and historical narration” (*Body Art* 19). I propose that autotheory is one of these “new reading practices” that Jones describes feminist body art practices as having the potential to give way to. When read in the context of Piper’s oeuvre, the consequentiality of Piper’s *Food* becomes clearer. In her subsequent artwork, Piper foregrounds the politics of gender and race; for example, in the ongoing *Mythic Being* performances where she performs exaggerated forms of Black masculinity in public spaces.

³⁶ Feminist reclamations of “narcissism,” such as Jones’s in *Body Art* and *Self/Image*, are important reminders of the context in which the use of women’s bodies in their own work, especially when those women are seen as being physically attractive, is read as narcissistic and subsequently precluded from being intellectual or conceptual. Related is the problem of the narcissistic woman objectifying herself, which is perceived as a problem for feminism when a mutually exclusive subject/object binary is presupposed. Such binaries have been and continue to be troubled by post-structuralist feminist scholars and artists who reveal the possibility that women can be both subject and object—both body and mind. This has been a dominant theme in feminist performance art since the 1960s, and artists whose work I see as particularly relevant to an understanding of autotheory as feminist practice, including Annie Sprinkle, Andrea Fraser, and Vaginal Davis, align their work explicitly with this kind of binary-troubling.

She makes this argument in relation to *Food*,³⁷ amongst other works, where “subject” and “object” refer here not specifically to the Kantian sense of the terms but to the more general patriarchal context of art history in which women, as de Beauvoir³⁸ argues, are precluded from intellectual subjectivity and the possibility of so-called “transcendence” by virtue of their de facto embodiment. When discussing body art practices, Jones supplants Cartesian binaries with her more holistic term “body-self,”³⁹ defining body art ultimately as “...a set of performative practices that, through such intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentering of the Cartesian subject of modernism. This dislocation is, I believe, the most profound transformation constitutive of what we have come to call postmodernism” (*Body Art* 1).⁴⁰ Civil’s reading of *Food* is similar to Jones’s, with Civil providing further consideration of blackness and the particular visibilities of thinness in her reading of Piper’s self-images in *Food* (Civil 173).

Kantian Philosophy and the Subject/Object Dialectic

When it comes to Kantian philosophy and feminism, the presiding understanding seems to be that Kant’s work suppresses the embodiment and subjectivity in philosophy that feminists are

³⁷ Discussing Piper in *Food*, Jones states: “she is both embodied woman-as-object of the camera’s ‘gaze’ and photographer-subject of the image” (*Body Art* 162).

³⁸ Jones observes that, historically, feminist philosophers like de Beauvoir have argued that “patriarchy works to separate women’s immanence from any possibility of cognition, selfhood, or transcendence” (*Body Art* 152).

³⁹ I take this term from Jones’s *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, where Jones discusses the post-structuralist ontologies that feminist body art and performance art practices engage and self-reflexively deconstruct.

⁴⁰ To decenter the Cartesian subject of modernism is to decenter the transcendent male subject of Kantian aesthetics that women—historically understood to be immanent (as opposed to transcendent) and “the unspoken objects of representation” (Jones, *Body Art* 157)—are positioned in opposition to; pointing to Pollock as the transcendent high modernist subject par excellence, Jones argues that “Under patriarchy, women are doubly removed from the possibility of achieving transcendence, whereas men are still able to have the fantasy of obtaining it” (152).

committed to theorizing and enacting.⁴¹ This prevailing feminist reading of Kant—which we saw with both Civil and Jones—takes issue with Kant’s perceived disregard for the material body and his notion of aesthetic “disinterest,” a notion which continues to be misunderstood. Jones describes Kantian aesthetic philosophy as attempting “to erase the vicissitudes of bodily interest” (*Self/Image* 14), and in this way she positions feminist body art practices in direct contract to Kantian aesthetics.⁴² In her view, body art “Activates the spectatorial (and often auditory and tactile) relation to pose difficult questions” that relate to issues of gender, race, embodiment, and the metaphysics of presence in a way that is, perhaps, more dialectical than Kant’s aesthetic philosophy (Jones, *Perform Repeat Record* 15).

Jones’s account of Kantian aesthetics, which perceives in Kant’s work a fundamental suppression of the body,⁴³ is found in other feminist art critical writings,⁴⁴ and is likely attributable to the hegemonic place that formalist art critic Greenberg’s “mystified Kantianism” (*Body Art* 74) holds in the mid to late twentieth century art world. But what do these readings of Kantian philosophy leave out? Piper herself has written on the consequential ways in which Greenberg’s formalism engendered an opposition between (social, political, autobiographical, racial, gendered) “content” on the one hand, and “form” on the other. She

⁴¹ The publisher’s summary for *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant* reads “Because of his misogyny and disdain for the body, Kant has been a target of much feminist criticism. Moreover, as the epitome of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, his thought has been a focal point for feminist debate over the Enlightenment legacy—whether its conceptions of reason and progress offer tools for women’s emancipation and empowerment or, rather, have contributed to the historical subordination of women in Western society” (Schott).

⁴² In Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, he advances a philosophy of aesthetics that conceives of “The work of art as fully contained, frames, and thus as ‘universal’ in its effects” (Jones, *Perform Repeat Record* 14).

⁴³ In the mid twentieth-century, Kant’s theory of aesthetics (“art for art’s sake”) was embraced by American art critic Clement Greenberg, who drew heavily on Kant to articulate and advance his mode of formalism. Margaret Morgan contextualizes the ascendancy of Greenberg’s ‘apolitical’ formalism in light of the post-war political climate, explaining how the Kantian aesthetics of “art as autonomous” gave way to Greenberg’s formalism (Morgan 170).

⁴⁴ Feminist scholars and artists, including but not limited to Jones and Civil, presuppose a distinction between Kantian philosophy on the one hand, with its suppression of subjectivity and the body, and subjectivity and embodiment on the other; whether this is an accurate reading of Kant is, in this chapter, up for question.

underscores the ways that, in American modern art, Greenberg's formalism configured "social content—particularly explicitly political subject matter—. . . as sully[ing] the 'purity' or impeding the 'transcendence' of a work" ("Logic" 576),⁴⁵ and yet her own readings of Kant—as rightfully disentangled from Greenberg—are more dialectical. Such a clear opposition between "content" and "form" seems disingenuous, especially when read in light of Kant's philosophizing of notions like "subjective universality" to resolve the problems presented by questions of aesthetic judgment and form (Kant, *Judgment* 301). In this chapter, I will discuss some of the ways in which Piper's art practice—specifically *Food*—and her philosophical writing—specifically *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*—provide a nuanced interpellation of Kantian problematics through an autotheoretical feminist practice. Furthermore, I demonstrate how Piper's focus on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* provides valuable insight into the issues that Kantian philosophy raises for feminist artists, philosophers, and scholars.

In point of fact, Greenberg's (and others') accounts of Kant are largely grounded in Kant's third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment*, where he hones in on the specific question of aesthetic judgment⁴⁶; this text and its arguments should be distinguished from Piper's *Food*, where the focus is on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and where, it follows, the specific question of

⁴⁵ In "The Logic of Modernism: How Greenberg stole the Americans away from a tradition of Euroethnic social content" (1993), Piper makes a convincing argument that the history of European art through to modernism saw formal innovation taking place alongside the presence of social and political content, and that it was not until American high modernism under Clement Greenberg in the 1950s that attention to formal concerns necessitated the exclusion of (social, political, autobiographical) content (576). Piper acknowledges how the CIA's support for Jackson Pollock is a well-known matter at the time of her writing, which reminds us that the politics and aesthetics of the transcendent male abstract expressionist Pollock is not solely a problem for feminist artists interested in infusing work with more explicitly politicized 'content': the formalist's purportedly apolitical formalism is one which merely shrouds its ideological investments.

⁴⁶ This is also acknowledged by Jones, who argues that Kant's third *Critique* exerted a particularly strong influence on "oversimplified modernist forms of art criticism in the twentieth century" (*Perform Repeat Record* 14). It is worth noting here that art criticism is a parallel discourse and practice to art making; consider the interactions between art production and reception, and the intersections of theory and discourse in these interactions, in contemporary art practices.

aesthetic judgment is more or less absent. Kant's notion of aesthetic "disinterest" has more to do with issues of judgment—the judgment of taste—than it does with the ontological metaphysics of the Transcendental Aesthetic that characterizes much of Kant's focus in *Critique of Pure Reason*, the text with which Piper is engaged in *Food*. In order for aesthetic judgment to be both subjective and universal, in Kant's view, the judgment must be based in form: this is where Greenberg's aesthetics of formalism comes in. How does Piper's body, particularly as it is made visible in the context of Piper's rigorous conceptual art practice, disrupt this Kantian view of aesthetic judgment? What form does Piper's female, racialized, nude, artist's body take within Kantian aesthetic philosophy? Is her existence as a subject "knowable" *a priori*, or does it become knowable *a posteriori* or on the basis of experience? As I read Piper's *Food* in relation to the history of autotheory, I consider the ways in which her embodied mode of wrestling with and metabolizing Kant's philosophy leads to new insights, affirmations, and subtle critiques of Kant.

While the philosophical effects of Piper's selfies in *Food* have not yet been read in light of the metaphysics of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Jones's writings on aesthetics and self-imaging practices provide a foundation from which to begin this reading. Jones opens her book *Self/Image* with an epigraph from Kant's first *Critique*.⁴⁷ She cites Kant's philosophy alongside other Western philosophers and theorists in making her claim for the integrality of self-imaging practices to our understandings of representation; following epigraphs from Kant, Henri Bergson, and Vivian Sobchack, Jones states that:

⁴⁷ The quote from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which serves as the first epigraph to Jones's Prologue, is as follows: "Accordingly, I have no knowledge of myself as I am but merely as I appear to myself. To be conscious and aware of oneself is thus very far from knowing oneself... Without some empirical representation to supply the material for thought, the act 'I think' would not take place" (Kant, *Reason* 23-24; Jones, *Self/Image* xiii).

...philosophers and cultural theorists in Euro-American culture have long recognized the inexorable links among the body, the concept and understanding and experience of the self, and visual representation or even more specifically the photographic (Kant notes clearly our *desire* for ‘empirical representation’ that led Descartes, among others, to describe this body as a secondary representation of the self, the locus of the ‘I think’). (xiii)

By opening *Self/Image* in this way, Jones frames contemporary artists’ practices of self-imaging in the context of the history of European philosophy and the important intervention that Kant makes in that history.⁴⁸ The quotation of Kant’s that Jones uses to frame her analysis of self-imaging practices in art history introduces the problem of the divide between the self as a “thing in itself” (noumena) and the self as an appearance or “mere representation” (phenomena): it is this Kantian problematic that Piper takes up through her autotheoretical self-imaging in *Food*.

Continuing her theorization of the subject/object dialectic, Jones observes a fundamental paradox in Kant’s philosophy of aesthetics that, to this day, remains unresolved:

The Kantian aesthetic attempts to suture the impossible chasm between people with sensory apparatuses that allow us access to the world (of course in a deeply ‘subjective’ way, as senses are by definition individualized) and objects by offering a system of *interpretation* that can and in fact must claim to be ‘universal’. This paradox of Kantian aesthetics, as Derrida points out, haunts the subsequent 200 years of modernist art theory and criticism. (*Seeing Differently* 27)

Jones explains that, although Kant recognizes “the subject only has access to the world of potentially aesthetic objects through his or her senses, which are by definition subjective...

Claiming universality for one’s aesthetic judgment was of course crucial for the European male philosopher” (26). She recognizes that, historically, the practice of a philosopher required

⁴⁸ As seen above, in her prologue to *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject*, Jones cites Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*; Jones also references Kant consistently throughout *Seeing Differently*.

making the leap to universality even if, as in the case of Kant, the philosophical argument that philosopher is making is one that challenges such claims to universality. As a European male philosopher, Kant sought some synthesis or “suturing” of subjectivity (perception) and objectivity (empiricism, science) in his account of the rational subject in his first *Critique*,⁴⁹ an ongoing philosophical project that Piper, following Kant, takes up and continues in *Rationality and the Structure of the Self Volumes I and II*, and the point that such suturing remains unresolved in Kant’s work is, I believe, gestured toward in Piper’s *Food*.

Jones situates Kantian aesthetics within the larger matrix of “Western representational structures” and the philosophical problematics they present:

If Kantian aesthetics is about bridging the gap between the image and its referent in the ‘real world’, between the making and the viewing subject, between the subjective and objective, then meaning-making in Euro-American culture is dominated in general by parallel systems of bridging the gap between the sign and the referent, between the objective and the subjective. Kant’s model never resolved the gap between the subjective and objective worlds except through the willful imposition of the transcendental. (*Self/Image* 3)

Just as Kantian aesthetics “attempts to suture the impossible chasm” that exists between sensation (*sensatio*) as subjective and cognition (*cognitio*) as objective (Jones, *Seeing* 27) and between sensibility and understanding, so too does Piper’s practice as a pioneering conceptualist and philosopher work to suture the chasm that exists between self-imaging and philosophizing, a chasm rife with gendered tension in light of the larger histories of art and philosophy.

⁴⁹ Focusing on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Jones states: “Kant solves the problem of how to claim universality when one’s access to art can only ever be subjective, or at least puts it in abeyance, by noting that any judgment must claim to ‘subjective universality’, a seemingly obvious contradiction in terms. Kant quite radically foregrounds the impossible paradox put in play by this tension between the objective (what Galison and Daston note will become aligned with the scientific a few decades later) and the subjective (the artistic or individual)” (*Seeing* 26).

In her discussion of work by feminist artists who use “self-imaging practices”⁵⁰ in their work, Jones describes Claude Cahun’s art in the early twentieth century as the “kinds of modern art” that “presage what would happen in the latter part of the twentieth century”—namely, that “the body could be said to be the very hinge or bridge that Kant sought in the aesthetic” (Jones, *Self/Image* 38). This is where *Food* as an autotheoretical processing or coming to terms with Kantian aesthetic philosophy comes in. That the body is the “hinge or bridge” that Kant “sought” in his philosophy but which remained insufficiently fleshy, as it were—“Kant’s model never resolved the gap between the subjective and objective worlds except through the willful imposition of the transcendental” (3)—is key when considering how Piper’s practice, as a non-white female artist using embodied and theoretically informed self-imaging practices in the mid twentieth century, contributes to this history of feminist artists who instantiate Kantian philosophical problematics in germane ways. Jones acknowledges that feminist self-imaging practices by artists like Cahun is “the means of navigating the never-to-be-fully-bridged gap between inside and outside, between the subject and the world of images/things” that Kant is working through in his philosophy. I consider Piper’s own “bold reiterative self-imaging practices” (39) in *Food*, focusing specifically on autotheoretical effects of Piper’s self-imaging as it relates to Kant’s *Critique*.

Embodying the Transcendental Aesthetic: Self-Imaging as Kantian Processing

Within the Kantian system there is the thing in itself—related to *a priori* knowledge—and there is the perception of the thing—related to *a posteriori* knowledge. You can perceive but

⁵⁰ See “‘Beneath This Mask Another Mask’: (Analogue and Digital Photography)” in Amelia Jones’s *Self/Image* for her discussion of Cahun, Wilke, Cindy Sherman, Renee Cox, Laura Aguilar, and Nikki S. Lee.

not access *a priori* the thing in itself. For Piper as an artist-philosopher and the perceiver of her self through perception, the selfie becomes an attempt to access this thing in itself through representation to herself after the live event of looking in the mirror. In this way, the selfie becomes a phenomenological mediation, a trace of Piper's wrestling with, and instantiation of, the status of the self in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

In Kantian aesthetic philosophy, the aesthetic is "that whose determining ground can be no other than subjective" (Kant, *Judgment* 294). Kantian aesthetics pertains to the sensorial or that which is perceptible by the senses; in this way, it is not unlike the etymological sense of "aesthetics" from the Greek "aisthesis" meaning "sense perception." Writing in *Critique of Judgment*, Kant defines the scope of aesthetics as "That whose determining ground can be no other than subjective" (294; 5:203). Building on fellow German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's notion of "aesthetics," Kant's use of the term "aesthetics" is "...in accordance with the ancient distinction of αἰσθητά and νοητά, to 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception'" (OED, "aesthetic"). In a 2006 article entitled "Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic," Piper opens with a definition of Kant's "transcendental aesthetic" as "the science of all principles of a priori sensibility (A 21/B 35)." The "Transcendental Aesthetic," describes the larger field of Kant's philosophical system of aesthetics, or a philosophical consideration of sensibility within which terms like "transcendental idealism" are forged. Piper explains that Kant's presuppositions, tied as they are to "aesthetics," are "sensible rather than intellectual" (Piper, "Intuition" 1) writing: "These, he argues, are the laws that properly direct our judgments of taste (B 35 - 36 fn), i.e. our aesthetic judgments as we ordinarily understand that notion in the context of contemporary art" (Piper, "Intuition" 193).

In his writings on the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant distinguishes objects into phenomena and noumena, where “phenomena” is what we perceive (representations, “mere appearances”) and noumena is “the thing in itself” or the unknowable.⁵¹ Kant famously conceives of objects in space and time as representations or “merely appearances,”⁵² and as space and time themselves as “appearances”: this is the doctrine called “transcendental idealism.”⁵³ To quote Kant:

. . . everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us, are nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself. (*Reason* 426-27)

Reading these passages, Stang names a key paradox in Kant’s widely debated notion of “transcendental idealism,”⁵⁴ a notion which, after the transcendental aesthetic, remains one of the most unresolved and widely debated questions in Kantian philosophy: “In both passages, Kant

⁵¹ In his exegesis of Kant’s notion of “transcendental idealism,” Nicholas F. Stang explains: The “concept of a transcendental object” might be fruitfully thought of as “the transcendental concept of an object”: the concept of “object” that makes experience possible. Our mind’s synthesis of representations into experience of objects is guided and made possible by the idea that there is a way objects are that must be tracked by our representations of them. . . . The concept of things in themselves is the concept of the (unknowable by us) objects (or aspects of objects) that appear to us the 3D world of space and time. They are the grounds of phenomena, while the transcendental object is the very abstract idea of those objects in space and time as the targets of our cognitive activity.

⁵² In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes that: “[...] external objects (bodies) are merely appearances, hence also nothing other than a species of my representations, whose objects are something only through these representations, but are nothing separated from them” (426-427; A370-1).

⁵³ Kant defines “transcendental idealism” in the following way: “I understand by the transcendental idealism of all appearances [Erscheinungen] the doctrine that they are all together to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves [nicht als Dinge an sich selbst ansehen], and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves [als Dinge an sich selbst]” (*Reason* 426; A369).

⁵⁴ A Kantian philosophical problem at the heart of Piper’s *Food*, transcendental idealism is widely debated: “There is probably no major interpretive question in Kant’s philosophy on which there is so little consensus” (Stang). I draw from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy’s entry on “Kant’s Transcendental Idealism” as I work to understand the Kantian mechanics of the transcendental aesthetic, even as I am aware of the problems of using encyclopaedic translations of Kant’s work as an academic crutch (Stang). Perhaps not unlike Piper at the time she made *Food*, I find myself challenged as I struggle to process the terms of Kant’s first *Critique*: as soon as I think that I have grasped a term, it starts to slip through my fingers.

describes appearances as representations but also as objects of representation. If this is correct, then Kant thinks that the sense in which an appearance is a representation is compatible with it being the object of a representation” (Stang). As a human being who exists in space and time, Piper as the artist in *Food* is an “object(s) of an experience” and therefore “nothing but appearance(s), i.e., mere representation(s)” (Kant, *Reason* A490–1/B518–9). But she is also an object of representation, foregrounded as such through the act of photographing herself. Rendered aesthetically, Piper becomes perceptible through her senses—which, early in Kant’s *Critique*, is posited in contrast to the “unmediated,” “precognitive” process of “intuition” (Piper, “Intuition” 2)—when she views herself through the mediation of the mirror and, through the senses of herself and others (who will only have access to her image once the performance is finished and Piper has developed the film), when her reflected image is captured in a photograph. This interpretation of Kant evoked conceptually in *Food* also comes through in Piper’s later philosophical writings, where she describes how in Kant’s Transcendental Analytic, “Kant effectively rethinks the independence of intuition and understanding and finally offers an account in which the two are interdependent” (Piper, “Intuition” 8).

What is interesting here is that, as autotheoretical practices, feminist body art and conceptualism become not simply legitimate sites of theorizing but necessary sites from which to work through and instantiate philosophical problems that are long-debated or difficult to resolve. Piper herself states “Contemporary artistic practice poses an interesting case against which to test the soundness of Kant’s thesis and the dilemma it appears to engender” (“Intuition” 6). The example Piper refers to here is the tension between intuition and understanding, and the role that mediation plays in these epistemological modes; arguing in favour of the generative capacities of

contemporary art practice as a mode of knowledge-making, Piper states that “Contemporary artists bear a special relationship to intuition itself, in Kant’s technical sense, because they have unmediated intuitive access to the material objects they create” (“Intuition” 6). Piper’s practice of self-imaging is a way to better understand—through a physical, material, and ultimately auto-oriented practice—what Kant means when he describes his notions of the transcendental aesthetic and transcendental idealism. Piper’s body as it reads Kant and traces the process of her reading through marking up the physical text of Kant’s *Critique* and capturing her image in photographs is, in a way, “test(ing) the soundness” of Kant’s theses by enacting its theses through embodied demonstration.⁵⁵ Piper’s grounding in the specific practice of body art is particularly notable here, given Piper’s claim that contemporary artists “have unmediated intuitive access to the material objects they create” (“Intuition” 6)—objects which, in the case of body art, includes the artist’s body as represented live (in the case of performance) and through photographic documentation and self-imaging (via photography, video, etc.). This returns us again to the aporias in Kant’s philosophy of the rational subject as taken up in Piper’s *Food*, since Piper, working with her body, has “unmediated intuitive access” to it through the process of self-imaging while at the same time requiring such mediating processes to confirm that she, in the terms of Kantian philosophy, “exists” over the course of the work (Piper, *Food*).

⁵⁵ The example of Kantian transcendental idealism is notable here, with modern and contemporary theorists alike troubled by “the apparent consequences of (Kant’s) tendency to identify appearances with representations of them” (Stang). The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes that “One standard strategy is to say that Kant is simply being sloppy: he means that appearances are the objects of our representations, not that they literally are those representations” (Stang). But what if he does mean it literally? Or, what would a philosophical practice that takes this quite literally look like? With Piper’s *Food*, we get a work that instantiates through self-imaging the apparent literalism of Kant’s philosophy as articulated in his first *Critique*: that the body of the philosopher, or the artist-philosopher in Piper’s case, as an object in space and time, is simultaneously an “appearance” (Kant, *Reason* 426-27) and a “mere representation” (426); and that feminist body art, with its ontological straddling of subjectivity and objectivity, engenders a representational context that supports and upholds embodied self-imaging practice.

As we see in Jones's thesis on feminist body art, the view that a woman can be simultaneously subject and object of representation was a site of empowerment for feminist art practices that emerged from a phallogentric representational history—one in which women and people of colour were, in representations by white men, overdetermined by their bodies. With Piper's *Food* and its foregrounding of Kantian philosophy, this self-imaging can also be read as processing, through embodied instantiation, the tensions that exist within Kant's philosophy of representation (repraesentatio): namely, the dialectic between sensation (sensatio) as subjective and cognition (cognitio) as objective, where both are aspects of what Kant calls representation with consciousness (perceptio) or "transcendental unity of apperception" (Kant, *Reason* 398). To extend this reading deeper into philosophical distinctions within Kant's philosophy of representation, the photographs of Piper's racialized female body haunting the photographic surface in varying degrees of visibility, can be understood as instantiating the tension between intuition, as singular, immediate representation, and concept, as general, mediated representation (Janiak).

In her discussion of self-imaging practices, Jones observes, "(Kant notes clearly our desire for 'empirical representation' that led Descartes, among others, to describe the body as a secondary representation of the self, the locus of the 'I think')" (*Self/Image* xiii). In response to the desire for "empirical representation" espoused by Kant, whose philosophical project attempts to square philosophy with empirical science, Piper provides evidence in the form of a photograph of her existence in the world. In this way, the photograph serves as an "empirical representation" or evidence, a posteriori, of her existence over the course of the performance. Could it be that self-imaging practices are a kind of paradoxical attempt at empiricism situated in the liminal and

potentially irresolvable space between subject and object that extends beyond a feminist politics of objectification to broader philosophical questions related to the metaphysics of ontology?

In her artist statement for *Food*, Piper configures Kantian philosophy as that which “was shaking the foundations of my self-identity,” introducing a fundamental problem of the divide between the demands of philosophy on the one hand, and the desires, affects, and needs of the artist’s embodied self or “I,” on the other. This statement by the artist, which summarizes the conceptual premise of Piper’s *Food*, is preserved in the Adrian Piper Research Archive in Berlin along with the rest of the performance documentation,⁵⁶ including the marked up *Critique of Pure Reason* and Piper’s photographs. It reads as follows:

Private loft performance continuing through summer, while reading and writing a paper on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, fasting, doing yoga, and isolating myself socially. Whenever I felt that I was losing my sense of self due to the profundity of Kant’s thought, I went to the mirror to peer at myself to make sure I was still there, and repeat aloud the passage in the *Critique* (underlined on following pages) that was shaking the foundations of my self-identity, until it was just (psychologically manageable) words. I recorded these attempts to anchor myself, by photographing myself and tape-recording the reiterated passages (the tape has since been destroyed). These attempts did not succeed, so I eventually abandoned them, and just studied the *Critique*. Upon finishing the paper, I found I could not look at or think about the *Critique of Pure Reason* for two years afterwards. (Piper, *Food*)

It is this fear of losing her self that comes with the practice of reading Kantian philosophy in isolation that sparks Piper’s movement towards the mirror with her camera, prompting her to take self-portraits to ensure that she still “exists” as a body with a reflection. Piper describes the

⁵⁶ As a private performance, *Food* is particularly dependent upon documentation for people to view the work long after the performance took place. As documentation, it functions as an archive of the effects that philosophy has on Piper as a black female artist working in early 1970s America. The didactic panel contextualizing *Food* in Tate Modern’s sprawling group exhibition *Performing for the Camera* states: “The original presentation included 44 pages of a paperback edition of Kant’s text torn out and annotated by Piper” (Tate Modern 2016). I have accessed these pages through the Adrian Piper Archive in Berlin, where they have digitized scans of the original text that Piper marked up over the course of the private performance as archival material and performance detritus.

resulting self-portraits and voice recordings as “attempts to anchor myself”: in addition to serving as documentation to anchor the performance in time (after the live event—a “private loft performance” without an audience), the self-imaging functions as a literalizing of Kant’s transcendental aesthetic by materially grounding or “anchoring” the artist in space and time through the phenomenological confirmation of the “I” that the narcissistic⁵⁷ mechanism—whereby the self is doubled (becoming self and self)—provides.

In his “General remarks on the transcendental aesthetic,” Kant articulates his thesis of the transcendental aesthetic:

We have therefore wanted to say that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us; and that if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. (Kant, *Reason* 168)

Reality is dependent upon our perception of it as subjects with sensorial capacities, and if we remove the subject—here Piper (as artist-philosopher, subject)—then the objects in space and time—here also Piper (as art object, as object in space and time that can be perceived by the subject/is constituted through that subject’s perception)—“would disappear” (168). It is this notion of Kantian “transcendental idealism” and the “transcendental aesthetic” that Piper instantiates in *Food*. As an artist, Piper demonstrates a belief in the “transcendental idealism” of Kantian philosophy in a way that involves a degree of abstraction and a suspension of disbelief

⁵⁷ I refer to “narcissism” here in the most literal sense: the act of the subject looking at herself or himself, as found in the mythological trope of Narcissus gazing at his reflection in a pool of water (though this could be another reflective surface, like a mirror). It is this doubling into subject and object that the narcissistic mechanism involves, and that Piper’s *Food* and Kant’s *Critique* wrestle with.

that contributes to the work's conceptual punch: that she, as a subject and as an object in space and time might “disappear”—as a unified and coherent self⁵⁸—during the course of her disciplined engagement with Kant is enacted in the conceit of *Food*.

The selfie-taking ritual that Piper engages in is an instantiation of Kant's view, espoused here, that “all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance” (Kant, *Reason* 168): by capturing her phenomenological perception (“intuition”) of her self in the mirror as the material object and representation (“the representation of appearance”) of a photograph, Piper performatively literalizes ideas that Kant investigates. Processing through an embodied practice Kant's theory of transcendental idealism, Piper makes the attempt, conceptually, to “abstract from all subjective conditions of human intuition” through the simultaneously ascetic and aesthetic practice of reading Kant's first *Critique*.⁵⁹ That she is not able to literally “abstract” from these conditions comes through in the content and form of the resulting selfies—performance documentation and conceptual works of art in which the artist-philosopher's body—gendered as female, racialized as not white, but also not exactly Black.⁶⁰

The selfies in *Food* are representation of the self to the self. They become a performative, phenomenological feminist evidencing of Kantian problematics, whereby Piper takes a photograph of herself as a means of navigating the Kantian terrain of *a priori* and *a posteriori*

⁵⁸ In *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume II: A Kantian Conception*, Piper spends time working through those conditions which Kant conceives as necessary for a unified and coherent self (293; Kant, *Critique* 149).

⁵⁹ “Perhaps the central and most controversial thesis of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that human beings experience only appearances, not things in themselves; and that space and time are only subjective forms of human intuition that would not subsist in themselves if one were to abstract from all subjective conditions of human intuition” (Stang).

⁶⁰ A great deal of Piper's artwork—particularly works made between 1960s-1980s—performatively and conceptually engages with Piper's liminal racial identity as a half-Black and half-white woman, including: *I Am the Locus* (1975), *My Calling (Card)* (1986) on the problems of ‘passing’, *You Don't Want Me Here* (1992), *Ur-Mutter* (1989), *Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features* (1981), and *Self-Portrait as Nice White Lady* (1995).

reasoning: once the film develops, Piper will theoretically know, *a posteriori*, that she exists. Piper's act of taking a self-portrait or "selfie" as a means of empirically and experientially securing confirmation that she "exists" as a body can be interpreted as her instantiating the Kantian problematic between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge through an autotheoretical practice. In this instantiation, the selfie provides *a posteriori* knowledge—or knowledge known on the basis of experience (rather than *a priori* knowledge, known independent of experience) of Piper's existence in the world as a self with a body and a reflection. In a way, this selfie-taking can be understood to be a "pseudorational mechanism" of the kind Piper elaborates on in *Rationality* and which I discuss later in this chapter. The selfie is Piper's means of evidencing the existence of her self as a rational and an embodied subject that exists in space and time. That the instability of representation is a key problem for Kant—who seeks to bridge metaphysics with empiricism—comes through in the (in)visibility of Piper in the photographs and whether the photograph itself as an evidencing object of some kind of empirical representation can be trusted as such. Just because Piper appears to us on the surface of the photograph does not necessarily mean, Kant's philosophy would hold, that we have access to her as "the thing in itself."

Put another way, Piper's selfies in *Food* serve as a trace of Piper's process of physically instantiating the tensions of Kant's "empirical deduction" as it presses up against the "transcendental deduction" through the ghostly image of the artist-philosopher that appears in the photograph. According to Kant, "transcendental deduction" refers to "the way in which concepts can be related to objects *a priori*" (Kant, *Reason* 220), or independent of human (sensorial) experience; in contrast, "empirical deduction" refers to "how a concept is acquired through experience and reflection on it" (220). In his section "On the Deduction of the Pure Concepts of

the Understanding,” Kant outlines a key problematic with regards to the functioning of the understanding in relation to the distinction between subject and object: “namely how subjective conditions of thinking should have objective validity, i.e., yield conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects; for appearances can certainly be given in intuition without functions of the understanding” (222). Speculatively speaking, Piper’s self-imaging is a reconciliatory response to this problematic: by making the self and one’s perception of the self have “objective validity” (222) through transmuting this perspective into an object (the photograph), and then by infusing this self-imaging with philosophical rigour via the conceptual premise of *Food*—that the artist as such is becoming “spirit” through a self-abnegating engagement with Kant’s *Critique*, Piper’s “appearances” brush up against “the understanding”—at least conceptually (222). The selfie is an attempt to transmute that which is accessible to intuition as that which is accessible to understanding: to transmute “subjective conditions of thinking” that perceive the self to these perceptions as having “objective validity” (222). For the feminist body artist, this becomes, quite literally, the transmuting of the subject into an object-subject by way of the selfie.

Resonant with the modus operandi of autotheory as feminist practice, *Food* is as much a practice of the artist seeking to know or understand herself, as it is a practice of the artist seeking to know or understand philosophy. Writing on her physical copy of Kant’s book, Piper draws a box around the words “knows himself,” scribbling an exclamative “NB!” that reads as “NG!” in the adjacent margin (Kant, *Reason* 472). These moments of semantic slippage are found throughout Piper’s marginalia and remind the reader, at the level of form, of the embodied and affective excess that engaging with philosophy provokes in the artist-philosopher as she ritualistically metabolizes Kant through her own (sensorial, physical, intellectual) system. We

find traces of her engagement with Kant on the surface of the page, witnessing the moments in Kant's *Critique* that are most resonant to Piper. Piper understands the importance of self-consciousness to the Kantian subject (Piper, *Rationality* 53), and the fact that, in the Kantian system, "to be self-conscious we must at least make this general distinction between objective and merely subjective connections of representations" (Stang). In both *Food* and in *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, Piper clarifies the Kantian conception of the rational self through an embodied and self-referential feminist practice. "For Kant," Piper states, "self-consciousness is a necessary precondition for unified moral agency, not a contingent product of it. My account follows Kant's in this regard" (*Rationality* 52). Through the self-reflexivity of her self-imaging and personal reflections, Piper performs such "self-consciousness" (Piper, *Rationality* 52).

In Kantian philosophy, there is a doubling effect in relation to Kant's conception of the subject, where there is the empirical subject and the transcendental unity of apperception, which refers to the "self-consciousness" that one has of their existence *as* a subject (Azeri 271). For Kant, "Pure apperception or the original apperception is the self-consciousness which while producing the representation 'I think' cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation" (Kant, *Critique* B132f). Much of Kant's writing takes up the complicated enmeshment of subjectivity and objectivity when it comes to a human being (dependent as they are on their sensorial capacities for perception and, it follows, for knowledge and understanding) being able to "know"; the tension between Kant's empirical self and the transcendental subject of apperception is, in this way, tied as much to questions of epistemology as to questions of ontology.

Piper describes the work she was making in the period between 1968 and 1992 as “meta-art,” citing this as a new conceptual mode of practice which “requires an epistemic self-consciousness . . . namely, viewing ourselves as the aesthetic objects we are, then elucidating as fully as possible the thoughts, procedures, and presuppositions that so define us” (*Order Vol II* 21). The self-consciousness necessitated by Piper’s “meta-art” extends further than standard postmodern self-awareness (as we find in meta-fiction, for example) to a literalizing of the subject-object awareness that we bear witness to in Piper’s *Food*.⁶¹ The practice of “meta-art,”⁶² as Piper describes it, requires the dual practice of “viewing ourselves as the aesthetic objects we are,” which Piper does through the self-imaging practices of repeatedly photographing her mirrored reflection throughout *Food*, and then “elucidating as fully as possible the thoughts, procedures, and presuppositions that so define us,” an exegesis or articulation of the artist’s subjectivity in a manner that is metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological.

Selfies and Specularization

In *Food*, Piper’s self-portraits are photographs—often underexposed—in which the artist is nude or in different states of undress (topless and wearing Black underwear, or wearing underwear and a Black teeshirt); holding the camera at the height of her bellybutton, she faces the mirror and takes a snapshot of her self in the reflection. Piper uses the camera in conjunction

⁶¹ Jones notes how “many feminist artists working in the 1970s and 1980s relied on the binary [Black and white, male and female, subject and object] while critiquing it” (*Seeing* 12).

⁶² The critic is a key focal point for Kantian aesthetic theory, and Piper distinguishes art criticism—the vocation of the critic—from “meta-art” (Piper, *Order Vol II* 22).

with the mirror to give way to the “doubling”⁶³ of narcissism⁶⁴ or the splitting into subject and object respectively. The camera is the mediating instrument that transmutes, through the physics of light, the image of the objective world into a re-presentation. But the mirror also serves an important function in the mechanism of Piper’s selfie; Piper does not turn the camera toward her self to capture her image but, instead, turns it toward the mirror to capture her image as it is reflected by the external (and inverting) object of the mirror.

Visible⁶⁵ in the photographs is the Kodak Brownie camera Piper uses in her *Food for the Spirit* work.⁶⁶ The photographs were shot on Kodak film and developed at the local drugstore near Piper’s studio/apartment in SoHo, New York (APRAF Exhibitions Assistant; McMillan 146). Described as a “revolution” that “democratized photography,” the Brownie camera inaugurates what we have come to know today as the “snapshot”: an image of the everyday captured nearly instantaneously and developed at one’s convenience (Dowling). By introducing the “snapshot” to the masses,⁶⁷ the Kodak Brownie camera marks a major shift in the history of

⁶³ In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir describes the “doubling” of the narcissistic orientation when she advances a reading of the narcissistic woman that bears resemblance to Freud’s (756). Consistent with her approach to feminist theory, which focuses on the role of women’s material and economic circumstances in perpetuating subjugation, de Beauvoir acknowledges that women’s propensity toward narcissism is a matter of “circumstances” rather than an inherent essence of femininity—but that it is nevertheless a problem for many women. It is woman’s social, economic, political, and philosophical status that leads women to see themselves as objects more readily than as subjects; Irigaray would take a different view and argue that it is because the very basis of subjectivity (and language) is masculine. In the postwar period in which de Beauvoir is writing, women do not have access to the “virile activities” that men do, and their passivity is entrenched by their having been objectified as “passive and desirable” since puberty (756). And so, women experience “the ecstasy of the mirror” (759) and the illusory pleasures of “doubling” that the mirror brings. By “doubling,” de Beauvoir refers to the splitting of the woman “into a male subject and a female object” that takes place in the narcissistic scene (757).

⁶⁴ Jones unpacks the political and aesthetic potential of “Narcissism as manifested in body art (through a fixation on performing the self),” embracing narcissism for its potentially radical implications rather than focusing on the term’s negative connotations (*Body Art* 46).

⁶⁵ The visibility both of Piper’s body and the camera that she is holding varies across the different photographs, as some are more underexposed than others.

⁶⁶ This point was confirmed for me via an e-mail from the Exhibitions Assistant of the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation in Berlin in 2017 (APRAF Exhibitions Assistant, “archival”).

⁶⁷ The Kodak Brownie camera “invented low-cost photography by introducing the concept of the snapshot to the masses” (Wikipedia, “Brownie (camera)”).

photography: making “cumbersome” equipment and tedious processing previously available to a specialized few significantly more accessible to the public (Dowling). Arguing that the Brownie can be considered “the most important camera ever made,” Stephen Dowling explains how it has “captured more of the twentieth century than any other kind of camera.”

The history of photography is intricately connected to the history of self-imaging practices and philosophical questions around the status of—and the relation between—the subject, body, and self. That the camera is visible in the photographs, with Piper holding it near the center of her torso (a few inches below her exposed breasts), makes it a predecessor of “selfies.” Most simply, the “selfie” is a photographic practice—or more specifically, what Jones would call a “self-imaging” practice—that takes the twentieth century invention of the “snapshot” (which was inaugurated by the Kodak Brownie camera), and uses the reflective surface of the mirror to enable self-portraiture through the snapshot or, in other cases, points the camera directly toward one’s self to take the image (a pose enabled through technological development of lightweight cameras and camera phones). While the practice takes on a particular aesthetic and political charge in feminist work, self-imaging (and, related, the practice of taking selfies) its scope is not limited to feminist artists. Jones acknowledges the use of self-imaging practices by male artists in the history of art, and her discussion of the problematics in French photographer-inventor Hippolyte Bayard’s 1840 *Self Portrait as a Drowned Man* (*Self/Image* xiv) bears resemblance to my discussion of Piper’s *Food* as processing, through performative instantiation, certain issues within Kant’s philosophical system: “With this complex image,” Jones explains, “Bayard gets at something fundamental about the body in relation to the image, something that, indeed, provided the major impetus to the development of photographic technologies: the desire for the image to

render up the body *and thereby the self* in its fullness and truth” (xiv). For Piper, the selfie becomes a means of thinking through—in a visual and material way—Kant’s transcendental aesthetic by thinking through the relation between the body and the representational image.

As mentioned, the mirror plays as much of a role in Piper’s self-imaging practice as the Kodak brownie camera does, and this doubling effect in *Food*—characteristic of feminist self-imaging practices more broadly speaking (and a key factor driving critiques of “narcissism” against these practices, at least historically)—has precedents in Kantian philosophy as well. Stepping back from Kant, for a moment, I turn to the opening scene of the 1995 comedy *Clueless*, an unassumingly intelligent⁶⁸ and satirical romantic comedy directed by Amy Heckerling to playfully illustrate the ways in which photographic doubling functions as a mode of knowledge for women. In the opening of *Clueless*—following a montage of protagonist Cher Horowitz’s glamorous life in Beverly Hills—we are shown scenes that demonstrate Cher’s class privilege—pool parties, high fashion, with the opening line narrated by Cher: “I know what you’re thinking: is this like a Noxzema commercial or what? But seriously, I actually have a way normal life for a teenage girl” (*Clueless*). The irony between her describing her daily rituals and the sheer privilege of her life establishes the satirical bent of the film: Cher selects her outfit for the day using a now-dated, but then ultra-cool-looking, computer program. Later in the film, as she gets ready for her date with Christian, Cher stands at the entrance to her gigantic mechanized closet with Dionne: “I don’t trust mirrors, so I always take polaroids.” For whatever reason, this moment in the film has stuck with me.

⁶⁸ The movie *Clueless* is itself cheekily aware of the ways in which male-authored philosophy performs certain kinds of social/cultural capital and meaning, a point which will become even more important in my following chapter; in an iconic scene, Paul Rudd’s character reads Nietzsche by the pool.

Rhetorically, the distrust of the mirror is the cause for her action of taking polaroid photos of herself as an aid in helping her choose her outfit for the day. Cher's best friend Dionne snaps a polaroid of Cher posing in her outfit, which she will then consult to see if this is the right outfit for her date rather than looking in the mirror. It is not clear why Cher distrusts mirrors but trusts polaroids, and in many ways this scene is heightening the film's project of satirizing the Beverley Hills teenage elite more than it is advancing a Kantian argument on the status of the self. Cher's choice to have her self-image captured in a photograph—with the immediacy of the “instant”-developing polaroid preferred over looking at her reflection in real-time in the distorting surface of the mirror—is worthy of theoretical attention in light of my discussion of Piper's proto-selfies.

There are differences between Piper's and Cher Horowitz's self-imaging, even as the shared representational mechanism is, I believe, an interesting parallel that connects feminist conceptual art and its philosophical roots to mainstream popular culture.⁶⁹ This scene in *Clueless*, however, echoes the Kantian tensions between the real of the body versus the appearance of the body—tensions which are longstanding throughout the history of Western philosophy, and which takes on new valence with the performative turn in philosophy. Here we see that a representation of the self through the mediation of the photograph is more desirable to the subject for its perceived trustworthiness, than through one's own embodied sense perceptions in real-time. In *Food*, Piper plays with this tension as it relates to whether or not she can be said to still “exist” after submitting herself—embodied as she is—to the all-consuming intellectual practice of reading Kant's *Critique*.

⁶⁹ For one, Piper takes a “selfie” in that she herself takes the photograph of herself, and she uses the reflection of the mirror as a kind of double-mediation in the process. Cher, on the other hand, has her friend Dionne—a Black woman with a similar class privilege as Cher—take the photograph, so it is not a “selfie” in the strict sense of the term. There is no mirror involved in the staging, so there is only one degree of mediation via the polaroid camera.

The use of the mirror (an instrument of narcissistic doubling) as a means of ensuring that one still “exists” as a physical body—within the contexts of philosophy and aesthetics—is a theme that has been explored by other feminist artists, including Lebanese-Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum.⁷⁰ In Hatoum’s *YOU ARE STILL HERE* (2013), a sculptural work that consists of sandblasted mirror glass and metal fixings in which the eponymous text is written across the mirror’s surface, the mirror provides textual confirmation that the viewer is “still here”—which is to say, still alive and producing a mirror-image reflection. The viewer becomes the image reflected back in the mirror, introducing a participatory element to the work. I came across this piece as I walked through Mona Hatoum’s retrospective at the Tate Modern in the spring of 2016, the same morning that unexpectedly brought me to the documentation of Piper’s *Food* in the Tate Modern’s adjacent exhibition “Performing for the Camera.”

Hatoum’s *YOU ARE STILL HERE* takes on a more nuanced and self-reflexive meaning as I consider the evolution of her practice as an artist: as a female artist who was working across performance, body art, and video in 1970s London—often featuring her own body in her work as well as other autobiographical material⁷¹—Hatoum’s more recent work tends toward the formalist, disembodied, and controlled. As I walk through her retrospective, I notice how her early body art work is relegated to the margins of the exhibition while larger and more spectacular sculpture and installation work—where the autobiographical self is more abstract—takes up the most space. Both Hatoum and Piper seem to recognize the ambivalently affirming effects of the narcissistic turn to the mirror as evidence of one’s existence, and both artists’

⁷⁰ Hatoum has also created works that are autotheoretical in impulse, such as her 1988 video *Measures of Distance*.

⁷¹ In the case of *Measures of Distance*, this includes letters between the artist and her mother as well as video footage of the artist’s mother in the shower.

practices exemplify the ways in which feminist conceptualist artists work across formalism, abstraction, and more explicitly embodied and politicized modes.

The mirror image is not an exact image of ourselves but an inverted reflection, an inversion of our bodies as objects in space and time. Irigaray uses this point as a conceit in her thesis in *Speculum*, where she configures the distorted view of reality that the mirror provides as a metaphor for the distorting effects that patriarchal views of the world have on our understandings of women and women's bodies. Far from being objective, Irigaray argues, the view of reality reflected in the surface of the mirror is subjective, gendered (as male, or as not female), and distorting (the mirror reflection is an inversion).⁷² Kant himself acknowledges the mirror image as an inversion; the mirror presents a liminal point for Kant in his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science*.⁷³ Irigaray's *Speculum* is another example of feminist autotheory that both engages with Kant and is autotheoretical.⁷⁴

Speculum is an example of a feminist critique of Kant and "the false universals that plague philosophy" (Irigaray, "Seminar"). In autotheory, the particular, specific body of the philosopher—or the artist-philosopher, in Piper's case—instantiates the feminist practice of

⁷² As Irigaray states in *Speculum*, "...what matters is not the existence of the object—as such it is indifferent—but the simple effect of a representation upon the subject, its reflection, that is, in the imagination of a man" (207).

⁷³ "What can be more like my hand or my ear, and more equal in all points, than its image in the mirror? And yet I cannot put such a hand as is seen in the mirror in the place of its original; for if the original was a right hand, the hand in the mirror is a left hand, and the image of the right ear is a left ear, which could never serve as a substitute for the other. Here are no inner differences that any understanding could think; and yet the differences are inner as far as the senses tell us, for the left hand cannot be enclosed in the same boundaries as the right (they cannot be congruent) notwithstanding all their mutual equality and similarity; the glove of the one hand cannot be used on the other" (Kant, *Prolegomena* 37; Irigaray, *Speculum* 203).

⁷⁴ *Speculum of the Other Woman* can be read as Irigaray's reading of the work of philosophers and theorists, from Plato to Freud, as autotheory. Irigaray explains that she wrote *Speculum of the Other Woman* "because I was a woman and the Western story of philosophy did not correspond to my autobiography" (Irigaray, "Seminar"). By autobiography here I take her to mean this as her lived experience as a sexuate—namely, feminine—being, an important point for Irigaray that has kept her divided from other feminist French theorists like de Beauvoir and Cixous. "Obviously myself-as-woman has been woven into the fabric of *Speculum*," Irigaray says.

autotheory as a means of engaging with Kantian philosophy. So, in “Paradox A Priori,” the chapter of *Speculum* devoted to Kant, Irigaray speaks as a woman⁷⁵ to critique Kant and Western philosophy more broadly for failing to recognize the gendered constitution of their own philosophical perspectives—namely, that their philosophical thinking is shaped by their “sexuate” existence as male. “It is my gesture in *Speculum*,” Irigaray explains, “to reveal how the philosopher expresses their subjectivity in a presumed objective terrain. In *Speculum*, I make appear the philosopher’s subjectivity in their presumed objectivity” (“Seminar”). In Irigaray’s understanding of Kantian philosophy, women represent nature and matter that men—as reason and the mind—exert control over. Both Irigaray’s practice and her argument are, ultimately, autotheoretical, with her arguing that all Kantian notions, including the transcendental object, are “...always already defined in/by the subjectivity of man” (*Speculum* 204-05), where “man” is not a neutral, universal category, but a subject positioning gendered as male.

Through abstraction, Irigaray explains, male philosophers and theorists present their work as universal and generalizable, even as it might be grounded in their own lived experience as men. Irigaray takes to task the problem of male-authored philosophical discourse not acknowledging itself as such, inquiring into the mechanisms of language that facilitate the elision of the particular speaking subject in the name of “universal” truths that are without gender or body. Irigaray’s project begins with an analysis of the exclusion of women or the feminine from

⁷⁵ As a scholar attuned to the imperatives of trans-inclusion in feminism (as well as inclusion of other gender non-conforming folks, including those identifying as genderqueer, genderfluid, and non-binary), I emphasize that one must consider any discussion of “gender difference” in context. Irigaray’s theoretical writing—which began in the 1970s and continues through to the present—presupposes a gender binary of male/female, and a great deal of her writing is predicated on there being discrete “sexuate difference” between the two genders (Irigaray, “Seminar”): such a view is at best unfashionable, at worst exclusionary, in the context of contemporary feminism.

discourse and subjectivity.⁷⁶ When it comes to participating in language, Irigaray recapitulates the options that are open to her: she can either speak as man (or “neuter”—without “sex difference”) and be intelligible, or she can utter as a female and be deemed unintelligible (for example, hysterical). In order for her to “speak intelligently” (and intelligibly) as a woman, and to take part in philosophical discourse as a being whose body is gendered and inscribed as female or feminine, she must enter into the discursive mechanisms of subject-formation through a method she terms mimesis.⁷⁷ Piper professes her desire for a similar “abstraction” and a transcendence of her (gendered, racialized) body in works like *Food* and texts like “Flying.” Ultimately, Irigaray rejects Kant’s “transcendental illusion” for its divide of the transcendental from the phenomenal, concluding that this issue in Kant’s philosophy grows from the philosopher’s repression of his relationship to “the mother” (Irigaray, “Seminar”).

The degree of the artist’s visibility varies over the course of Piper’s photographs, with consistent underexposure rendering the artist more and less visible in different images.⁷⁸ Piper plays with the paradoxes of visibility as a way of rendering sensory intuition—the transcendental aesthetic—intelligible, while at the same time playing with the ambivalence around visibility

⁷⁶ Responding to Lacanian theory as a feminist theorist, Irigaray states “...the articulation of the reality of my sex is impossible in discourse, and for a structural, eidetic reason. My sex is removed, at least as the property of a subject, from the predicative mechanism that asserts discursive coherence” (*This Sex* 149).

⁷⁷ I pause here to acknowledge that the male/female binary invoked here by 1970s feminist theory functions symbolically in my discussion of the gendered politics and aesthetics of “autotheory” as a mode. Acknowledging this gendered history of philosophy and feminist critiques of philosophy by theorists like Irigaray is important when historicizing autotheory in its different manifestations. It is true that the male philosopher as phallic arbiter of knowledge has been at the very least problematized over the past century, with philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida critiquing these terms themselves. But the importance of Irigaray’s work stands, particularly her maintaining the need for male philosophers to acknowledge themselves as male, and to acknowledge the situated-ness (to take Haraway’s postmodern feminist term) of their knowledge in a gendered or what Irigaray calls the “sexuate” body.

⁷⁸ I will note that I am less interested in problems of visibility and presence and more interested in theorizing the ways in which feminist performance art and body art practices function as works of autotheory. Taking this approach allows me to gain insight into the politics and aesthetics of autotheory as a post-1960s feminist practice that, while gaining traction with a flashy new term in the 2010s, has deep roots in these earlier feminist art movements.

within feminist performance art practices at the time (Phelan, *Unmarked* 31). Jones argues that feminist self-imaging practices are ripe for revealing the ways in which the body always exceeds representation: the image is “never enough to contain the bodies it renders...Something always escapes the image (the image is, again, never enough to contain the bodies it renders)” (*Self/Image* 23). As Jones maintains, something always exceeds the image (*Self/Image* xiv), and in Piper’s *Food* it might be the Black female as conceptualist and as philosopher that exceeds what is intelligible and legible in the eyes of what hooks refers to as the white supremacist patriarchy of America—and, particularly importantly for *Food*, what is intelligible in the German idealist philosophy of Kant.

Fleetwood defines race as an “iteration through theories of performativity” (20). To be sure, iteration forms an integral aspect of Piper’s performance in *Food* and of her oeuvre more broadly. Iterability is the phenomenon whereby out of repetition comes the possibility of difference, and iteration therefore bears resemblance to notions of the mimetic like that described by Irigaray and discussed in relation to Kraus’s work in Chapter 2. With Butler’s notion of “performativity,” tied as it is to Derrida’s notion of iterability, every performance involves the citation of past performances (“citationality”) and every performance gives rise to the possibility of performing differently (“iterability”) or, put another way, of engendering transformation. Whether it is Piper iterating her racial identity in performative ways—her Blackness (*Self Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features* (1981)), her whiteness (*Self Portrait as a Nice White Lady* (1995))—or her gender in performative ways—performing in drag as a caricatured Black man in the *Mythic Being* series (1973-) (McMillan 95-96)—her practice involves embodied iteration and repeated action as a mode of critique. Piper’s work is about abstraction

and formalism while at the same time being about the gendered and racialized body: an artist and a philosopher, Piper is invested in both aesthetic and political concerns.

As discussed, autotheory as feminist practice engages *a posteriori* knowledges, drawing on theory and one's lived experience to make observations, hypothesize, and draw conclusions. This grounding of knowledge in experience—what Kant would call *a posteriori*—has been central to feminist theory from its onset, with women historically having more access to the material of their lives than to philosophical texts, and thus drawing from their lives—and, through the practice of consciousness-raising during the second-wave of feminism, the lives of other women that they find resonant with their own experience—to deduce truths about “women’s experience” in a given context. As we move into postmodernism, the interest is less in a stable conception of the “female body” and more in a multiple and fluid conception of gender, the body, and the self. With autotheory as post-1960s feminist practice, we witness the invocation of new ways of doing theory or philosophy that shuttle between theory and lived experience in a given body, community, social system, and discursive and material economy.

Metabolization and the Margins

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, *Food* is an early work of feminist conceptual art in which the artist, Piper, processes Kant’s first *Critique* through an autotheoretical practice that involves monastically reading Kant and capturing her self-image through the doubling processes of using a camera and a mirror. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asks “How are

synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?”⁷⁹ (*Reason* 146), turning to such examples as: “How is pure mathematics possible?” (147), “How is pure natural science possible?” (147), and “How is metaphysics possible as science?” (148). Similarly, in *Food*, Piper asks: How is a pure engagement with Kantian philosophy possible—where “pure” in the Kantian schematic refers to that which is *a priori*, or independent from sensory experience. The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is that such an engagement is not possible. For Piper, recourse to an autotheoretical practice of *a posteriori* knowledge—through physical practices of scribbling on pieces of paper and taking her self-image, as well as through the metaphorically physical conceit of transubstantiating Kantian philosophy into a kind of “food”—belies the possibility of cognizing something *a priori*. Extending Kant’s discourse of “pure” (where pure is tied to *a priori* knowledge) to the discourse of purity in a more politicized sense, Piper troubles Kant’s *Critique* through the presence of her body in the photographs; her own liminal⁸⁰ racial identity allows her to engage social, political, and aesthetic issues of being a conceptual female artist of colour working in America in the 1970s alongside the specifically philosophical problematics such as the Kantian tensions between the *a priori* and *a posteriori* epistemological modes.

Piper uses the practice of conceptual art as a framework within which she can stage the reading of Kantian philosophy as a mode of consumption and metabolization, where Kant’s

⁷⁹ “From this Kant concludes that metaphysics is indeed possible in the sense that we can have a priori knowledge that the entire sensible world—not just our actual experience, but any possible human experience—necessarily conforms to certain laws. Kant calls this immanent metaphysics or the metaphysics of experience, because it deals with the essential principles that are immanent to human experience” (Stang).

⁸⁰ Piper is neither Black nor white, and it is this ‘impurity’ that positions her as having a particularly nuanced perspective on race relations in the United States. In Piper’s relational performance works like *My Calling (Card)* (1986), the artist-philosopher engages directly with the politics of passing as white when one is, in fact, a biracial woman with Black heritage. hooks might conceive of this as giving Piper a “special vantage point” from which to theorize: hooks argues that, by virtue of their lack of privilege, Black women possess a “special vantage point” that their “marginality” gives them (hooks, *Margin* 15). hooks theorizes the potential for theory-making that this marginality might enable if and when Black women (and biracial women) recognize it as such.

philosophy of the transcendental aesthetic is configured as nourishing matter “for the Spirit.” She ritualistically enacts a conceptual transubstantiation whereby Kantian philosophy is rendered sustenance or “food” that the artist will figuratively (and, in light of her fasting, somewhat literally) subsist on over the course of the performance. The embodied metaphor of philosophical sustenance is in sustained tension with the notion of “spirit” as abstracted from the body (like the tensions sustained within Kant’s philosophy). Furthermore, the metaphor is tied to Piper’s understanding of Kant’s stance on the rational self and behaviour motivation: the Kantian view that behaviour depends in part on to what extent abstract concepts, like “fairness,” are “embedded in the structure of the self” (Piper, *Rationality* 51). We see this in Piper’s philosophical writing and her description of the philosophizing process in terms of “ruminations” (51). With *Food*, Piper frames the rumination, metabolizing, and consumption of philosophy as a work of conceptual art that self-reflexively draws attention to these philosophizing processes and practices (rumination, metabolization, consumption) as such; she makes art of the embodied process that reading and seeking to understand philosophy requires. In her later writings in *Rationality*, Piper discusses the ways in which “our personal investments in our favored moral theories” are “deep,” and that these moral theories are digested by us, incorporating themselves into our body and transforming us into rational Kantian moral subjects (288).

Throughout *Food*, Piper scribbles in the margins of Kant’s *Critique* as she reads: these pages serve as documentation of her private performance alongside the self-portrait photographs. Autotheory has an interesting relationship with the margins, with the conceit of writing or “scribbling” (Kraus, *Dick* 113) notes in the margins of a theoretical or philosophical text taking place in a subsection of autotheoretical work. We see this in the mise-en-page of *The Argonauts*,

where Nelson inscribes the name of the theorist, writer, or artist being cited in the margin of the page as a formally innovative citational practice, demarcating the spot where their summarized idea or direct quotation is included by placing their name literally beside it. This beside-the-text and in-the-margins use of citation can also be seen in Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* (1977), a text which Nelson iterates to new, queer feminist effect through transmuting her lived experience as a queer woman interpellated by the discourses of love in her relationship with the artist Harry Dodge. We also see this when Kraus playfully collides the conceit of female-coded practices of diary writing with German high theory in her meta-fictional references to the character Chris Kraus's writing of marginalia in *I Love Dick*. Describing Chris Kraus's process, Kraus explains:

She read Harlequin Romances, wrote her diary and scribbled margin notes about her love for Dick in Sylvère's treasured copy of Heidegger's *La question de la technique*. The book was evidence of the intellectual roots of German fascism. She called it *La technique de Dick*. (Dick 113)

Here, writing in the margins becomes the female character's way of exerting her own creative agency on a male-authored text through a kind of textual intervention that, in contrast to simply overwriting or disregarding the original text, might be understood as a writing with it.

In the physical copy of Kant's *Critique* that Piper marks up in her performance, we find a particular preoccupation on the sections that probe the subject/object relation so central to Kantian aesthetics. Piper's theorizes this metaphysical problematic at the core of Kant's *Critique* and the larger matrix of "Western representational structures" (Jones, *Self/Image* 8) through self-imaging and marking up the margins of the book. Piper's notes in the margins of the pages—torn out from the book to give the artist better physical access to make her annotations—serve as traces of her physical engagement with philosophy. The artist's annotations read as barely legible

scribbles, and the connotations of violence in tearing out pages from a book gives further weight to the reading of Piper's *Food* as a counter-practice to hegemonic notions of philosophy and the ways in which philosophy is consumed. In order to understand Kantian philosophy, she requires a more physical engagement that involves making a given page more accessible and highlighting passages that she perceives to be key to her own art practice and understanding: rather than uphold the purity of the philosophical text by not writing on it or disfiguring the book in any way, Piper makes it her own, adjusting it to her needs as someone with a body existing in a given space at a given period of time. There is a ravenousness to her markings on the page—a making-visible of the process of her ruminating on Kant.

There are key passages in Kant's *Critique* that Piper underlines and about which she scribbles notes in the adjacent margins, including the passages that she marks with the abbreviation "N.B." or *nota bene* ("note well"). Piper's notes are made to ease her understanding of the philosophy through reiterating in her own words what the passage says in abbreviated forms: she marks and flags the points of emphasis in the text to aid the reader's understanding. While her notes are difficult to read, there are momentary exceptions such as when Piper writes what appears to be "logic ally" next to the following passage: "...how subjective conditions of thought can have objective validity ... For appearances can certainly be given in intuition independently of functions of the understanding" (Kant, *Reason* 124). In this way, Piper hails philosophy—as "master discourse" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 149)—as an ally or source of discursive support for her feminist art practice. By hailing philosophy as a "logic ally," Piper invokes Kantian reason as discursive foundation for her work.

Based on her markings and notations,⁸¹ she seems to be the most taken by those passages that philosophize the relation between subject and object, a matter which her own piece—as feminist body art and as instantiation of concepts advanced in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*—is engaged with. The final section that Piper underlines is a passage where Kant describes man as constituting both “phenomena” or sensibility and “a purely intelligible object” (Kant, *Reason* 472): which is to say, Kant describes man as both subject and object. This ontological duality in Kantian philosophy has been critiqued by feminists like Irigaray,⁸² who takes issue with the divide between “transcendent” (spirit)—typically reserved for men— and “phenomena” (body). Piper enacts the following passage of Kant’s *Critique*: “[She] is thus to [herself], on the one hand phenomenon, and on the other hand. . . purely intelligible object” (472), staging Kant’s conception of self-consciousness and “pure apperception” (472) through the process of ritualistically taking selfies while reading Kant’s *Critique*; in Kantian terminology, apperception refers to self-consciousness,⁸³ and the “transcendental unity of apperception” is “Kant’s conception of the basic structure of a unified consciousness” (Piper, “Intuition” 14).

Part 2: Surviving Philosophy

⁸¹ As a typically postmodern practice, autotheory often involves the artist or writer theorizing their own work and, in some cases, apprehending critiques of it. In the case of Piper’s *Food*, we can tell from the passages that she has marked the margins with “N.B.” that she is reading Kantian philosophy to better understand herself and her own practice as an artist; Piper’s fixation on the subject-object passages of Kant’s *Critique* in a work punctuated by intervals of her capturing her self-image with a camera and a mirror.

⁸² Irigaray attributes this divide in Kant’s philosophy as having grown from the philosopher’s repression of his relationship with, and dependence upon, the mother (as feminine principle), and she critiques Kant for what she perceives as his complicity in perpetuating “the false universalisms” that plague philosophy (“Seminar”).

⁸³ In the section “Transcendental Deduction” of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states that “The unity of this apperception I likewise entitle the *transcendental* unity of self-consciousness, in order to indicate the possibility of a *priori* knowledge arising from it” (153).

In *Food*, autotheory functions as much as a way for Piper to process her own existence in relation to Kantian philosophy as it does a way for her to “survive” Kant. Returning to her artist statement, written by the artist to describe her piece, Piper states “Whenever I felt that I was losing my sense of self due to the profundity of Kant’s thought, I went to the mirror to peer at myself to make sure I was still there” (Piper, *Food*). As we have seen, Piper’s use of autotheory begins as a way for her to process her own existence in relation to Kantian philosophy: specifically, Kantian notions of the transcendental aesthetic and transcendental idealism, where Piper’s selfies conceptually straddle the empirical and the transcendental in relation to Kant’s conception of subjectivity. In this way, autotheory becomes a means for Piper to survive philosophy. I now turn my attention to a consideration of the ways in which feminist autotheory is a performative practice for feminist artists to keep themselves intact as they engage with the discourses of philosophy that, as Piper states in her statement about *Food*, threaten to “shak(e) the foundations” of her “self-identity” (Piper, *Food*): as a work of art that takes this up through conceptualism, Piper’s *Food* provides an ideal place to reflect on this.

Within the larger conceptual framework of *Food*, Piper’s repeated act of photographing herself in the mirror is a means of documenting the transformation of the self over time, working in the time-based media of (private) performance as she does so.⁸⁴ It also allows her to document the creative process of the artwork, and to allow viewers who did not witness the original performance (namely, everyone except the artist herself), have access to the work through its documentation. Framing it as an ascetic ritual, *Food* can be understood as constituting a space-

⁸⁴ Again, taking Jones’s sense of “body art” as distinguished from “performance art” (which requires a live audience to be properly described as performance), *Food* is not technically performance art; but, for the purpose of a discussion of the ways in which space and time parameters structure the work, discussing *Food* strategically as performance here is useful.

time parameter within which Piper makes space for the witnessing of self-transformation through philosophical rumination. Metaphorically “feeding” on Kantian philosophy, Piper enacts a speculative alchemical process that involves a figurative self-sacrifice that, in the end, manifests the (non-white, female) self as an integral part of the practice of philosophizing.

The repetitive image of Piper standing naked (or, as I’ve noted, in various states of undress) in front of the mirror and repeating aloud a passage of Kant’s *Critique* that she found particularly difficult conjures rituals of witchcraft and feminist spell-casting; the underexposed photographs give the work a sense of haunting, with the body of the artist haunting the copy of Kant’s *Critique* that this same artist’s body has marked up. In doing so, Piper invokes a conceit in witchcraft rituals including Haitian voodoo,⁸⁵ where the act of sacrificing a human or a non-human animal for the purposes of transformation and transcending the material body in order to access the “spirit” world is undertaken. And yet, as the process of sacrificing her self to the “transcendence” of Kantian philosophy is underway at the beginning of the work, as Piper rigorously reads the *Critique*, an anxiety emerges in the artist around the fear of losing her self in this philosophical-alchemical experiment: the artist, in response to this anxiety, turns to the practice of self-imaging, capturing her self-portrait through the synchronous use of the Brownie camera and the mirror. Thought of another way, this self-imaging is not solely an anxiety-fuelled behaviour response to the prospect of Kantian transcendence (as (mis)understood by feminist scholars like Irigaray and Jones), but is an instantiation of the very problematics and terms that Kant himself is working through in the text.

⁸⁵ Reading Maya Deren’s *Divine Horsemen*, a documentary on Haitian voodoo, Civil describes the scene in which “the houngan, the priest, slits the throat of a chicken. You see its blood pour down to the earth below. That death is a necessary ritual that connects the worshippers to the spirit world beyond..We were witness to the transfer of one life to another, one energy to another—not for entertainment or shock value but for transformation” (Civil 36).

Framing the event of reading Kant as a self-abnegating ritual has the effect of underscoring the ways in which philosophy—as a discourse and as a (typically masculine and caucasian) institution—requires self-discipline and self-denial to an extent that the artist has a difficult time coming to terms with. That the conceptual art ritual—ascetic as it is—takes place within the mode of performance art practice known as durational performance⁸⁶ (with its connotations of physicality and endurance) further compounds the work as physically and psychologically demanding. Piper describes this painstaking process as destabilizing—“shaking the foundations of my self-identity” (*Food*)—and as psychologically unmanageable. Ritualistically turning away from Kant’s text and toward the mirror, the rhythmic and conceptual basis of *Food*, establishes this dual practice of theory and philosophy on the one hand and the auto or self on the other that is characteristic of autotheory as a feminist mode.

On another level, framing the practice of reading Kant as an ascetic ritual underscores Piper’s critique and disavowal of what she calls the Humean conception of the self—“structured and motivated” as it is “by desire” (“Conceptions” 173)—and her proffering of the Kantian conception of the self instead. In Piper’s view, the Humean conception of the self is “future-oriented, heteronymous, and individualist” while the Kantian conception of the self is “present-oriented, autonomous, and social” (186), and the staging of *Food* as a meditation underlines her commitment to the Kantian present-oriented self within her larger philosophical practice. Piper’s philosophical project is in many ways centered around a comparison of the Humean conception

⁸⁶ While all performance (and other time-based media, like video and film) is by definition durational, in that it takes place over a given period of time, works described as “durational performance” tend to take place over a longer duration—anywhere from a number of hours to a number of days or, in some cases, even years. Taiwanese artist Tehching Hsieh is one of the most famous durational performance artists, with many of his works taking place over the period of a year. In a collaboration with Linda Montano entitled *Art/Life One Year Performance 1983-1984*, Hsieh and Montano were connected by a rope tied around each others's waists for the duration of one year.

of the self and the Kantian conception of the self, with Piper since the late 1960s leaning more toward the Kantian one in her own practice. Piper explains how she came to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1969, after having been working through some Kantian ideas in her work without realizing it as such:

My first inkling that there was something amiss with the Humean conception of the self came before I knew enough Western philosophy to call it that. I am grateful to Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, Edward Sullivan, and Swami Vishnudevananda for urging me to read the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Yoga Sutras* in 1965. I am grateful most of all to Phillip Zohn for his willingness to argue with me at length about the import of these texts, and for introducing me to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1969, after reading an art text of mine on space and time (*Hypothesis*) that inadvertently echoed its doctrine of transcendental idealism. (*Rationality* xx)

As Piper acknowledges here, her decision to bring together feminist conceptual art practice and Kantian philosophical inquiry began earlier than *Food*, with her having engaged in a Kantian exploration of the perception of her own body as an object amongst other objects in the 1968-70 *Hypothesis Series* (Piper, *Hypothesis*). It was work like this in which Piper engaged with what could be understood as aporias within Kantian philosophy, even if she had not acknowledged it as such. After she was introduced to Kant, Piper stages *Food* as a means of setting aside time and space to catch herself up on canonical philosophical texts: texts that, she is told, articulate problematics that she is working through in her practice. This point becomes relevant when we consider the ways in which *Food* instantiates Kantian philosophy while ruminating on it: that her method of “survival” as it were—the strategy of self-imaging (proto-selfies)—is also a means of understanding and of communicating terms and ideas from Kantian philosophy. With this context in mind, *Food* becomes an autotheoretical feminist ritual for surviving philosophy.

Piper's recourse to self-imaging as her effort to "anchor" herself as she reads Kant points to larger moves within autotheory as a post-1960s mode of feminist practice which seeks performative ways of engaging theory and philosophy. Autotheory is a mode of practice that feminists turn to in order to engage with these "master discourse(s)" and the dominating or "terroristic" (Heiser and Critchley) forms that theory can take in contexts like academia and contemporary art. For Piper, it is the hegemony of midcentury high modernist formalism (which emerges from Greenberg's understanding of Kantian aesthetics) that precludes her own art practice⁸⁷ from being recognized as aesthetically legitimate in the eyes of Greenberg. Piper's dialectical engagement with Kant through an artwork is simultaneously conceptual and formalist, embodied and abstract, and so complicates the terms of Greenberg's Kantianism which has, historically, fostered a dubious divide between "content" and "form." Through a literalizing metaphor, Piper engages in a performative ritual as a way of autotheoretically grounding or "anchor(ing)" (Piper, *Food*) herself in light of the disembodying effects—or affects⁸⁸—of reading philosophy. In a sense, Piper's *Food* is prophetic of artists after her who will come to feel similarly about theory, and who will work through these feelings in their work. Critchley notes of the Euro-American art school context two decades after Piper made *Food*, that young artists often find themselves totally discouraged and lost when the "terroristic" modes of theory are pushed onto them and their practices via language and terminology that destabilizes their sense of themselves and their work (Heiser and Critchley). With Piper's *Food*, we find an early work of conceptual art that apprehends such anxieties.

⁸⁷ I include conceptual art, body art, self-imaging, feminist art, Black feminist art, and explicitly politicized art related to what some term "identity politics" in this list.

⁸⁸ Piper speaks of having "felt" that "I was losing my sense of self due to the profundity of Kant's thought" (*Food*), and in this way the affective register of her response to reading Kant is worth noting.

Piper began her engagement with Kantian philosophy at the age of twenty when, after finishing art school, she was struggling to explain the thinking that laid behind her recent work (Jones, “Fallen” 121). In other words, Piper was struggling to contextualize her work in relation to philosophical concepts and theoretical frameworks, a practice that has become increasingly important to the work of contemporary artists and how they are received. Wark maintains, “Piper’s engagement with Kantian philosophy serves as the foundational grounding of her work. Piper wants to reconcile Kant’s moral theories, which posit the self as dependent upon a rationally consistent and coherent view of the world that enables experience to be assimilated into a priori categories, with her awareness of how people respond to difference by making what she calls “pseudorational defences” of Kantian philosophy” (“Conceptual” 50). As Piper unpacks in her philosophical writing, these “pseudorational defences” are “self-defensive mechanisms” that the subject resorts to in order to cohere as a subject (Piper, *Rationality* 292). In her philosophical writing, Piper upholds Kant’s conception of rationality in the structure of the self and the value he places on “transpersonal rationality”—which she contrasts to other philosophers like Hume (45)—while paying due attention to the “pseudorational mechanisms” that the subject resorts to in the “non-ideal realities” of life as an embodied subject.

I conceive of this reconciliation that Wark describes as being taken up through autotheory as a feminist practice which, most fundamentally, is grounded in this very shuttling between the so-called rational and irrational, objective and subjective, and/or (neutral) philosophical and the otherly gendered and racialized self on which Piper’s “pseudorational defences” are founded. That Piper’s “defences” of Kant are not exactly rational or irrational but “pseudo-rational” is noteworthy: in autotheory, rational Kantian philosophy exists alongside the

presence of a “narcissistic,” selfie-taking, non-white female body that has been coded as something other than rational by a system that privileges rationality as a white male principle. This context also provides more insight into the shuttling between the “auto” and “theory” or philosophy that takes place in *Food*. *Food* can be understood as part of Piper’s extended practice that seeks to reconcile Kant’s moral theory of the rational subject with the embodied sites of slippage and excess that she perceives through experience—which is to say, autotheoretically.

Wark positions Piper’s study of Kantian philosophy as having a conflicted set of effects. On the one hand, a sustained engagement with philosophy “enables her [Piper] to articulate her artistic concerns” with more precision than she was otherwise able to (Wark, *Radical* 142). It provides Piper with more depth of insight and understanding into her own condition as subject and object through a Kantian framework, which resonates with Piper’s desire to incorporate the terms of Kantian philosophy into her practices as an artist and a philosopher; it allows her to frame her art practice “as an investigation of subject-object relations” (142) in the Kantian sense. Knowledge of Kantian philosophy becomes a way for Piper to intellectualize her work, and it provides her with agency in discourse.

Piper explains how the rigorousness of her “philosophical training” allowed her to strip any “excess theoretical baggage” from her work and signify her emotions in a way that makes “political sense,” that is “intelligible,” and that prepares her to be able to hold her own in a discursive “fight” (“Flying” 30). She notes how “as my philosophical training began to take effect, it purified the imagery in my artwork of excess theoretical baggage and offered me a new kind of reflective conceptual tool” (30). Piper perpetuates the problematic discourse of purity here, describing an engagement with philosophy as a purifying ritual that gets rid of any

linguistic “excess” in the artist’s practice. She upholds the discourse of white, Eurocentric, male-authored philosophy and its power to figuratively prune an excessive art practice by streamlining it into something formally elegant and conceptually clean. As a “reflective conceptual tool,” philosophy itself becomes a kind of mirror that has a similar doubling effect—splitting into subject-object—as the mirror does (30). On the other hand, the lack of space in philosophy and theory for different kinds of embodied processing—physical, affective, personal—seems to provoke anxiety in Piper, as seen in the artist’s description of the premise behind *Food* (Piper, *Food*). This is when the turn to the “auto” takes place, with Piper turning to “narcissistic” rituals of looking into the mirror and capturing her self-image as a means of counteracting the fear she has of “disappearing” or ceasing to exist as a material body in space and time. Piper’s repeated self-imaging becomes an autotheoretical refrain to the practice of meditating on philosophy.

Even as Piper zealously desires to “fly”—to transcend the self, to engage in practices of abstraction from the self—she re-grounds herself through a turn back to politics, a turn back to the body, and a turn back to the personal as political. We see this play out in the trajectory of Piper’s practice during the period between 1967-72: in the 1960s, Piper saw herself as working in abstraction and minimalism, but after 1972 she concedes to the sociopolitical forces that hail her back to what she describes as the confines of her own subjectivity (Piper, “Flying” 26-29).⁸⁹ Scholars like Wark acknowledge this politicization of Piper’s in the 1970s: “She grew increasingly dissatisfied with the notion of art as an autonomous, ‘Kantian thing in itself’, with its isolated internal relationships and self-determining aesthetic standards” (Wark 45). The

⁸⁹ “The political upheavals of 1970 Kent State, Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia, the student revolts, the women’s movement, and others’ responses to my perceived social, political, and gender identity braked my flight a bit, reflecting back onto me, enclosing me in my subjectivity, shocking me back into my skin. I struggled to transcend both. It didn’t work” (Piper, “Flying” 28-29)

abstraction of pure reason was not only impossible—as Kant himself noted—but also unsatisfactory given the tumultuous sociopolitical climate (post-1968 and 1969). Later, Piper begins to disclose anecdotes from her own life experience to critique academic culture and its systemic sexist and racist biases⁹⁰: she articulates the disappointment and surprise she feels when she witnesses the chasm that exists between what an academic or philosopher upholds in theory, and what their actions look like in practice (Piper, “Flying” 29). She does so in a manner that resembles Kraus’s tactics of disclosure, taken up in the following chapter.⁹¹

As a philosopher and as an artist, Piper understands the stakes of Kantian philosophy to be high, and she translates these high theoretical stakes into affective and psychological terms. Her description of transmuting the overwhelming Kantian ideas into “(psychologically manageable) words” intimates a sense of philosophy and theory as overwhelming—a kind of psychic onslaught, with the parentheses representing at the level of form the affective management taking place in the content of the work. Piper makes repeated reference to what she calls the “conceptual unmanageability” (Piper, *Rationality* 292) of reality when we are confronted with theoretical anomalies and conceptual anomalies. On a Kantian level, the “literal self-preservation” that the selfies—and the self-attuning practice of taking the selfies—provides is a means of preserving the “rational agency” of the Kantian subject (289). The selfie becomes a form for managing conceptual and theoretical problems in the real world.

Even as I read this oscillation in Piper’s *Food* as autotheoretical, I am aware of the

⁹⁰ After moving through a list of encounters that include everything from racially charged micro-aggressions to sexual harassment, Piper states: “I marvelled that such people could be so smart in their respective fields, yet so very provincial and tasteless in all other areas of life” (“Flying” 31).

⁹¹ Where disclosure is a means of critiquing contradictions within theory, art, and academia from a post-punk feminist perspective: see Chapter 2 for a more extended discussion of this issue.

fundamental ambivalence in Piper's relationship to Kant. On the one hand, there is a degree of irony in her framing of the work as an ascetic ritual, as what was once self-denying becomes, through the compulsive act of feminist self-portraiture, self-indulgent. It is not unfounded to read irony in Piper's work, given the humour and play involved in her performance art and conceptual art practices. Kantian philosophy specifically has featured in Piper's satirical send-ups, as in the case of Piper's *Mythic Being*, an early 1970s drag performance in which Piper "...donned an Afro wig, moustache, and aviator sunglasses to assume a belligerent but philosophically hip male persona, a persona who claims to 'embody everything you most hate and fear,' but who also could be found at the typewriter working out Kantian quandaries in cartoon thought-bubbles" (Stoll 40). Diana Stoll describes this work as Piper's satire of the authority and style of the "philosophically hip male" of the 1970s (40) in a manner not unlike Kraus's satirization of this "philosophically hip male" of French poststructuralism in *I Love Dick*. The humour of Piper's reference to Kant, both in *Mythic Being* and in *Food*, lies in what Kant represents on the level of cultural capital: Kant stands for what those in the know—artistically, intellectually, socially—are reading,⁹² and he is cited by the "philosophically hip male persona" accordingly.

Piper's fasting, and her dedication to parsing the *Critique* over a set period of time, demonstrates her sacrifice of the body to the pursuit of higher knowledge. Even though she required two years away from Kant's thought once the gruelling performance had finished, as explained in Piper's artist statement for *Food*, she would go on to engage with Kantian philosophy in her capacity as philosopher and scholar for a number of years. This does not

⁹² We see a similar parody of the cultural capital of reading particular kinds of texts in recent satires as well, such as the 2011 sketch "Did You Read It?" on *Portlandia*'s first season ("Did You Read?").

necessarily challenge my reading of Piper's work so much as it reminds us of the ambivalences⁹³ at the heart of feminist autotheory as a practice: that there is a striving to sincerely engage with, understand, and transmute canonical (male-authored) philosophy into one's work alongside an affirming of critique and subversion of this philosophy that emerges from the instantiation of that philosophy through the gendered (as female) and/or racialized (as non-white) body. Feminist autotheory positions itself within these core debates that constitute modern philosophy and theory while contributing something uniquely feminist in its politics and aesthetics. In the case of Piper, she advances a "pseudorational" mode of Kantian philosophy in and as Black feminist body art and conceptual art in a way that sheds light on Kant's theory of the transcendental aesthetic in the context of American art and criticism in the mid twentieth century.

Unlike the mimetic, comedic approach that Kraus takes to male-authored theory, Piper engages sincerely with Kantian philosophy even as her title plays with the equivocal and ironic in the context of feminist performance practice and the hegemony of Kantian philosophy as understood, or perhaps misunderstood, by Greenberg (and others) in mid-twentieth century America. Given Piper's artist statement quoted at the opening to this chapter, the title refers to Kant's philosophy as that which will nourish or sustain the artist through her period of fasting—a making-literal of the process of philosophical rumination (as both thinking deeply and as chewing): the fact that the artist does not look particularly spirited or nourished in her somber self-portraits engenders some irony. Read with this irony in mind,⁹⁴ the title of Piper's *Food*

⁹³ Kraus plays with this ambivalence in self-reflexive and satirical ways in *I Love Dick*, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

⁹⁴ The irony and humour of this work depends on a similar kind of theoretical in-joke that we see in Kraus's *I Love Dick*: which is to say that much of the humour in feminist autotheory relies on the reader/viewer possessing some knowledge of the terms and stakes of the theory and philosophy being taken up, and in this way questions of education and access, and corresponding issues of class, emerge. This is not to say that the work does not have merit apart from the theoretical in-jokes, but to note how such dense intertextuality ties autotheoretical texts to the hegemonic canon it references and risks being read as inaccessible or unintelligible by non-academic audiences.

gestures to a fundamental problem of philosophy⁹⁵ both for philosophers and for feminists: the place of, and status of, the body in philosophy. By conflating “spirit”—which is, in the Kantian scheme, a kind of interiority (Piper, *Rationality* 236)—with “food”—literally, physical matter that nourishes the immanent body, and figuratively, nourishment for one’s spiritual and philosophical life, Piper engenders an autotheoretical feminist impulse with the title of *Food*.

Feminist body art is a ripe place to instantiate the problematics presented in Kant’s *Critique*: as a practice, Piper’s body art paradoxically foregrounds the body as the site of knowledge, making, and theorizing, while her conceptual framing of the work as ascetic fasting ritual underscores Piper’s professed desire to “fly,” attain “abstraction,” and “transcend” the limits of her body through the philosophizing process:

Abstraction is flying. Abstraction is ascending to higher and higher levels of conceptual generalization; soaring back and forth, reflectively circling around above the specificity and immediacy of things and events in space and time, from a perspective that embeds them in a conceptual framework of increasing breadth and depth. . . . Abstraction is also flight. It is freedom from the immediate spatio-temporal constraints of the moment . . . freedom to survey the real as a resource for embodying the possible . . . Abstraction is a solitary journey through the conceptual universe, with no anchors, no cues, no signposts, no maps, no foundations to cling to. Abstraction makes one love material objects all the more. (“Flying” 26)

As we see here, Piper’s desire to “fly”—to access a realm of abstraction—is one rife with ambivalence: it paradoxically foregrounds both abstraction-as-flight from the space-time parameters of reality (“freedom from the immediate spatio-temporal constraints of the moment”)

⁹⁵ A note on terminology: while I describe Piper’s *Food* as autotheory, I am aware that the work she is engaging with is philosophy rather than theory *per se*. That said, Kant’s work arguably marks the beginning of a modernist shift that will slowly move the discourse from “philosophy” to “theory,” with Kant’s work inaugurating a lineage that extends from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. Worth mentioning here is Jameson’s acknowledgment of the role that feminist theory plays in this move from philosophy to something else: “The repudiation of ‘theory’ itself as an essentially masculine enterprise of ‘power through knowledge’ in French feminism (see in particular the work of Luce Irigaray) may be taken as the final moment in this particular ‘withering away of philosophy’” (“Periodizing” 192). For the purposes of my discussion here, I refer to Piper’s work as autotheory even though it might more accurately be called autophilosophy.

and as an immanent “love” of materiality. This sense of the word “fly” comes from Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, when he proffers his definition of “transcendent” (as opposed to “immanent”): “We will call the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience immanent, but those that would fly beyond these boundaries transcendent principles” (385). In her 1987 essay “Flying,” Piper advances flight as a metaphor for gaining access to “abstraction”: her unrequited desire to fly represents her pursuit of abstraction and transcendence as a Black woman artist (gendered, racialized, ‘marked’ as ‘other’) engaging with Kantian philosophy (25-26). Piper posits this figurative flight into abstraction as one which gives rise to “freedom from the immediate boundaries of concrete subjectivity” (Piper, “Flying” 2)—as a transcendent means of reaching out beyond the boundaries of lived experience:⁹⁶ something both freeing and anxiety-provoking (24).

Food marks Piper’s first steps into this “solitary journey through the conceptual universe” that is, in her view, one of “abstraction.” Piper’s description of abstraction as “freedom to survey the real as a resource for embodying the possible” (“Flying” 26) bears resemblance to my conception of autotheory as feminist practice, where concepts interface with embodied experience to generate insights on what is real and what is possible: a philosophical practice. Piper’s repeated use of the metaphor of flight could also be read as an instantiation of Kantian transcendental idealism, which holds that “human beings experience only appearances, not things in themselves; and that space and time are only subjective forms of human intuition that would not subsist in themselves if one were to abstract from all subjective conditions of human intuition” (Stang). By ascetically reading Kant’s *Critique*, Piper attempts to enact this abstracting

⁹⁶ “We will call the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience immanent, but those that would fly beyond these boundaries transcendent principles” (Kant, *Reason* 385)

from “subjective conditions of human intuition” in order to, as Kant hypothesizes, suspend space and time as the “subjective forms of human intuition” that they are. In Piper’s schema, this flight is not unlike being intoxicated or high, an out of body experience or altered state of consciousness that expands the subject beyond the limits of her self (Piper, “Flying” 28). The description of Piper moving “crazily” underscores her self-identified status as not entirely rational, while the “uncharted sky” symbolizes the autotheoretical inquiry into philosophy that she undertakes in her work: an emergent, speculative feminist practice for engaging with theory and philosophy that has yet to be charted.⁹⁷

When discussing Piper’s autotheoretical engagement with Kantian philosophy, in light of both Kantian philosophy and Piper’s extensive practice as a philosopher and a conceptual artist who often uses her body in her work—it is difficult to draw a simple line between abstraction and embodiment. My discussion of “abstraction” and “transcendence” here is made all the more complicated by the tension between Kant’s use of “transcendence” and the sense Piper uses it—perhaps more in the Sartrean, existential sense—in her “Flying” essay. There is a rich history of women artists working in abstraction, and there is a unique feminist politics and aesthetics of abstraction which scholars, art historians, and writers, including Nelson, have taken up, and which admittedly extends beyond my focus in this chapter. In *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions*, Nelson proffers “true abstraction” for thinking through the paradoxes of women’s relationship to abstraction in art history: the feminine is unintelligible, Nelson acknowledges, and yet at the same time “the antithesis to abstraction or transcendence” (10).

⁹⁷ In the epigraph to this chapter, I quote Piper in her essay “Flying,” where she writes: “Reality could be rearranged, relocated, varied, shot through with metaphysics. I was drunk on intellectual construction, theory, abstract structure; swooping and swerving crazily through uncharted sky” (28).

Nelson resuscitates women and feminist artists and writers throughout history, including Stein, to re-work dominant narratives about abstraction, gender, and representation in the history of literature and art (11). Ultimately, Nelson locates the New York School of the 1950s-1960s as opening up to new possibilities for cisgender gay male writers to engage with the “feminine” qualities of materiality and immanence, and female writers to engage with the “masculine” qualities of idealism and abstraction (xxii). When I use “abstraction” here in my discussion of Piper’s work, I refer to it in its incarnation in the context of Greenberg’s modernist aesthetics, or the hegemony of formalist abstraction in the mid twentieth century that purported to be de-politicized and disembodied and masculine even if, it in fact, was not; cue the 1960s and the practices of conceptualism, body art, performance, and a coherent feminist arts movement, which takes the ideology, materials, and forms of these hegemonic modes and shakes it all up.

The act of “flying” through uncharted skies can also describe the practice of making conceptual art in the 1960s. Using a paratactical list of sentences to theorize conceptual art—as a mode of practice he is deeply invested in as an artist—in 1967, LeWitt taunts the line between rational and irrational in his description of what conceptual art, as an art practice indebted to philosophy, does. With claims like “Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically” (LeWitt 82), LeWitt makes clear how in conceptual art, as in philosophy, notions of logic and reason are up for troubling. Piper extends Kant’s stance on the human subject as constituted by theoretical reason and the ways in which concepts are “embedded in the structure of the self” (Piper, *Rationality* 51). *Critique of Pure Reason* is a critique or, in the Kantian schema, an extended philosophizing of “the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all knowledge after which it may strive independently of all experience” (Kant, *Reason* 101). When

considering Piper's engagement with reason in Kantian philosophy in light both of the history of philosophy and feminist criticism and autotheory as emerging feminist practice, we must consider the ways in which reason has been coded as a male or masculine principle historically: this is partially attributed to women being historically overdetermined by the body, in a dualistic (Descartes) schema that conceives of mind and body as a binary opposition, while men are associated with the mind and, in turn, reason. In a patriarchal context, women and the body were configured as raw, irrational matter (mater) that needed to be formed by masculine reason.⁹⁸ This has lead feminist theorists like Irigaray to critique the centrality of a certain conceptualization of reason in the Kantian system and the ways in which the phallogentric conceptions of reason have an abject-ing effect on women, at least historically. And yet, to uncritically perpetuate the divide between masculine reason and feminine irrationality is not desirable to either a feminist⁹⁹ practice or to a Kantian one: the ways in which the body is wrapped up in Kant's proto-phenomenological accounts of perception and ontology is fleshed out, in my view, in Piper's autotheoretical work. And yet, one cannot deny the centrality of the notion of "pseudorationality" in Piper's *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, and I now consider what this term performs for our understanding of both Kantian philosophy and feminist autotheory.

In *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, Piper upholds the importance of rationality to the structuring of the self as coherent and comprehensible—a stance Kant upheld in his philosophy. Piper upholds reason for its role in giving the self a sense of unity and integration

⁹⁸ This problematic has been taken up by countless feminist scholars, but one article that has been particularly influential to me in understanding the ways in which these binary oppositions have been gendered and perpetuated historically is Anne Carson's "The Gender of Sound."

⁹⁹ Many feminist artists and scholars straddle the rational/irrational divide in self-aware and theoretically resonant ways, re-performing the unintelligibility of women in mimetically subversive ways: we see this in Chris Kraus's strategic performance of stereotypes of femininity in *I Love Dick*, which I take up in Chapter 2.

(Piper, “Conceptions” 194): as moral philosophy (where Kant, in *Critique of Practical Reason*, introduces moral philosophy as a function of ‘pure reason’, thereby rendering pure reason, in a sense, ‘impure’), reason is configured as that which we aspire to as humans—to be “a rational self...full unified and integrated” (Piper, “Conceptions” 194). Writing *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* as a contemporary iteration of Kantian philosophy, Piper uses examples from contemporary sciences, like quantum physics (322-25), just as Kant used examples from the contemporaneous sciences of his time, like natural science and “mechanistic” physics (Guyer and Wood 22), as well as logic and mathematics (Kant, *Reason* 110).

As a philosopher and as an artist, Piper makes explicit her indebtedness to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and her departures from “Kant’s actual doctrine” (“Conceptions” 181). In her philosophical writing, Piper acknowledges a distinction between theoretical concepts—ideals—on the one hand and the complications and limitations that “non-ideal realit(y)” presents on the other (*Rationality* 287). I propose that the Kantian “pseudorational defence” elaborated on by Piper describes a kind of autotheoretical positioning that emerges in response to the fundamental problem Piper perceives between the transcendent realm of pure concepts and “intellective freedom” on the one hand and “the vastness and complexity of reality, plus the weight and incorrigibility of our deeply ingrained desires and impulses” on the other (289-90). In *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* and in her earlier philosophical works, Piper iterates the metaphor of flight—“...to soar above...” (289)—and grounded-ness—“Anchored and trapped in the gravitational pull...” (289)—respectively to describe her desire to “transcend” the “non-ideal situation” of being in a body with its “deeply ingrained desire and impulses” in order to attain a

purely intellectual, rational, and conceptual space not bound by the “impediments” of the body in space and time.

Piper divides *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume II: A Kantian Conception* into two parts: Ideals and Realities. The ideals of reason and moral interiority in Part One lead to a consideration of pseudorationality, first-person anomaly, inclusiveness, and xenophobia in Part Two. “With the ideals of transpersonal rationality, consistency, and moral motivation now in place,” Piper explains, “I turn next to extended discussion of the non-ideal realities in which these ideals serve – psychologically, morally and socially – as distant reminders of the standards of performance to which we naturally aspire” (*Rationality* 287). It seems to me that feminist autotheory is well-equipped to theorize what Piper refers to as “the non-ideal realities” within which theoretical and philosophical ideals, like rationality or justice, take place. With its receptivity to the particular, the embodied, and the provisional, feminist theory has a long history of theorizing in light of non-ideal realities: not least of which results from the ways in which the very body-selves of feminist philosophers and theorists—Piper included—are precluded from the ideal realities of abstraction¹⁰⁰ by virtue of their status as marked (gendered, racialized) selves.

With *Food*, the artist provides a constructed conceptual space whereby circumstances are manipulated to approximate Kantian “ideal” circumstances. The “actual circumstances,” however, manifest insofar as the artist is embodied—and gendered, and racialized—and experiences affective responses like anxiety and fear at the prospect of succumbing to “pure” Kantian abstraction. But such attempts at a disciplined engagement with philosophy are not

¹⁰⁰ Nelson outlines the paradox at the heart of women’s relation to abstraction: the feminine has been historically overdetermined as unintelligible and yet is also considered to be “the antithesis to abstraction or transcendence” (*Abstractions* 10). The unintelligibility of the feminine, as theorized by Luce Irigaray and then Judith Butler, is a key jumping off point for the texts I’ve chosen to discuss in my dissertation. See Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* on how “the feminine cannot be said to be an intelligible term at all” (Nelson, *Abstractions* 11).

without their effects and affects, including those that might not be foreseen. Piper seeks to better understand Kantian philosophy—incorporating it as she does through the embodied process of reading—and yet, the conditions under which Piper reads Kant in 1971 form an example of this “non-ideal case” being staged as conceptual art and performance. Piper’s *Food* stages, in light of Kantian philosophy, what it means to be an embodied human striving for theoretical reason in a context where both the internal and the external world fall short of being entirely reasonable. In an effort to create the ideal case within which to read Kant, Piper creates a conceptual art work in which the process of intensively focusing on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* becomes the art work, as it were; the artist limits any distractions external to the act of autotheoretically processing Kant’s *Critique* by isolating herself and suppressing the body’s more base desires through fasting.

Piper’s self-imaging can also be read as enacting the mechanisms of pseudorationality and self-preservation that she identifies as a philosophical problem in her reading of Kant’s *Critique*. The opening section of Part Two: Realities of Piper’s *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume II: A Kantian Conception* is an extensive philosophizing of “pseudorationality,” a term which comes from Kant and which Piper elaborates on here. Piper names the three mechanisms of pseudorationality—denial, dissociation, and rationalization—as “coping” mechanisms that we resort to when faced with either theoretical or conceptual “anomalies” that threaten our sense of integrity as rational subjects (*Rationality* 290). “In all three cases,” Piper says, “the bias is toward the appearance of rational coherence against the reality of theoretical insufficiency and so of thwarted literal self-preservation” (290). Piper explains how “It is because these mechanisms preserve the appearance of unified selfhood and agency against the

fact of disintegrality that I refer to them as pseudorational mechanisms” (290). Her use of a kind of parallel structure—“the reality of theoretical insufficiency,” “the fact of disintegrality”—to describe the non-ideal realities within which the philosopher, or the philosophizing subject, finds them self in, compounds the emphasis brought about by her diction. She takes the Kantian language of integrity while noting its limitations and the ways in which our nearly inevitable reversion to “pseudorationality” is a means of preserving the self from a kind of deterritorialized, to take Deleuze and Guattari’s term here, madness. Piper states:

I argued that literal self-preservation—essentially, preservation of theoretically rational coherence—was a necessary condition of rational agency, and motivationally overriding in the structure of the self. In this chapter I show how the structural and motivational dominance of literal self-preservation explains why, when confronted by conceptual anomaly, we are more inclined either to suppress it from consciousness altogether, or to distort or truncate the concepts constitute of our perspective in order to accommodate it. By thus systematically warping our theory-laden understanding with the collusion of our rational capacities themselves, we achieve the illusion of horizontal and vertical consistency over time, and so of rational intelligibility, against the reality of interior disintegrality. I describe this systematic process as one of *pseudorationality*. (Piper, *Rationality* 289)

Piper’s practice of capturing her self-image in *Food* enacts this “literal self-preservation” at the level of phenomenological experience: as a representational trace of the artist-philosopher’s live presence, the photograph becomes evidence of Piper’s self-preservation during the abstracting practice of philosophizing. That she describes the mechanisms of “pseudorationality” as “coping” mechanisms, and that she makes repeated reference to the “literal self-preservation” that compels the rational subject, is relevant in considering the ways in which Piper’s philosophical practice in *Rationality* originates, in many ways, with *Food*.¹⁰¹ In the opening to

¹⁰¹ In the opening to Part Two: Realities, Piper states: “the concepts of literal self- preservation introduced in Chapter V, and of pseudorationality introduced in Chapter VII below, are key to understanding how reason guides action under actual circumstances” (*Rationality* 287).

Part Two: Realities, Piper states: “the concepts of literal self- preservation introduced in Chapter V.2, and of pseudorationality introduced in Chapter VII below, are key to understanding how reason guides action under actual circumstances” (287).

Referring to denial, dissociation, and rationalization respectively, Piper argues “We can think of these three self-defensive mechanisms, then, as ways in which our highest-order disposition to literal self-preservation rallies, valiantly but ineffectively, to the challenge posed by conceptually unmanageable anomalies” (Piper, *Rationality* 292). Describing these attempts to reconcile the self to the theoretical and conceptual anomalies of existing as a body engaging with theory in terms of being “ineffective” and unable to be “managed” (292), Piper provides more insight into understanding the terms of *Food*’s success as a ritual for “surviving” and the viability of reverting to these “pseudorational” mechanisms of self-defence in order to survive. In *Food*, Piper seems to face the challenge of Kantian philosophy head-on, rather than revert to denial and dissociation. From the photographic documentation of the performance, Piper appears to be present, dedicated to the task of wrestling with the paradoxes of theoretical reason in the Kantian system while at the same time photographing herself in her literal and conceptual nakedness.¹⁰²

My reading of *Food* in terms of “survival” is consistent with Piper’s own diction in her philosophical writing. In her philosophizing of Kantian self-consciousness, Piper refers to cognitive “assaults” that one encounters in life and the strategies one turns to for “coping,” which brings us back to Piper’s notion, building on Kant, of “pseudorational defences” (*Rationality* 289). The “assaults” referred to here stem not from philosophy so much as from the (theoretical and conceptual anomalies) in the external and internal world. For Piper, as for Kant, philosophy

¹⁰² The photographs of Piper span the artist being dressed, partially undressed, topless, and fully nude.

and “theoretical reason” are posited as a means of survival (299). If this is the case, what do we make of Piper’s recourse to selfie-taking as part of a self-disciplined philosophical ritual, and her description of this as a survival mechanism? Piper writes: “So the demands of theoretical reason must be attenuated and bent to the contours of our limitations” (299). This proclamation can be read as an endorsement of the autotheoretical mode. Rhetorically leading with the the causal “So” demonstrates Piper’s response to the fundamental problem that she has unpacked at length in her philosophical work regarding the rational Kantian subject in the “non-ideal realities” (287) of the world.

“So the demands of theoretical reason”—that which Kantian philosophy demands of us as rational subjects who (in theory) live our lives by the principles of theoretical reason—“must be attenuated and bent”—must be *made* flexible, and, in a sense, provisional; must be weakened and made less rigid and unyielding—“to the contours of our limitations”—according to, or in response to, the particular shapes that our “non-ideal realities” (287) as embodied persons in a world that sometimes demands “pseudorational” responses for us to cohere demand. The self as embodied, immanent, affective, and limited (in our capacities, in our rationalities)—this is what theoretical reason—or at least its “demands”—must be “attenuated and bent to” (299). I read this philosophizing statement of Piper’s as a call for a kind of flexibility on behalf of both the theory and the subject. This passage sums up Piper’s conclusions about theoretical reason based on her engagement with Kant, and resonates with concerns of contemporary feminist theory, including ableism and accessibility (“be made easier to satisfy”) and the place of the self. I understand Piper’s statement as metonymically embodying her nuanced subversion of the Kantian system via an autotheoretical feminist practice: one which upholds many of Kant’s terms and, at the

same time, calls for an “attenuation” of “theoretical reason” and its “demands” in light of the “non-ideal” circumstances that we find ourselves in in our everyday lives.

This statement by Piper also provides further insight into the potency of symbolism in *Food*: by fasting over the course of her performance while reading Kant’s first *Critique*, Piper attenuates herself—makes herself thin through a kind of monitored starvation—to engage with the philosophical work. And yet, here there seems to be a reversal at work where “the demands of theoretical reason”—the demands that we witness in the conceptual premise of *Food* as ascetic ritual—must themselves “be attenuated” to “the contours of our limitations,” meaning, the contours or shapes of our embodiment and immanence, our particularities as limited, living selves. The conceptual premise of *Food*, at least initially, seems to be that we are metabolized by philosophy: that a kind of self-sacrificing practice is required to metabolize the theory and, in a sense, be metabolized by it. And yet, Piper implies that it is philosophy and theory—“the demands of theoretical reason”—that must be metabolized through us: that theoretical reason is somehow “attenuated”—worn down, starved, physically decayed—as a result of brushing up against our contours—our selves, our bodies, our lives, “our limitations” (Piper, *Rationality* 299).

That this call for attenuation of “the demands of theoretical reason” comes from a need Piper perceives within the Kantian philosophical system itself is noteworthy. In her practice, Piper philosophizes in the name of clarifying the Kantian structure of the self and the place of rationality in that structure; her exegesis of the “pseudorational mechanisms” or “self-defensive mechanisms” at work in the Kantian system gives way to an acknowledgment, within Piper’s own understanding of (and iteration of) Kantian philosophy, of the subjective and embodied subject’s stress and capacity for weakness or “error” (deviating from the standards of rationality

and theoretical reason). As it stands, the recourse to pseudorational mechanisms has the effect of dismantling the rational subject as such, which Piper laments. She describes the self-defensive or pseudorational mechanisms “as parts of a mental demolition process, whereby the rational scaffolding of reality is gradually dismantled, so that a funhouse monument to wishful thinking can be erected in its place. Thus does our highest-order disposition to literal self-preservation buckle under stress” (Piper, *Rationality* 293). Her acknowledgment that our “disposition to literal self-preservation” is of the “highest-order” is one she literalizes through conceptual art with her repeated self-imaging in *Food*.

The imperative that follows is an acknowledgment of the contours of the “non-ideal” situation we find ourselves in as subjects striving for—but continuing to fail at—being coherent rational subjects—and the need to make theoretical reason as an epistemological system more flexible according to the particularities (“the contours”) of “our limitations” (Piper, *Rationality* 299), or our selves as embodied and experiencing, or experiential, beings. For Piper, this call extends also to the subject or “agent,” whose perspective has an influence on the “Degrees of conceptual unmanageability” (292). In response to the Kantian problems of “conceptual anomaly” and “theoretical anomaly,” Piper calls for a making-flexible and making-open and inclusive for both the subject and for the theory at hand. This call resonates with a contemporary feminist politics of inclusivity to “otherness” and “unfamiliarity” (292); Piper uses the word “inclusive” as a counter to “limited” when describing the importance of “an agent's perspective” in how a given “conceptual” or “theoretical anomaly” is perceived and taken up. By expanding our perspective, Piper seems to say, the destabilizing effects of theoretical anomalies can be lessened, and we can in turn become more rational and integrated human beings.

In addition to inclusivity, Piper gestures to the importance of accessibility to her conception of philosophy and theoretical reason. She states that “Section 3 offers a contemporary version of a Kantian model of theoretical reason. I impose on cognitively accessible things and properties in general a Kantian requirement of rational intelligibility, i.e. that we should be able to recognize them as instances of concepts that constitute our perspective” (Piper, *Rationality* 53). Consistent with the Kantian system of cognizing being grounded in the context of one’s perspectives, but resonating perhaps more explicitly with a feminist politics of accessibility, Piper’s emphasis on theory and accessibility resonates with the work of Black feminist theorists like bell hooks who emphasizes the imperative of making feminist theory as practice accessible to diverse communities and readerships. In autotheory, the materials of one’s particular experiences and lived insights, alongside the history of theory, literature, and art, provide the basis from which the theory (hypothesis as explanation) is forged. In “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” hooks¹⁰³ underscores theory as a wrestling with “the concrete,” a means of making “sense of everyday life experiences,” and a means of articulating these experiences to transgressive (in the way that Black feminism transgresses white-supremacist patriarchal orders) ends (*Transgress* 70): in short, theory is inextricable from practice. For hooks as a feminist, one’s experience is a rich and necessary place from which to generate theory.

The role of context and the particularity of a given person’s perspective in the formation of theoretical, philosophical, and even scientific truths is a matter gestured toward in Piper’s *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*; her acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of a given

¹⁰³ hooks’s essay “Theory as Liberatory Practice,” in *Teaching to Transgress*, is a good example of a twentieth century feminist theory text that, in its articulations of the inextricability of (good) theory from (good) practice, anticipates the politics of the autotheoretical turn.

person's "interests, background, experience, environment, available information, and opportunities for obtaining more" (Piper *Rationality* 293) with theory resonates with autotheory as feminist practice. Piper calls for a flexibility and an openness to supplant rigidity or fear (293): it is an opening up to the unfamiliar that Piper upholds as a means of strengthening self-preservation, rather than being rigid and closed off to that which is unfamiliar to us, whether politically, epistemologically, and so on. As Piper writes, "Our highest-order disposition to literal self-preservation is strengthened, not stressed, by a receptive curiosity about the unfamiliar" (293); this unfamiliarity is also tied to an intersectional feminist politics and aesthetics, where Piper, as a racialized woman living and working in America and, later, in Germany is "unfamiliar" as a philosopher (Jones, *Body Art* 162). By opening herself up to the Kantian void and performatively interrogating the status of the embodied self within the Kantian system, Piper's *Food* embodies what her later philosophical writings insist upon.

No-Selfie

In "Adrian Piper: Goodbye to Easy Listening," Piper says "I am at the cusp of penetrating my own illusion of selfhood" (Stoll and Piper 42-43). This is one of the central problems that she wrestles with in *Food*. Even as Piper's *Food* can be read as "autotheory," which I have made the case for over the course of this chapter, Piper's self-imaging practice paradoxically moves toward a state of no-self, rather than a clinging to "the self." Both the conceptual premise of the work and her resulting photographs open up to the possibility of a kind of (Buddhist) no-self in *Food*, a theme that returns in *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*. In their introduction to *Nothing: Three Inquiries into Buddhism*, Marcus Boon, Eric Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton

philosophize the ties between “what is called *theory*. . . critical theory, literary theory, and so on” and what is called Buddhism (3). They argue “To practice Buddhism is to be involved in a deeply theoretical, reflective exercise that in Theravadin traditions and elsewhere is formalized as hearing, contemplating, and meditating” (3). To read Piper’s work through this perspective is not a stretch, given her longtime engagement with yogic philosophy and Eastern spiritual traditions as a parallel practice to her engagement with Kant; she has even incorporated practices of yoga into other works made in the same era—and the same space— as *Food*.¹⁰⁴

Just as Kant sought to critique traditional Enlightenment metaphysics and “put in their place a scientific metaphysics of his own,” Piper advances a “pseudorational” instantiation of Kantian philosophy as manifesting in the context of feminist body art, performance, and conceptual art practices. Piper frames the engagement with philosophy and theory as a practice, whereby through the repetitive act of reading the philosophical work the artist-philosopher can be transformed into something other than what she was at the beginning of the work. We witness this personal development with the example of Piper’s engagement with Kant: as I read *Rationality* I bear witness to the ways in which Piper’s understanding of Kantian philosophy has evolved—in her capacity as a philosopher who articulates Kantian philosophy in both an intricate and, I would argue, accessible way—while resembling the core sensibilities of Piper’s 1971 performance. I also witness the ways in which Piper both upholds Kantian principles and tweaks them based on the observations she has drawn and the conclusions she has come to over the course of her artistic and philosophical practices. While Kant takes the male (“he”) or “Man”

¹⁰⁴ I am thinking specifically of *The Mythic Being: Doing Yoga*, which Piper made in 1975. Consisting of a series of six silver gelatin prints, *The Mythic Being: Doing Yoga* features Piper, in her gender-bending person as The Mythic Being, practicing yoga in her apartment/studio space.

as the universal subject, Piper switches between female pronouns (“she”) and male pronouns (“he”) over the course of *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, in a manner that seeks a structural balancing between the genders.

The action of reading Kantian philosophy as a racialized female body is at the crux of this work. That Kant’s *Critique* will “nourish” her—that this intellectual work will translate into material that the artist can metaphorically consume for intellectual nourishment—is the conceit that Piper makes literal through the act of fasting. In an act of faith, Piper stages this belief in philosophy or high theory within the frame of conceptual and body art, enacting a devotion to the hegemonic discourse surrounding her as a contemporary artist through practices of fasting and rigorous reading. She becomes a kind of self-documenting Kantian monk, repeating passages of Kant as a mantra while capturing a ghostly imaging of her self through the mirror. These themes in *Food* connect to trans-humanist philosophy and the ways in which trans-humanist philosophy turns to technology as a possible means of “transcending” the limits of our embodiment.¹⁰⁵ Coming out of a Kantian stream of philosophical practice that takes up notions like the “sublime,” theorists like Elaine Graham and Sherryl Vint consider the feminist implications of trans-humanist desires to transcend the limits of our human flesh through technological interventions and developments. This is another effect of Piper’s iterative self-photographing process over the course of *Food*: art-making and self-imaging as means of immortalizing the self or existing outside of the confines of one’s body as an object—a transformation made possible through technology (such as the technology of photography).

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Graham defines transhumanism as “...a futuristic philosophy which celebrates the potential of advanced technologies to augment human functioning to unprecedented degrees, ushering in a new phase of ‘posthuman’ evolution” (65).

Piper uses self-portraiture to document the effects that reading and ruminating on Kantian philosophy has on her physically and “metaphysically” (Wark, “Conceptual” 46), opening up feminist body art to the speculative. In “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” LeWitt claimed “Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach” (82). Piper transmutes the act of reading Kantian philosophy into a mystical ritual, whereby the conceptual artist becomes mystic. The conceptual conceit of Piper’s repeated exposure of herself to the camera is a kind of compulsion, a means of answering Piper’s anxious inquiry as to whether and to what extent she “exists.” Her ghostly presence in the under-exposed selfies symbolizes the tension between “mere phenomenon” (Kant, *Reason* 360) and noumenon in Kant’s theory of the “transcendental object” (421). As both physical presence in the space and as representation (symbolized in the object of the selfie), Piper’s ghostly self-imaging embodies this tension between Kantian phenomena (what we perceive, appearances) and noumena (the “thing in itself,” the unknowable) that Kant’s theory of the “transcendental object” constitutes.¹⁰⁶

The tension between appearances (phenomena) and things in themselves (noumena) also takes on resonance in relation to the feminist politics of visibility and presence and “the spectre of Blackness” (Fleetwood 194) that haunts histories of art, philosophy, and Western culture. As a woman and as half Black—a liminal positioning of being “mixed race” that opens up another layer of potential marginalization and oppression—Piper’s (in)visibility in the photographs that surface at the end of *Food* (once the performance has completed and Piper takes her Kodak film to be developed at her local drugstore) is doubly charged. Piper as artist-philosopher (subject)

¹⁰⁶ Describing Kant’s notion of the “transcendental object” in relation to the Kantian problematic between phenomena and noumena, or appearances and things in themselves, Stang states: “The ‘concept of a transcendental object’ might be fruitfully thought of as ‘the transcendental concept of an object’: the concept of ‘object’ that makes experience possible. Our mind’s synthesis of representations into experience of objects is guided and made possible by the idea that there is a way objects are that must be tracked by our representations of them” (Stang).

and as body (object) stands for the absent presence of the Black female subject (or, more broadly, the subject as gendered and racialized as something other than European and male) in the history of philosophy, haunting¹⁰⁷ the visual and conceptual field through an autotheoretical absent-presence.¹⁰⁸ As the absent presence at the heart of *Food*, Piper symbolizes the limits of representation in both the contemporary, politicized sense of identity politics, and in the philosophical sense of a Kantian sublime, where the absent presence comes about when we attempt to represent that which is unrepresentable.¹⁰⁹

There are latent connections here between Piper's stated decision "to fast" and Kraus's positing of anorexia as an active stance of feminist resistance in *Aliens & Anorexia* (2000), where anorexia in Kraus's schematic is tied historically to the philosopher Simone Weil and reclaimed as a feminist "rejection of the cynicism our culture passes to us through its food" (*Aliens* 163).¹¹⁰ In *Mythic Being*, Piper repeatedly utters the phrase: "So I've decided to fast" (McMillan 95). What is the significance of fasting as an embodied act of self-discipline in Piper's conceptual and performative practice? For one, fasting can be read as a means of 'transcending' the body—literally, through long-term starvation, or figuratively, as in religious and/or spiritual rituals that

¹⁰⁷ For scholarship on the ways in which the Black female or, more inclusively, the Black "femme" body haunts the visual field, see Kara Keeling's work on "the elusive figure of the Black femme" in *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (2007).

¹⁰⁸ Note also the intersections between the "absent presence," which Morrison and Fleetwood use to describe the status of the Black subject in Western (literary, artistic, philosophical) traditions (Fleetwood 194), and a Kantian absent presence that Lyotard (as a Kantian of the third *Critique*) takes up in relation to the sublime.

¹⁰⁹ To quote Jean-François Lyotard, "When the point is to try to present that there is something that is not presentable, you have to make presentation suffer" (125).

¹¹⁰ I take this up in Chapter 2. I will note briefly here my interest in taking up this connection (of female artists autotheoretically exploring fasting and anorexia as both metaphor and practice) between Piper's *Food* and Kraus's *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000), where Kraus autotheoretically engages with the philosophy of Simone Weil. Both Piper and Kraus also appropriate "male" principles and characteristics in performative ways, and play with the idea of becoming "monstrous": see Kraus's "Monsters" chapter in *I Love Dick*, or Piper's 1975 *Mythic Being* caption "I embody everything you most hate and fear."

are done alongside practices like meditation, yoga,¹¹¹ and prayer to attain access to a spirit world. Piper's titling of her work "Food for the Spirit" is notable here, as she foregrounds the problematic between food, embodiment, and materiality on the one hand, and "spirit" on the other. The utterance "So I've Decided to Fast" appears in Piper's 1974 advertisement in *The Village Voice*, which the artist took out in the newspaper as a conceptual art intervention.¹¹² As explained in the excerpt from the artist's 1964 diaries (which were written when she was a teenager)—texts which the artist cites in her conceptual work (in a manner that might be considered autotheoretical)—Piper's decision to fast follows from her mother perpetually "buying crackers, cookies, and things" which, we presume is unwanted junk food that the artist continues to eat in spite of her desire not to (McMillan 100).

Sick Woman Theory and the Feminist Aesthetics of Failure

I now consider the effectiveness of Piper's *Food* as feminist autotheory in practice, while noting the importance of making space for feminist and queer theories of failure in discussions of contemporary feminist autotheory. The theme of failure as a site for troubling, reclamation, and nuance factors into my considerations of both Piper's *Food* and Piper's work as a scholar and philosopher within and beyond University and academic institutions. The ambivalence I witness in Piper's artwork *Food*, with the artist-philosopher instantiating Kantian philosophy while at the same time speaking of her need to "anchor" herself lest she "disappear" in the act of doing so,

¹¹¹ Piper's *Mythic Being* performance includes *The Mythic Being: Doing Yoga* (1975), in which Piper—dressed in drag as the "Mythic Being"—practices yoga in her studio/apartment (McMillan 98).

¹¹² The caption written as a thought bubble drawn next to Piper as the Mythic Being reads "No matter how much I ask my mother to stop buying crackers, cookies, and things, she does anyway, and says it's for her, even if I always eat it. So I've decided to fast" (McMillan 99-100).

reverberates into the life of the artist as a philosopher-scholar whose “non-ideal realities” of being embodied preclude a successful and sustainable career in academia.

After her 1971 performance, Piper reflects on the experience of *Food* and describes it as a kind of failure. When read in the context of the statement, what Piper seems to be referring to having been unsuccessful—“These attempts did not succeed” (Piper, *Food*)—are her efforts at “anchor(ing)” herself “by photographing myself and tape-recording the reiterated passages” from Kant’s *Critique* (Piper, *Food*). Such failure is not uncommon to autotheory as contemporary feminist practice, with Halberstam’s reclamation of failure as a queer site of agency and political potential. In “Shadow Feminisms: Queer Negativity and Radical Passivity,” Halberstam proposes a “shadow feminism” that positions itself as an alternative to the more socially acceptable forms of feminism that orientate around positivity, reform, and accommodation (4). Halberstam’s is a form of “antisocial feminism” that is anti-Oedipal, anti-humanist, and grounded in queer, postcolonial, and Black feminisms (Halberstam 125-26). This turn away from the auto—bringing her self-portraiture and embodied vocal articulations to a halt—and instead choosing to “just stud(y) the *Critique*” leads to an extended period of burn out in which Piper “could not look or think about” Kant’s work “for two years afterward” (Piper, *Food*).

Even as Piper’s post-performance reflection signals a particular kind of failure in the artist’s engagement with philosophy, Piper went on to write a two volume treatise on Humean and Kantian philosophy respectively, which has garnered significant praise from such legitimizing institutional figures as the Referees of Cambridge and Oxford University Press (Piper, *Rationality* 505-09). And yet, Piper as a philosopher and scholar seems to have butted up against the demands of University institutions, which might explain in part her decision to

publish her work as an electronic, open-source book through her own archive in Berlin. In 1990, Vanessa E. Jones explains, “Piper’s work in Kantian ethics had inspired Wellesley College to name her the first African-American woman to become a tenured full professor of philosophy in the United States” (“Fallen Academic Star” 121). Jones goes on to note, however, that shortly thereafter Piper became too weak and ill to continue teaching philosophy, a period in Piper’s life that Jones describes as her “troubled tenure” (121). Piper’s disclosure¹¹³ of her experiences at Wellesley on her website, and her calling out of what she perceives to be racist discrimination on the part of Wellesley College bears resemblance to Sara Ahmed’s autotheoretical use of her blog *feministkilljoys* to call out Goldsmiths for perpetuating and enabling a culture of sexual harassment among its faculty and students. Piper spoke out about illness in/and art institutions in ways that are resonant with recent feminist autotheoretical critiques of neoliberalism and capitalist imperatives, like Hedva’s “Sick Woman Theory” which was disseminated entirely on the internet (like Piper’s *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*). In *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment*, John Bowles explains how, in 1976, Piper employed the metaphor of illness to describe the professionalization of the artist, “ascrib(ing) physical ailments to the effects of a career in art” (639-40). Piper uses the language of illness to critique the art world and make literal the effects that power, competition, success, and networking have on the body.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ The disclosure of the artist-philosopher’s own lived experiences of racism—often grounded in specific anecdotes or situations (something we find in more recent autotheoretical works as well, such as Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric*)—is a motif in Piper’s larger oeuvre; this includes an extended section on “Racism, Racial Profiling, and Xenophobia” that Piper wrote in her book *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Volume I, Writings on Meta-Art, 1968-1992*.

¹¹⁴ More recently, Hedva’s “Sick Woman Theory” becomes a space to reclaim the ill, disabled, and otherly abled body as a site of politicized resistance and agency—a theory steeped in the kinds of critiques of neoliberalism that we find in Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure*.

In considering Piper's status as an outsider academic/philosopher, failure becomes a site of intersection for Black radical practice and feminist practice: both involve a proffering of alternatives to neoliberal, white, patriarchal, capitalist institutions and definitions of success.¹¹⁵ In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten theorize the undercommons as a space for the Black and the broken that involves "appositionality" rather than positionality: positionality (a trait of the commons) requires a privilege not afforded to those in the undercommons (10). Elucidating their notion of "the subversive intellectual" who emerges from a Black radical tradition of theorizing, Harney and Moten write of "the undercommon refusal of the academy of misery" (10). Feminist theorists like Sedgwick have unpacked the structural cultures of sickness that suffuse academic spaces; in "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," Sedgwick observes—autotheoretically, through anecdotal evidencing—the high rates of clinical depression among academics and graduate students in the Humanities (640).¹¹⁶ In contrast to Sedgwick's reparative reading, Moten and Harney choose to work from the space that exists between antagonism and affirmation (20).

Theorizing Piper's experience of illness as it intersects with her professional life as a philosopher and as an academic is made all the more interesting when we consider the narrative surrounding her founding of the Adrian Piper Research Archive in Berlin in 2002. On the

¹¹⁵ Halberstam, the author of *The Queer Art of Failure*, wrote the Introduction to Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons*: "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons."

¹¹⁶ Sedgwick makes room for depression in academic discourse in a reparative and enabling way ("Klein" 640). She demonstrates how writing in the academic context can be enriched through the experience of depression; that rather than pathologize depression, or see it as an "excuse" that students give for a disappointing performance, we can create conditions under which its creative and therapeutic functions flourish. It is not necessary for the depressive position to transmogrify into an ability: it already is a kind of "ability" which should be recognized as such. In regards to the pervasiveness of depression amongst academics in the humanities, Sedgwick chooses not to engage in an essentialist/antiessentialist debate; instead, she weaves her discussion together with personal anecdotes to work through the question of what this pervasive depression might mean or do for our understandings of theory.

webpage of the Research Archive,¹¹⁷ the opening paragraph provides an origin story of Piper’s archive, contextualizing it in relation to Piper’s chronic illness: “Adrian Piper founded the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation in 2002, after being diagnosed with a chronic, progressive, and incurable medical condition. The creation of the archive, which is described as both a “personal” and a “public” resource, is tied to the moment in Piper’s life when she was ill: while her illness is described as “chronic, progressive, and incurable,” the description of the Research Archive also notes that “the condition had vanished within two years after her move to Germany” (“Research Archive”). This description intimates that either APRAF in Berlin, or being in Germany itself, has had some kind of magical effect—or one, at least, that runs counter to the dictates and diagnoses of Western medicine—on the artist-philosopher’s body.

The more that I read, the more that I feel compelled to consider Piper as an outsider academic: this is interesting, given the ways in which this positioning of being “outside” hegemonic academic and theoretical spaces reverberates through my research on autotheory as contemporary feminist practice. Interesting too for my consideration of autotheory is the fact that Piper foregrounds “the work of self-clarification and self-analysis” in the scholarly projects that her foundation APRAF will support (APRAF, “Fellowship”). The discourse of “outsiders” is present throughout the description of the Adrian Piper Research Archive’s multi-disciplinary fellowship, which is “not restricted to those who hold advanced academic degrees” and which supports interdisciplinarity to a degree that universities typically do not (“Fellowship”). Piper is

¹¹⁷ Piper’s archive comprises both the web site (adrianpiper.com) where Piper’s *Rationality* e-books can be accessed for free, and the physical space in Berlin which houses “Piper’s art work, correspondence, manuscripts, documents, family photo and letters archive; book, catalogue and articles library; video and sound work library; reproductions library; Vedic and Western philosophy library, art library, fiction and poetry library, music collection, video collection; artwork inventory, text inventory; and, eventually, preserved personal living and working space, furnishings, and personal possessions exactly as she designed, built, arranged and/or used them” (APRAF, “Research Archive”).

not the only feminist working both autotheoretically and, to some extent, as an outsider to (patriarchal) academia:¹¹⁸ Irigaray has been working on the outskirts of academia ever since she was banned by Jacques Lacan from holding a post at the University of Paris VIII or the University of Vincennes¹¹⁹ following her publication of *Speculum*;¹²⁰ as mentioned above, Ahmed resigned from her position at Goldsmiths as an act of feminist resistance (Ahmed “Resignation”) to ongoing issues of sexual harassment within the university and publicly discussed her decision through autotheoretical posts published on her blog and social media. Ahmed continues to write on her blog and publish as an independent scholar (*Living a Feminist Life*), while Irigaray continues to publish an impressive output of philosophy and mentor doctoral students through what seems to be a fairly strategic, tangential relationship with university systems in Europe and the UK.¹²¹

Anecdotally, Piper’s public persona is understood to be somewhat anti-social, or even hostile, to scholarship on her work. Take, for example, Piper’s refusal to give Jones image reproduction permissions for her work “Self Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features” (Jones, *Seeing* 12). I will consider this situation from two perspectives, the first being one that gives

¹¹⁸ I say “patriarchal” here not to ignore the growing numbers of women scholars holding posts in universities, but to acknowledge the ongoing feminist problems (including systemic issues related to gender-based oppression and suppression, sexual harassment, etc.) that persist within the university institutions and which have arguably lead to the autotheorists whom I am discussing to engage in a practice of refusal.

¹¹⁹ “Like Foucault, Jacques Lacan too is guilty of silencing women. Indeed, like the Guardians jealously guarding the Word, robed in Righteousness, he banned the philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray from his School, making her lose her position in the department of psychoanalysis at Vincennes when her reflective work, *Speculum*, was published” (Jackson, *Academic* 107).

¹²⁰ Irigaray’s *Speculum* theorizes the feminine in a manner that diverges from the work of Freud and Lacan. She repeats this story to me and the other conference participants over dinner, revealing how Lacan’s firing of her from her post at a Parisian university still has palpable effects on her (Irigaray, “Seminar”).

¹²¹ Irigaray continues to facilitate the Luce Irigaray International Seminar each summer at a different institution in Europe or the UK: I took part in the 2016 iteration held at the University of Bristol. My understanding is that the Seminar takes place in collaboration with a university, but Irigaray herself is not formally affiliated with or employed on any long-term basis with an institution.

Piper the benefit of the doubt and acknowledges her agency with regards to the politics of “refusal,” and the other being the view that there are potential issues with censorship that Piper might be facilitating around how she and her work are viewed. In the introduction to Jones’s *Seeing Differently* (2012), the reader sees images of works by Black conceptual artists like Lorna Simpson and Glenn Ligon. Then, we come to a blank box with the heading “ADRIAN PIPER” that reads as follows:

Adrian Piper has unfortunately refused to allow permission for *Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features*, 1981, to be reproduced here. The image is, however, freely available on websites and, in fact, on Wikipedia commons (see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AdrianPiper1981Self-Portrait_Exaggerating.png, accessed 4 August, 2011). While no explanation was offered to the author, this refusal typifies the increasing attempts on the part of artists and agencies to control what is written about artists’ works—arguably an extension of the commodification and bureaucratization of the global art world. (12)

Jones’s frustration toward Piper’s “refusal” is apparent, both in her cheeky inclusion of a link to the image of Piper’s work on Wikipedia commons and to her concluding jab that Piper’s decision is part of a larger problem tied to the late capitalist global art world where artists want to maintain control over what is written about their work (12). Based on an e-mail correspondence that I had with the APRAF Archivist as I wrote this chapter, I have reason to believe that Jones is indeed onto something in observing Piper’s desire to control what is written about her work: when the topic of the Image Reproduction Application came up, the archivist requests that I “Please allow enough time in order for us to fact-check the texts discussing Piper’s work” (APRAF Archivist). For an archive to require a work of scholarship be “fact checked” prior to granting Image Permissions arguably amounts to an act of censorship. Moving back

from this a bit, and focusing again on Jones's description in *Seeing Differently*, it is worth considering the ways in which Piper's act of "refusal" can be considered as a politicized feminist act. The Black radical tradition is grounded in the practice of refusal¹²² and we see Piper engaging in similar practices of refusal: both her refusing Jones access to image reproduction rights and the terminating of Piper's tenure at Wellesley College during Piper's time in Berlin. The feminist politics of refusal seem particularly charged for BIPOC women and other feminists who have been differentially marginalized by institutional power; their refusal to facilitate particular manifestations of institutional power at their own or others' expense is a refusing of "that which was first refused to us [them]" (Halberstam, "Wild" 12). Notably, Jones's own desire to reproduce Piper's image could be read as equally complicit with the imperatives of the global art world and surrounding scholarly discourse, with the commodification of knowledge and intellectual property and the (cultural, economic) capital of publishing work.

Even as Piper describes the feminist ritual of self-portraiture as having been unsuccessful in (psychologically, emotionally) grounding her against the disembodied effects of Kantian thought, this hailing of the *autos*—her physical self as a body artist—as a counter to the effects of Philosophy still forms the basis of Piper's conceptual work. In terms of how this work is contextualized and displayed, most viewers of it will encounter it solely through its title and the photographs of Piper standing in front of the mirror with a camera in hand. This was the case when I first saw the work in person: it was at the Tate Modern, where it was included as part of an extensive group exhibition entitled "Performing for the Camera" in the spring of 2016. That

¹²² In their introduction to *The Undercommons*, Halberstam explores the politics of refusal informing Black radical theorists like Moten and Harney in a manner not unlike their theorizing of queer failure (9). We find this discourse of "refusal" in curatorial decisions made around Black conceptual practices in twenty-first century art exhibitions and public programming in American contemporary art galleries and museums, such as in the recent panel "A History of Refusal: Black Artists and Conceptualism" at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (Hammer Museum).

this work fits well in the lineage of artist's practice of "performing for the camera" is clear from such institutional curatorial decisions as its inclusion in this Tate Modern exhibition, which opens with 1960s-1970s conceptual work involving performance-based elements and ends with an image from millennial artist Amalia Ulman's Instagram-based selfie series *Excellences and Perfections*. Arguably an iteration of proto-selfies, the gesture that Piper enacts in the self-portraits of *Food* has become synonymous with "selfie" culture today,¹²³ where the taker of the photograph (who is the same as the body being photographed) points the camera to the mirror and photographs their reflection in the mirror; the camera (or iPhone) is often captured in the shot. The problem of the efficacy or "success" of feminist self-imaging in contemporary art practices is one that continues to be up for debate, and those working autotheoretically—as a mode engaged with philosophy and theory alongside such "self"-focused practices—are well-positioned to respond to these debates.¹²⁴

A large part of Kant's project in *Critique of Pure Reason* involves philosophizing the conditions of subjective experience, and Piper seeks to understand this philosophy in a way that, once *Food* was completed, underscores the subjectivity of her own experience through an artwork that is both conceptual and formalist, political and aesthetic. Through its juxtapositions, Piper's *Food* shows the ways in which feminist body art and conceptual art are viable practices

¹²³ Just as the "selfie" as a feminist form has been contentious from its outset, I question the efficacy of recent practices that use selfies in post-internet spaces like *Instagram*, asking whether works by artists like Wollen can be described as philosophically generative and "autotheoretical" in the way that Piper's *Food* is, or whether it is a rendering of theory into fetish-object for a late capitalist consumer culture vying for relevance and cultural capital in an ever-shifting terrain of fashionability and feminist politics.

¹²⁴ The debate of whether "selfies" constitute a legitimately feminist act of creative, representational, and/or political agency, or whether they are simply complicit in the capitalist patriarchy that objectifies women (or whether they are both), is one that we see within the history of feminism (consider de Beauvoir's section on "Narcissism" in *The Second Sex* alongside Jones's "Rhetoric of the Pose" as an example of this tension, albeit across different temporal and geographical contexts) and which continues today. This longstanding debate is integral to the discursive context of feminism, performance, self-imaging, and autotheory.

for philosophizing. Piper's work, as an artist and a scholar, can be understood in today's terms as practice-based research; consider the contemporary context of PhDs in studio art, and the configuring of one's studio practice as research that is both theoretically informed and that adds to existing scholarship. Piper's practice of self-imaging forms an integral part of her engagement with Kantian philosophy, both at the level of formal juxtaposition in the conceptual art work and at the level of content, where her desire to understand the terms of Kantian philosophy is enacted through the politics and aesthetics of feminist self-imaging practices.

Conclusion

In *Food for the Spirit* (1971), Piper stages a conceptual metabolization of Kant's first *Critique* through an autotheoretical practice that involves both rigorous reading and iterative self-imaging. As a racialized female artist making conceptual art in America in the early 1970s, Piper brings about new ways of reading and understanding Kant's *Critique* in relation to reason, subjectivity, experience, and the body. Through her art practice, Piper prompts an aesthetic confrontation between Kantian philosophy and feminist conceptual art and body art practices that challenge the mid-century ideology of aesthetics that privileged "disinterested" art. Piper foregrounds herself as an artist-philosopher in a way that both resonates with and challenges Kant's philosophical system: a system which can be read as an antecedent to autotheory in its proto-phenomenological assertion of the inextricability of knowledge, perception, the senses, and understanding, but which at the same time ignores the role that particular aspects of embodiment—including race, gender, sexuality, and ability—play in structures of subjectivity and knowledge. In this way, Piper critiques Clement Greenberg's Kantian-inspired mode of

modernist formalism as a kind of bad metaphysics and, in the process, reveals herself as a bold, nuanced reader of Kant. To be sure, Piper is one of Kant's best readers, because she understands the paradox of Kant's philosophical system—predicated as it is on the body and sensorial perspective while at the same time failing to consider the body in its gendered, racialized, sexual, and abled aspects. Piper autotheoretically metabolizes Kant's philosophy and, in doing so, creates a way in to his philosophy for a whole new school of artists and philosophers after her.

CHAPTER 2

Re-Performing Poststructuralism: Phallic Mimesis in Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*

To speak about excess and sacrifice, it must become excessive and sacrificial. It must become simulation if it speaks about simulation, and deploy the same strategy as its object.

- Jean Baudrillard, "Why Theory?"

The woman who still allows herself to be threatened by the big dick, who's still impressed by the commotion of the phallic stance . . . that's the woman of yesterday.

- Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

God is dead. Theory is dad.

- McKenzie Wark, "Review: *I Love Dick*"

Confronting Contemporary Theory's Gendered Terms

Joan Hawkins describes Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* (1997) as "theoretical fiction," meaning not simply fiction informed by theory, but fiction in which "theory becomes an intrinsic part of the 'plot,' a mover and shaker in the fictional universe created by the author" (Hawkins, "Afterword" 263). In similar fashion, Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, is described on its book jacket as "a work of autotheory," borrowing the term from Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, where autotheory is "a kind of shorthand for theoretical inquiry that uses the self as . . . an ethnographic source" (Doerr and Nelson). While the term circulates predominantly in relation to literary works, I contextualize autotheory within a trans-national lineage of feminist critical writing, conceptual art, video and performance, and body art practices, which bring politicized feminist stances into play with self-referential, theoretically-grounded critiques. Post-conceptual

feminist texts such as *I Love Dick* engage a particularly performative and self-reflexive practice of “autotheory” that warrant consideration in light of this emergent term.

Kraus’s post-confessional writing marks a contemporary mode of feminist theory that is resonant both with the 1990s American third wave in which it emerged and the globalized, post-internet present. *I Love Dick* is a meta-theoretical epistolary novel that has experienced a resurgence of interest in recent years, in part because it shares with millennial feminists and internet-based artists and activists, the strategy of public disclosure or outing of the bad behaviour of known and named men as a means of resisting systemic issues like sexual harassment and the perpetuation of rape culture. In 2016, *I Love Dick* was adapted for the screen by *Transparent* series creator Jill Soloway and her collaborator Sarah Gubbins, with Kathryn Hahn cast in the role of Chris Kraus and Kevin Bacon cast as the eponymous Dick; this *Amazon Video* series was canceled in January 2018 after one season, though it contributed to bringing Kraus’s book to the attention of a new generation of readers.

Mira Mattar describes Kraus’s work, as well as the work of other writers published through Kraus’s Semiotext(e) Native Agents series, as an “enactment of the theories of subjectivity found in French theory” (12). Reading Kraus’s work as feminist autotheory, I theorize the ways in which she performatively enacts and conceptually instantiates the terms of post-structuralism, focusing specifically on her interventions into Bataille and transgression, Schechner and performance, Deleuze and Guattari and schizophrenia, and Lotringer and psychoanalysis. Kraus uses the practice of autotheory to point to the hypocrisies of Continental philosophy: specifically post-structuralism and more recent iterations of theory like Performance Studies. While the post-structuralists make their living by telling us to question power structures,

Kraus shows the ways in which they are fully willing to profit—even exploitatively—by the very structures they call into question theoretically. Using her own privileged positionings tied to her art world and academic connections—connections forged largely through her husband—Kraus straddles the line between complicity and critique. Much of the power of Kraus’s satire comes from her intimate knowledge of the world of Continental philosophy (and philosophers); her bona fides are provided autobiographically as well as academically, with the “personal” of Kraus’s lived experience serving as a mode of citation alongside the academic and the theoretical. Kraus’s framework is grounded in performance theory and feminism even as she disavows both. Her critiques are performative and affirmative of a politics and aesthetics of transparency and disclosure—a position echoed by millennial post-internet feminisms.

I am interested in what Kraus is performing in, as, and for contemporary theory, and how her work gets at ongoing gendered problems in progressive, postmodern, and post-structuralist spheres. Kraus takes on the abject positionings that have been mapped onto women at the expense of their acknowledgment as theorists—the hysteric, the anorexic, the slut, the hag, the witch, and the sick woman¹²⁵—in such a way as to reveal that these are legitimate subject positions from which to theorize. I contextualize Kraus’s performative feminist strategies of mimesis, irony, and comedy, reading these strategies in light of Nelson’s “post-avant-garde” practices in *The Art of Cruelty*, Rebecca Schneider’s notion of the “explosive literality” of feminist performance art, and Shannon Bell’s autotheoretical practice of “fast feminism.” I unpack three key ways in which Kraus troubles the terms of Continental philosophy in her

¹²⁵ In addition to her disclosures of previous mental health issues (like anorexia), she discloses her experiences of Crohn’s disease (Kraus, *Dick* 232), yeast infections (233), and cystitis (233). Kraus positions anorexia not as a mental health issue so much as a deliberate and politicized site of post-punk, postmodern feminist agency in a manner not unlike the approach to schizophrenia taken by French post-structuralism via Semiotext(e).

performative and self-aware work *I Love Dick*, specifically philosophy's postmodern manifestation as French post-structuralist theory and performance theory in the 1970s onward. Kraus positions these in relation to her engagements with the lives and works of Georges Bataille, Richard Schechner, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. I propose that Kraus instantiates the process of "becoming-hysteric"/"becoming-schizo" through an autotheoretical feminist practice that is grounded in the histories of feminist performance art and body-based conceptual practices.

In an act of feminist transgression, Kraus extends the "becoming-hysteric" to the male post-structuralist in a meta-Deleuzian deterritorializing move. Through the character of Chris Kraus, Kraus stages the threat of contamination that the "schizo" woman poses to the male theorist in a way that oscillates between somber and satirical. To take Deleuze and Guattari's term, Kraus deterritorializes the male post-structuralist in a way that reveals the spaces of unchecked sexism in leftist experimental theory written by men. The spectre of the male hysteric as a literal and conceptual possibility haunts *I Love Dick*, specifically in Kraus's representation of Lotringer's character. A consideration of Kraus's work and the lineage of experimental feminist autotheory that *Semiotext(e) Native Agents* published from the early 1990s onward is pivotal to understanding how the hysteric manifests in the context of postmodernism and third-wave feminism in the West. I discuss this in the latter part of this chapter.

I take *I Love Dick* as a ripe place to theorize the intricacies of autotheory as a mode of feminist practice; in it, Kraus engages male-authored traditions of French post-structuralist theory, American literature, and art criticism from the perspective of a critically deft and self-effacing female filmmaker living in America near the end of the twentieth century. Through close

readings of key passages in the text, I consider the “philosopher’s wife” positioning theorized by Irigaray to be a role that Kraus strategically enacts throughout *I Love Dick*. Drawing on Irigaray’s mimetic function (*This Sex* 76) and considering it alongside Butler’s notion of gender performativity (“Performative” 519), I argue that in the role of “philosopher’s wife,” Kraus moves from what Irigaray (reiterating Plato) calls “reproductive mimesis” to “productive mimesis” (*This Sex* 131). Irigaray’s explication of Platonic mimesis in relation to “the philosopher’s wife” role provides context for better understanding Kraus’s transformative inhabiting of the role of “Academic Wife” (*Dick* 145) in the body of the text.

Mimesis as Strategic Performance: from Academic Wife to Autotheorist

And hysterical miming will be the little girl’s or the woman’s effort to save her sexuality from total repression and destruction.

- Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*

I Love Dick is an experimental novel in which the character “Chris Kraus” develops an obsession with “Dick,” an “English cultural critic” and acquaintance of Chris Kraus’s husband, Sylvère Lotringer (*Dick* 19). In the autotheoretical world constructed by Kraus, Kraus features as the protagonist alongside Lotringer—Kraus’s real-life ex-husband and founder of Semiotext(e) press—and Dick, a character who remains without a surname but who, following a series of events following the book’s publication, was revealed to be Dick Hebdige, the author of *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979).¹²⁶ After their initial meeting, Kraus begins to pen letters to Dick, which become an integral part of the text’s intertextual form; further complicating

¹²⁶ Hebdige’s “initiation of legal action” (Zembla) against Kraus in 1997 is one event that points to the fidelity between what Kraus half-heartedly frames as fictionalized and what happened in real life, and it also brought about the widespread association of his name with Kraus’s book.

the meta-theoretical layers of the text, Kraus interpellates Dick as her unwitting “ideal reader” (130). While Lotringer briefly joins in on the letter writing as a vaguely kinky, somewhat unsettling (due to Dick’s lack of consent) conceptual game, Kraus’s fixation on Dick culminates in the end of hers and Lotringer’s marriage—and the end of Part I of the book. The novel stands as a densely citational, phenomenological trace of these events, with Kraus interjecting essays that theorize such topics as the feminist politics of first person narration and the politics of the life and work of artists with whom she identifies—performance artist Wilke and painter R.B. Kitaj—with the essays punctuating the performative relaying of events pulled from Kraus’s own life. Autotheory involves approaching one’s lived experiences as material through which to theorize the political ramifications of one’s experiences, but also to bring to life the theory explored, and Kraus engages this mode for the duration of the text.

Writing in France in the 1970s, Irigaray describes Continental philosophy as the “master discourse” through which women must pass if they wish to inhabit and transform language in a phallogentric system (*This Sex* 149). When it comes to participating in language or discourse, Irigaray summarizes the options that are available to her: she can either speak as a man (or “neuter”—without “sex difference”) and be intelligible, or she can speak as a female and remain unintelligible (76). Irigaray states that in order for her to “speak intelligently” (and intelligibly) as a woman and to take part in philosophical discourse as a being whose body is gendered and inscribed as explicitly female or feminine, she must enter into the Lacanian discursive mechanism of subject-formation through a method she terms “mimesis”:

An interim strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the

feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her. (220)

According to Irigaray's theory of mimesis, a woman enters into discourse through reproductive mimesis and then can subvert it through productive mimesis; this bears resemblance to Butler's theory of gender performativity and the corresponding notions of citationality and iteration.¹²⁷

Mimesis is a provisional performance in discourse, wherein a woman takes on the role and characteristics of the conventionally "feminine" in order to transform that role from within.

Given that philosophy (or theory) functions as a "master discourse . . . the one that lays down the law to the others," Irigaray seeks to change the laws of philosophy rather than attending to its symptoms (*This Sex* 149). And yet, Irigaray notes that this is not possible—that the "master discourse" of philosophy must be taken on through the tactical use of indirection: "the option left to me was *to have a fling with the philosophers*, which is easier said than done," Irigaray explains (150). One of the best ways to have this proverbial fling is to become the philosopher's wife, a role which Irigaray describes as a ripe site for productive mimicry (151).

The feminist politics of narcissism—which I took up in Chapter 1, particularly in relation to feminist body art and the charges of narcissism brought on women artists and writers who engage their selves and bodies in their work—become further complicated when Irigaray describes the male philosopher as fundamentally narcissistic: according to Irigaray, the

¹²⁷ In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Judith Butler extends "the phenomenological theory of 'acts', espoused by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead" to gender, arguing that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (519). In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Butler fleshes out her notion of gender performativity in relation to Derridean notions of iterability and citationality, arguing that "all performativity rests on the credible production of 'authority' and is, thus, not only a repetition of its own prior instance . . . but its citationality assumes the form of a mimesis without end" (151). Then, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler continues her project of working through performativity in relation to iterability, arguing that "The iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility" (xxiv).

philosopher's wife functions as an object for the philosopher—a reflective surface (“mirror”) and formless matter (“reproductive material”) that exists to serve the philosopher's ends (*This Sex* 151). Making a larger case for the fundamental male narcissism undergirding the Western philosophical project, Irigaray calls out the elided specificity of male philosophers that masquerades as universality. She acknowledges that women have had a role in the production of philosophy, not so much as philosophers, but as the source material appropriated by the male philosopher for his own ends—as the body which “nourishes speculation” (*This Sex* 151). According to Irigaray, the narcissism of the male philosopher is dependent upon the wife withholding what she knows about him.

Post-third wave American feminist writers like Kraus and Kate Zambreno¹²⁸ demonstrate a renewed interest in the gendered politics of narcissism and philosophy, particularly as these problematics persist through the twentieth century into the present. In Irigaray's conception, the philosopher's wife performs a dual role in “safeguarding” the narcissism of the male philosopher, both by being the mirror for his status as genius and by not disclosing what she knows. To describe feminist modes of autotheoretical practice as narcissistic is problematic, particularly when we consider the ways in which writers and artists working in the autotheoretical mode apprehend and arguably refute such charges. What's more, when we acknowledge the history of the philosopher's wife as a kind of inverted narcissism that facilitates the male philosopher's self-propagating, as Irigaray describes above, the view that feminist practices of autotheory are narcissistic is revealed to be problematic on another level.

¹²⁸ In *Heroines*, an autotheoretical feminist novel published through Semiotext(e)'s Active Agents series, Zambreno takes up the gendered problematics of narcissism, literature, and philosophy using the example of hysteria and “the modernist mad wives” for whom hysteria came to characterize their lives (13).

Historically, for a woman to dutifully fulfill the role of the “philosopher’s wife,” she must keep her husband’s secrets. In addition, the role of the philosopher’s wife necessitates an “avoidance of self-expression” (151): so, the wife’s avoiding of disclosure on behalf of her husband goes hand in hand with her avoiding self-reflection and self-expression. Theorizing Irigaray through frameworks of phenomenology, Virpi Lehtinen points out how this mirroring function imposed on the philosopher’s wife would be troubled if the philosopher himself were to become more self-aware (172). In order for reproductive mimesis to give way to the subversive capacities of productive mimesis, the philosopher’s wife must engage in “A transformation toward self-definition” (172). Now, instead of continuing to avoid self-knowledge, the woman moves toward self-reflection. Through an experimental writing practice grounded in self-reflexivity, comedy, and post-confessional disclosure, Kraus mimetically takes on the part of “philosopher’s wife” and, by the end of the text, deconstructs it to find a new role to call her own: that of the feminist autotheorist.

Within the contexts of *I Love Dick* and of Kraus’s own life at the time of writing (the period of 1993-1994), metonymically, Lotringer and Dick stand in for the “master discourse” of theory in its late twentieth century manifestation: namely, 1970s male-authored French post-structuralism in America. With a few exceptions, including Acker (with whom Lotringer had been romantically involved) Semiotext(e) did not publish much work by women until Lotringer began his relationship with Kraus in the 1980s—and even then, the writing by women was framed as fiction, a point which I take up later in this chapter.¹²⁹ Regardless of whether Lotringer

¹²⁹ Interviewers Schwarz and Balsamo describe it somewhat euphemistically: “In the late 1980s, when Lotringer began associating with NY-based filmmaker Chris Kraus, he became aware of the severe imbalances of women’s representation within both the journal and the Foreign Agents series” (212).

is justified in denouncing feminist theory for its perceived psychoanalytic leanings (Schwarz and Balsamo 212)—a positioning justified through his alignment with Deleuze and Guattari (and their *Anti-Oedipus* thrust)—he is complicit in the re-entrenching of contemporary theory as the “master discourse” (149) through advancing limiting definitions of theory that exclude women. It is also worth noting that, while contemporary theorizations of gender complicate, or even make untenable, such overly determined binary oppositions as “male” and “female,” I use these as provisional points of reference throughout my discussion of Kraus’s work in a way that mirrors the cheeky mimicry of Kraus’s own invocations of a generalized male/female opposition—a binary which functions performatively in *I Love Dick*.

Kraus’s text opens with “Scenes From a Marriage,” a kind of film script synopsis in which Kraus introduces herself, Lotringer, and the titular Dick as characters who fulfill particular predetermined roles. Setting the discursive scene of a dinner party, Kraus establishes a conflict between the men who are well-versed in “postmodern critical theory” and the woman Chris “who is no intellectual” (*Dick* 19). While the men in this scene occupy the realm of the mind, freely engaging in intellectual discourse with each other, Kraus occupies the realm of the body, subject to the male gaze that feminist film theorists have, by the time of Kraus’s writing, theorized to the point of exhaustion. In this scene, the men are to criticality what the woman is to carnality. Riffing on this binary, while at the same time evading the predictable feminist script, Kraus writes of how Chris “notices Dick making continual eye contact with her” and that this attention from Dick “makes her feel powerful”:

Over dinner the two men discuss recent trends in postmodern critical theory and Chris, who is no intellectual, notices Dick making continual eye contact with her.

Dick's attention makes her feel powerful, and when the check comes she takes out her Diners Club card. "Please," she says. "Let me pay." (19)

Kraus combines feminist attributes—paying for the bill—with stereotypically feminine ones: that her power, in this scene, comes not from her active participation in the literal and discursive economies between men, but from her receiving "Dick's attention" through the form of "continual eye contact" (19). In doing so, she sets the tone for the kinds of ironic, mimetic jokes that ensue. When we understand what Kraus is doing in *I Love Dick* as a series of strategically mimetic acts, the power of the joke—at least for a feminist readership—is underlined. Though excluded from the Symbolic Order of theoretical language and suppressed as a speaking subject as a result of her gender, Kraus nevertheless feels "powerful" because she receives Dick's attention; within the conceit of this joke, the power Kraus experiences from being objectified overrides the power of her desire to be an intellectual. From the outset, she "assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 220), and in this way sets the stage for her performance of reproductive mimesis. As a self-identified "failed filmmaker" (Kraus, *Dick* 81) writing an anecdote from her own life in the form of a cinematic pastiche, Kraus satirizes the state of the free and equal woman in a 'post-women's lib' society by foregrounding her agency as both an object of desire and a willing consumer with the agency to pay for dinner; notably, *I Love Dick* predates (by one year) *Sex and the City* with its iconic feminist anti-heroes and its ensuing brand of neoliberal feminist empowerment.¹³⁰

Transmuting the material of her life it into cinematic anecdotes, Kraus frames the scene of a dinner party as a darkly comic melodrama where the men represent the elevated discourse of

¹³⁰ I take this idea from Amelia Jones's reading of feminist body art as an instantiating of the female artist as simultaneously subject and object (*Body Art*).

“theory” and women represent something “other”—that which is “unarticulated” (*Dick* 21).

“Because she does not express herself in theoretical language,” Kraus writes of the character Chris, “no one expects too much from her and she is used to tripping out on layers of complexity in total silence” (21). In this faintly fictionalized world constituted by Kraus, it is not that women are incapable of abstract theoretical thought—as she states here, the character is “tripping out on layers of complexity” (21) in private—but that they have not yet found a language through which to publicly articulate themselves in a way that will be understood by the men. Here, we return to the initial dilemma Irigaray perceived in the 1970s, where she suggested the strategy of mimesis while other French feminist theorists, like Cixous, sought a specifically feminine mode of writing that existed somewhere outside the bounds of phallogentric discourse (“Laugh” 875).

Kraus’s autotheoretical practice begins with strategies that engage with the work of male thinkers, including a mimetic re-iteration of stereotypical gender roles as they manifest in academic and art contexts—often to comical effect. Kraus establishes a mechanical¹³¹ arrangement in *I Love Dick* that is prompted by patriarchal terms, where the man stands as the speaking intellectual while the woman remains a silent body. The real-life characters become stereotypes, players in the “game” of contemporary theory and its discursive terms. Kraus stages the gendered tensions in the history of theory in her exchange with her husband and Dick, two men who are both cultural theorists and expats (French and British respectively) employed by American Universities. The work of both crosses between academic and art discourses and spheres, and is indebted to post-structuralist and postmodern theory.

¹³¹ Henri Bergson defines the comic situation as “Any arrangement of acts and events ... which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement” (Bergson 105).

Chris positions herself as the “Academic Wife” while the men are academics; later, in Part II, Chris acknowledges that this was a role that she was “playing” and she tells Dick as much (*Dick* 145). In addition to establishing a base level of self-awareness in the performances of everyday life that she engages in as a woman which will continue over the duration of the text, this also demonstrates Kraus’s underscoring of social scripts as performances and performative: the act of iterating something opens up space for the capacity to reproduce the role differently. Using the materials of her body and her life, Kraus refers to herself an “academic groupie,” willingly degrading herself in the service of showing the imbalanced power dynamics she perceives between heterosexual women and the men whose work they perceive as culturally significant. As a character in this metonymically gendered exchange, Chris embodies the stereotypes of the woman as “Academic Wife,” who remains quiet but not dumb (“tripping out on layers of complexity in total silence” (21)) and, presumably, physically desirable, even as Kraus dismantles the latter in her later descriptions of herself as an “Ugly Girl” (181). Historically, men are encouraged to speak while women are encouraged to be quiet, and the fact that there is a hold-over from less progressive historical epochs in a context of purportedly progressive, leftist, “queer,” and experimental theorizing only enhances the comedic quality of Kraus’s observations. That Kraus opens with a seemingly simplistic scene—in terms of her representation of gender and power—is part of the comedic point: as “something mechanical encrusted on the living” (Bergson 84), the comic revels in this kind of hyperbolic simplification.

Tactical Indirection: Subverting the Master Discourse

Using irony and other comedic strategies, Kraus stages the gender drama of theory as a melodramatic comedy in *I Love Dick*. From the book's title, Kraus performatively constitutes a space of reverence for the phallus, and this phallic devotion is one way in which Kraus's performative positioning in the text is mimetic. Instead of disavowing the phallic outright as a semantic and social imperative, as Irigaray and Wittig sought to do, Kraus makes known her desire for "Dick"—the genital-sexual (slang), the symbolic (phallus), and the particular (male theorist). In *I Love Dick*, it is the theorist who stands as the phallic arbiter of knowledge and authority: the big "Dick," so to speak. In terms of what is appropriate for women, for Kraus to say she loves Dick places her in a sexually aggressive position: she becomes the one pursuing the man, ravenous for "Dick" and dick.

At the same time, this reverence will just as soon become a site for feminist satire and mimetic inversion. *I Love Dick*, reverses the genders of the comedic structure that Northrop Frye outlines in his structuralist description of comedy, and the structuring of the action around romantic desire is a conceit within which more complex theoretical, artistic, and discursive feminist desires are couched to ironic effect. Feminist readers might recognize that "the obstructing characters" who "are in charge of the play's society"—Lotringer and Dick—are "usurpers" (Frye 163-164), and that the new society that manifests at the end of the text is closer to a feminist one. While there is a feminist politics at work in *I Love Dick* (most transparently in the essays constituting Part II) there is also an ambivalence characteristic of Kraus's writing and feminist comedy more generally. Instead of the protagonist of the comedy being a young man who desires a young woman, as it is in Frye's account (163), we have a woman nearing middle age who desires an older man. What's more, Chris Kraus's name is ambiguously gendered, and

her descriptions of herself point to the ways in which she fails at being properly “female”: she is a self-described “de-gendered freak” who has been accused of “acting like a boy” in the past (Dick 173). Performing a kind of queer gender failure (Coyote and Spoon 1), Kraus’s becoming-boy recalls performance precursors from history, such as the trope in Shakespearean plays where the girl “brings about the comic resolution by disguising herself as a boy” (Frye 183). Kraus’s desire to find a voice through the autotheoretical letters she writes to Dick is resisted by the opposition of two patriarchs: most vehemently Dick and, to some extent, Chris’s older husband Sylvère. Frye notes that “The opponent to the hero’s wishes, when not the father, is generally someone who partakes of the father’s closer relation to established society” (164-65); it is Dick as “cowboy” (201), as theorist, and as tenured faculty at a California university who partakes of Sylvère’s “closer relation to established society”—namely, the academic and artistic spheres—and who rejects Kraus’s letters, while Kraus is the unintelligible woman and abject “kike” (201).

American humour scholar Regina Barreca describes the female comic’s characteristic use of “comedic ‘covert’ language”—a strategy that “masks” the comic’s “radical contradiction of accepted patriarchal authority” (Barreca 8) through methods like irony and self-deprecation. It is through her mimetic performance of heterosexual femininity that Kraus makes use of such a “comedic ‘covert’ language,” masking her radical contradiction of the men in her life—contemporary theorists—with a feigned indulgence of their egos. Kraus shrouds her feminist frustration in a seemingly self-effacing and hyper-feminized obsession with Dick: being scorned by him in the plot of *I Love Dick*, she is “degraded” and, therefore, less threatening. But inhabiting this position of degradation is a performance which allows Kraus to reveal the conditions under which she, as a woman, is always already degraded. In the midst of a discussion

of contemporary artists and theorists, Kraus asks, “Why does everybody think that women are debasing themselves when we expose the conditions of our own debasement?” (221), echoing the views of earlier feminists, from Mary Wollstonecraft to George Eliot. Kraus wants the reader to know that, far from debasing herself, she is exposing the structural conditions that continue to debase her.

With the female-coded form of the epistolary genre, and the “Dear Dick” rhetorical conceit mirroring the “Dear Diary” of female adolescence, Kraus appropriates Dick toward mimetic feminist ends. Dick functions as a metonymic stand-in for the residual traces of patriarchal masculinity as it continues to flourish on the margins of the mainstream: Kraus repeatedly interpellates Dick as a the wild, frontier-imperialist figure of the “cowboy” (201) and as a lone wolf figure who is sensitive but stoic. Using deadpan observation and straightforward description of anecdotes from life, Kraus calls attention to what she perceives to be the problematic aspects of “Dick”—both as a specific person and as a more generalized phenomenon amongst men with cultural and social capital in the art and academic worlds. These aspects include Dick’s (implied) sexual encounters with women who are much younger than him—such as the woman whom Chris hears on Dick’s answering machine and heretofore refers to as the “Bimbo” (22)—and Dick’s (implied) appropriation of women’s ideas without due credit. Relaying an anecdote from a dinner party, Kraus configures the character Dick as embodying many of the problems that feminist scholars in literature, art, and philosophy take up in their work—including, but not limited to, the politics of canon-formation:

Betsey remembered something smart you’d said: I don’t believe in the evil of banality but I believe in the banality of evil. What’s Dick go to do with Hannah

Arendt? I wondered . . . Anyway Dick I like you so much better than these people.
(100)

Kraus speaks with a knowing irony—“What’s Dick got to do with Hannah Arendt?” (100)—pointing out that the “banality of evil” is not the theoretical insight of Dick, as his friends at the party made it seem, but the subtitle (and, in this way, an obvious, uncredited citation) of a 1963 publication by the German-born Jewish American theorist Arendt. Kraus implicates Sylvère in her satirical send-up: since Sylvère is a Jewish man whose family fled the Nazis (as did Arendt’s), he should know the reference to Arendt. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that he does not, and in this way, the passage can be read as another instance where Kraus combines anecdotal ‘truth’ with comedic hyperbole to stage real-life stories as telling feminist allegories. Whether this anecdote actually happened or not, its construction in the text performs Kraus’s characteristic adroit awareness of the politics of the personal and her mimetic acts that aim to advance a feminist aesthetics of accountability within learned social circles; this extends certain longstanding feminist aims, such as ensuring women have their rightful place in the canon.

Kraus employs the rhetorical strategy of couching her feminist jokes and criticisms within direct addresses and self-effacing appeals to her “reader” Dick; in this way, she affirms his power as her reader and source of validation, while at the same time troubling the foundations on which his reputation stands. We see this in the above instance where Kraus softens a jab at Dick’s appropriation of Arendt with a declaration of her affection for him (100). Similarly, in the midst of Chris’s insightful and sophisticated take up of the trope of schizophrenia in twentieth century theory near the end of Part II, Kraus concludes a paragraph with another non sequitur—a

cloying appeal to Dick's ego that, when read in the context of *I Love Dick* as a whole, is patronizing: "Oh Dick, I want to be an intellectual like you" (226).

While Kraus's ravenous desire for "Dick" is a motif throughout the book, it is a metaphor for Kraus's unfulfilled desire to be recognized as an intellectual, a privileged position occupied, as she underscores throughout, exclusively by men. In one such example, Kraus relays an anecdote of Antonio Negri stating at a party that "Christa Woolf is not an intellectual" (227). After reading one of the letters that she wrote to Dick, Lotringer denounces Kraus for writing something that really "makes no sense at all" (65); "You're supposed to be intelligent," Sylvère tells her and so she tries again, writing "The Intelligent Fax (printed on *Gravity and Grace* letterhead)" (65). Kraus's decision to frame her nonsensical words with the "official" letterhead of her failed production company and film—a film which is itself autotheoretical, where Kraus reflects on her process of making the film *Gravity and Grace* alongside an extended reading of the life and work of Simone Weil "the anorexic philosopher" (*Aliens* 162)—further the simultaneous self-effacement and autotheoretical affirmation. Kraus goes on to write autotheoretically, critically analyzing her actions as she describes them: "It was an interesting thing, to plummet back into the psychosis of adolescence. Living so intensely in your head that boundaries disappear" (*Dick* 65). Once again, it is not that Kraus as a character in the text is incapable of complex thinking, but that she does so in the privacy of her own mind: it is the autotheoretical letters Kraus writes to Dick that become the avenue through which she begins to publicly articulate her views in terms that are both subjective and elevated in their proximity to theory and its many intertextual references.

By couching her incisive critiques within stereotypically feminine, hyperbolically indulgent performance for her “ideal reader” (*Dick* 130) Dick, Kraus performs the very femaleness that has been grounds for the dismissal of women from the theoretical realm while simultaneously refuting the grounds of that dismissal in her apt preempting.¹³² That she ultimately appropriates Dick and his terms toward her own feminist ends brings the autotheoretical dynamics of *I Love Dick*’s full circle. In the contentiously titled “Kike Art” chapter, Kraus advances a critical interpretation of Jewish artist Kitaj’s paintings that is grounded in her identification with the artist. After writing a nuanced take on the context of the 1960s and the politics of art economies, grounding her theses in an art critical reading of Kitaj’s 1964 painting *The Nice Old Man and the Pretty Girl (With Huskies)*, Kraus truncates her own argument with statements like “Oh D ... I feel so emotional about this writing” and “I’m completely illegitimate” (*Dick* 191). Within the rhetorical and autotheoretical context of her writing, such a statement is unconvincing: when read in the context of what has preceded it, it is clear that Kraus’s claims of illegitimacy are put on. She is appealing to the patriarchal context that continues to misunderstand her, while at the same time demonstrating—through a text that is tactically subversive—her force as an emerging feminist voice.

In *Performing Marginality*, feminist comedy theorist Joanne Gilbert engages in a rhetorical analysis of women and stand-up comedy, arguing that the agency of the female stand-up lies in her capacity to embody the positioning of fool, artist, or social critic who can perform and, in turn, transform her marginality. Kraus performs her marginality—as “degraded” and “abject” woman—in winking ways: as a woman, as Jewish (“kike”), and as otherwise abject (her

¹³² In “Why Women Aren’t Funny,” Christopher Hitchens cites Fran Lebowitz who says that “humour is largely aggressive and pre-emptive, and what’s more male than that?” (Hitchens).

sick body, her hysterical body, her past involvement with sex work). There is notable crossover between contemporary stand-up comedy by women and autotheory as feminist practice. Broadly speaking, women's comedy has a history of making use of the particular and the embodied rather than the 'universal': women from Roseanne Barr to Leslie Jones are not able to 'transcend' their bodies or personas—and the sexist and/or racist ways their bodies are coded—in the way that, say, Jerry Seinfeld is able to in his more 'universal' or 'neutral' observations on everyday life. This brings us back to the larger gendered divide within philosophy and theory historically that theorists like Irigaray have taken up, where the (white) male is taken as universal and 'neutral' (concealing his particularity and *autos*) while the woman is rendered always already gendered, particular, and embodied. Working with what one has—including the ways one has been categorized socio-culturally—becomes a site for subversion, as women comics and comics of colour reclaim stereotypes through mimesis.¹³³ Gilbert describes what she calls "strategic subversion" (20) through humour, using her "That's *stupid bitch*, to you" joke as an example. She explains, "Women's humor is not always perceived as subversive because what appears to be submissive to stereotypes is often a 'thinly veiled indictment of society'" (21, quoting Barrecca 1991). It is this "strategic subversion"—or balancing between institutionalization and insurrectionist methods—that serve as what Barrecca calls "a thinly veiled indictment of society" (21). Of course, the ingenious convergence of self-deprecation and subversion in "a carefully constructed joke" (21) still runs the risk of misinterpretation: that it is complicit in perpetuating sexist stereotypes, for example.

¹³³ Three methods of comedy that Bergson outlines in "Laughter" are repetition, inversion, and "the equivocal situation" or "the reciprocal interference of a series" (Bergson 123). Repetition can be a method of comedy, whether this takes the form of an impersonation or impression, repeating one's words to comic (or annoying) effect, or engaging in ironic and self-aware reclaiming of stereotypes.

Kraus's strategic occupation of the role of wife, for example, becomes a possibility for her to both generate a "new genre" of autotheory in her own work and make space for related works in feminist writing in the form of her Semiotext(e) Native Agents series. There is a project of canon formation taking place too, foregrounding this strain of work (by women, queers, "hysterics") and positively valuing the liminal spaces it opens up. Kraus positions herself as an outsider to both the male-dominated art and theory worlds in which she "expect(s) to be patronized and ignored" (179) and to contemporaneous feminist spaces. Even as her writings are effectively feminist, Kraus does not protect feminism from her satirizing impulse.

Kraus's self-deprecation is a comedic strategy she uses throughout, employing irony as a means of underscoring her central point: that there is a gendered divide that persists in both the lived world and the discursive domain of theory, academia and the art world. Through this strategy, Kraus describes her practice of "female writing" as a practice of "intellectual vaudeville" ("Continuity" 25), and we witness this commingling of satire and theory in *I Love Dick*. Even as the narrator tells us that Chris is "no intellectual," the incisiveness of the narrator's observations—who is speaking for/as "Chris Kraus" in third person and, later, in first person—and her understanding of the 1970s-1990s discursive landscape of theory, academia, and art tells us otherwise. With Chris in the self-identified role of "Dumb Cunt" (*Dick* 27) and Sylvère in the self-identified role of "Dumb Dick" (51)—where these are not essential identities so much as positions inhabited—we are reminded that *I Love Dick* is in many ways a satire of of theory (and theory's institutions) from a post-punk feminist perspective attuned to the valences of gender and sexuality. Both the "Dumb Cunt" and the "Dumb Dick," Kraus seems to say, would do well to take themselves a little less seriously.

While Chris engages in self-deprecation within the body of her text, Dick is portrayed as genuinely ego-driven both in the text and in the real-life surrounding scenarios—not least of which being Dick Hebdige’s public outing of himself as the eponymous character as outlined in Nic Zembra’s article and interview in *New York Magazine* and his seeking out legal action against Kraus (Zembra). Dick—in the text and in real-life—did not “get” Kraus’s joke, and his public denouncing of her work as being read “only because it exploits a recognizable figure,” referring to himself, returns us to the initial premise of the primacy and narcissism of male theorists that started this entire feminist autotheoretical critique in the first place. This establishes Dick as the inflexible or rigid figure in the comedy of Kraus’s creation: the forces of “tension and elasticity,” are central to Bergson’s theory of the comic, where rigidity is comic (Bergson 74) and inelasticity or inflexibility prompt suspicion (73).

Kraus’s strategy of self-deprecation extends to feminism: while her work is effectively feminist, the character Kraus brashly evades the “feminist” label. Further complicating things, Kraus admits “Sylvère-the-pragmatist kept telling me I’d have better luck if I’d just call myself a ‘feminist’” (*Aliens* 103), since this way her work would have a context within which it could be understood. The character Chris tells Dick that, while she loves postmodern theory, she rejects “experimental film world feminism,” which we can take to mean feminist film theory of the 1980s, with its emphasis on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and “the gaze”:

What put me off experimental film world feminism, besides all its boring study groups on Jacques Lacan, was its sincere investigation into the dilemma of the Pretty Girl. As an Ugly Girl it didn’t matter much to me. And didn’t Donna Haraway finally solve this by saying all female lived experience is a bunch of riffs, completely fake, so we should recognize ourselves as Cyborgs? (*Dick* 181)

Despite her history as a filmmaker, Kraus does not identify with this branch of feminist theory: that Kraus willingly accepts Dick's gaze in the opening scene underscores this point. Self-identifying as an "Ugly Girl" warrants her an outsider positioning in relation both to heterosexual men and to feminist film theory. Though she is not alone: Kraus's rejection of certain movements in feminism resembles the critiques of feminism advanced by artists like Wilke—with her "Beware of Fascist Feminism" statement on a 1977 poster (Wilke, "Marxism")—or critics like Camille Paglia. Just as Irigaray's mimesis is an example of approaching the master discourse in an oblique way in order to deconstruct it, Kraus's distancing of herself from the "feminist" label is an oblique way of practicing feminist work more effectively; identifying as a "feminist" might lead to certain immediate responses, like defensiveness, and it might limit the ways in which her work is received—especially by heterosexual men.

Feminist humour theorist Rosenblatt defines stand-up comedy as "a socially acceptable form of aggression" and the joke as "an act of aggression and self-protection all in one" (Gilbert 10-11). In her work, Kraus calls into question the entire culture of male-authored theory, literature, and art in the post-1960s American context, calling out the hypocrisies in its persistent sexism and gendered double standards in its denigration of "the personal": yet she does not go about this in a straightforwardly aggressive way, but instead transmutes her critiques through strategically performative tactics, including hyper-feminized self-deprecation. As Gilbert notes: "Perhaps women and minorities must *seem* non-threatening, as fools did in order to become licensed social critics" (21). In order to "*seem* non-threatening," Kraus takes on a masculine strategy of aggression while couching it in a hyperbolically feminine (self-effacing, self-

degrading) voice; ultimately, this comes off as doubly wounding due to her patronizing of Dick through disingenuous appeals to his ego.

The Move from “Phallocentrism” to “Feminism”

In “Deleuze in the Age of Posttheory,” Jeffrey R. Di Leo investigates what he calls “the alleged ‘posttheoretical turn’” in academia, where “theory” is defined as the male-authored French post-structuralist work. Writing in the 1990s, the decade in which “a sophisticated post-structuralist feminist theory emerged” (Moore 219), Kraus takes the largely masculine line of thought encompassed in the term “post-structuralism” as a site for mimetic intervention and comic subversion. In light of recent discourses around “the age of posttheory” (Di Leo 174) and “the lure of the postcritical” (Weed 153), I approach autotheory as a critical practice that operates in proximity to, and as an alternative or counter practice, to “theory,” where “theory” refers to the discursive and intellectual lineage of Marx-Nietzsche-Freud through to the post-war French theory of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze that is authored predominantly by European, cisgender men. As mentioned, the “master discourse” that Kraus specifically confronts is the “high theory” (Di Leo 175) of 1970s French post-structuralism in America—a tradition indebted to this lineage of philosophy influenced by “the legacy of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud” (Weed 153).

What Kraus makes clear at the level of both form and content in *I Love Dick* is the way in which this tradition of contemporary theory excludes and suppresses female artists and writers who are working in experimental, transgressive, or critically rigorous ways but who are seen, instead, as creating unintelligent or unintelligible work (or, who are relegated to spaces of fiction and autobiography instead of the discursively elevated “theory”). In her description of the move

from high modernist practices of formalism to postmodern practices of conceptualism, artist and philosopher Piper cites examples of male conceptual artists, like Kosuth and the Art & Language Group, who moved “from linguistic analysis of the concept of art to discursive Marxist critiques of the means of production” (Piper, “Logic” 577). Viewing the autotheoretical practices of artists and writers like Piper and Kraus in light of the history of conceptual art practice, *I Love Dick* can be seen as advancing a critique of the “means of production” of contemporary theory, where the “means of production” is the theorists themselves.

Kraus is thoroughly knowledgeable of literary history and contemporary theory, and is complicit in the structures, spaces, and institutions that she critiques. Since the early 1990s, Kraus has published poetry, auto-fiction, and autotheory written by women through Lotringer’s Semiotext(e) press: blurring the line between art and life, the creation of a feminist sub-press (Semiotext(e) Native Agents) within Lotringer’s historically male-dominated press (Semiotext(e)) is mimetic. That Kraus operates in proximity to—and is even complicit to some degree—in the structures and institutions to which she directs her pointed jokes, is notable when we consider the subversive potentiality of her mimetic becoming. While Kraus’s own life testifies to the power of mimesis as a means of successfully making space for new feminist voices, it is in *I Love Dick*, which ritualistically obfuscates the line dividing art and life, that Kraus performs mimesis at the level of both content and form. The move from Part I to Part II inaugurates a series of formal and thematic shifts that are key in understanding the autotheoretical feminist practice that Kraus undertakes.

In the conceptual world of *I Love Dick*, Kraus’s continued performing of the positionings of “amateur” (176) and “not an intellectual” (227) stands as a mimetic strategy for how women

might subvert the systems and frameworks that exclude and suppress them without being seen as too threatening to the men. When Kraus announces her decision to leave Sylvère, it signals her move to find her own voice apart from the patriarchal institutions that she has until then been dependent—or, on which, as Anna Watkins Fisher puts it, she has been “parasitic” (Fisher 223):

“Nothing is irrevocable,” Sylvère said. “No,” she screamed, “you’re wrong!” By this time she was crying. “History isn’t dialectical, it’s essential! Some things will never go away!” And the next day, Monday, January 30, she left him. (Kraus, *Dick* 117).

This scene demonstrates how autotheory as a feminist practice brings the irrational—a woman in hysterics, “crying” and “screaming”—into proximity with the theoretical: Chris uses the Marxist historical materialist vocabulary of “dialectics” as she publicly behaves in abject and stereotypically “feminine” ways. The melodrama of the scene has a darkly comical effect, even as the feminist politics of her disclosures are politicized: she cites difficult experiences she has had as a woman in a relationship with Lotringer, from having abortions (117) to not being acknowledged in their collaborations (117). These disclosures serve to back up her argument that she is oppressed (as an artist and as an intellectual) in the context of their marriage. Kraus acknowledges how the structure of the heterosexual marriage institution and her role as “Academic Wife” has held her back to the point of her feeling “erased” (117) in the realm of theory and art, leading to her decision to leave her husband in the final line of Part I.

Referencing the structure of Greek New Comedy, Frye describes the societal shift that takes place over the course of a comedy, where at the end of the play, those who were in charge at the beginning (the “usurpers”) are displaced and “a new society ... crystallize(s) around the hero” (Frye 163). In *I Love Dick*, this shift is from a patriarchal structure of male theorists (Part

I) to a more capacious theoretical space of feminist autotheory (Part II). While Chris's desire for Dick remains ultimately unrequited (despite the two having slept with each other twice), her desire to be an intellectual is achieved. There is no wedding at the end, though there is a looming divorce. In terms of social bonds, Kraus remains in the happily dejected space of the abject woman: a space she shares with the (living and dead) feminist artists, poets, and theorists whom she invokes over the course of Part II. In contrast to the filmic title of Part I ("Scenes from a Marriage"), Part II, entitled "Every Letter Is A Love Letter," is firmly rooted in the writerly modes of literature and art criticism. Kraus describes Part II to Dick as "the manifesto I've addressed to you about snowy woods and female art and finding the 1st Person" (144). The shift from Part I to Part II marks a structural move from the heterosexual marriage institution and the bourgeois form of the epistolary genre to a space of post-third wave feminist potentiality in the form of theoretically trenchant feminist essays written in the almost explicitly autobiographical, factually "true" first person.

Considering the different intertextual constitutions of the two parts of the book provides insight into the functioning of the mimetic mechanism in *I Love Dick*, where Kraus moves from reproductive to productive mimesis. In Part I, Kraus's theoretical and artistic references are predominantly of men, including male theorists of influence to Lotringer's work and his Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents series, from Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard to Georges Bataille (74), William Burroughs (85), and Michael Taussig (114). When women theorists and writers are referenced, it is in the context of men speaking about them: Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt, and Vita Sackville-West (109). "My father's favourite writer is William Burroughs," Kraus states in a moment of non sequitur during her exegesis on Kitaj's painting (201). Within the parameters of

the conceptual game that Kraus establishes in *I Love Dick*, the mid-twentieth century countercultural writer Burroughs stands as the discursive Law of the Father in the context of twentieth century literature; Kraus has never mentioned her father before in the text, and this information therefore functions less as a moment of character development and more as Kraus cheekily positioning Burroughs as phallic authority in the constellation of intertexts she invokes. Kraus's decision to specifically reference Burroughs, as opposed to more traditional or classically masculine male writers, in relation to phallic authority is significant: the experimentalism of Burroughs's work, which involves a troubling of the Symbolic order of language that continues to be read as formally and politically transgressive, is entailed in all kinds of gendered baggage that Kraus, in *I Love Dick*, is interested in exposing.

As the patriarchal hegemony of Part I begins to wane, feminist autotheory emerges in its place. The action of Chris deciding to leave Sylvère at the end of Part I inaugurates a shift in intertexts, with Kraus citing a number of notable feminist writers, theorists, activists, and performance artists over the course of Part II that include Coco Fusco (143), Rigoberta Menchú (146), Judy Chicago (150), Penny Arcade (164), and Alice Notley (168). Using the form of autotheoretical essays that engage the first person with a new rhetorical certainty, Kraus engages in a performative practice of feminist canon formation for the mid to late twentieth century. She no longer displaces the first person onto ciphers (like Emma Bovary¹³⁴ or "Chris Kraus"), but instead speaks in the first person. In the final scene when Kraus opens Dick's letter to her and finds "a xerox copy of Dick's letter to Sylvère," there is a sense of resignation coupled with a vague sense of feminist celebration: Kraus "gasped and breathed under the weight of it and got

¹³⁴ Chris and Sylvère sign off a letter to Dick as "Charles and Emma Bovary" (*Dick* 106), playfully riffing on the similarities between the two couples.

out of the cab and showed her film” (*Dick* 261). While the plot reads as literally disappointing, the themes of the work are consummated to humorous effects: Kraus has written an extensive autotheoretical novel involving various vulnerable “disclosures,” presumably to and for Dick (though we know this is a figurative feminist conceit), while Dick has put little to no effort into his correspondence with Chris—his letter to Chris is a cheap copy of the letter he wrote to Sylvère, in which Chris’s name is misspelled (260).

Intertextual Identification

Often in contemporary autotheoretical feminist works, the writer draws intertextual parallels as a way of demonstrating precedent for the observations drawn from lived experience and the substance of one’s life. In *I Love Dick*, Kraus draws parallels between herself and other figures from literary and art history: in Part I these tend to be male-authored figures, like Gustave Flaubert’s Emma Bovary, while in Part II these tend to be feminist artists, like Hannah Wilke, or otherwise marginalized artists that Kraus identifies with like the Jewish painter R.B. Kitaj. Kraus draws parallels from both Flaubert’s work (*Madame Bovary*) and Flaubert’s personal life to her own: the plot of *Madame Bovary* bears resemblance to the plot of *I Love Dick*, and Flaubert’s real-life treatment of Louise Colet bears resemblance to both Lotringer’s and Hebdige’s treatment of Kraus as narrated by Kraus (*Dick* 197). We see this in other parallels that Kraus draws, such as between Kraus as Wilke and Hebdige as Claes Oldenburg: in both cases, Kraus portrays the feminist artist as aesthetically suppressed through the male artist’s demonizing or (legalistically) disallowing the woman from writing or making work that in any way involves him or his life. Kraus configures this history of censoring women’s disclosures—of domestic life

and marriage—as a feminist problem. Looking to recent art history, Kraus makes the point that she is not the only “Academic Wife” who has used her husband’s influence toward feminist ends: Kraus cites Miriam Shapiro’s founding of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in 1972 as happening because “her husband was then President of the School” (*Dick* 150). Once again, the patriarchal, phallogocentric system cannot simply be approached “head on,” as Irigaray says: it requires a strategy (strategically working the system and using the roles one has access to, like “wife”) like mimesis in order to bring about subversion.

The drawing of parallels between the personal and the historical serves a few functions: first, it ties what Kraus is doing to the history of feminist practice more broadly by demonstrating how “the personal is political” or, better yet, the personal is structural, systemic, philosophical, not-a-coincidence. Kraus plays with this in her cheeky way when she discusses the decisions made by the French post-structuralists and Semiotext(e) gang (Deleuze, Guattari, Lotringer) in both their life and their work. These parallels facilitate the “exegesis” that autotheoretical texts like *I Love Dick* engage in by demonstrating precedents to the arguments being made.

Autotheory involves opening one’s experiences to theoretical consideration in order to better understand those experiences (as structural, political, theoretical, and so on) and, conversely, using one’s experiences as perspective through which to elucidate theory. Kraus states: “If I could love you consciously, take an experience that was so completely female and subject it to an abstract analytic system, then perhaps I had a chance of understanding something and could go on living” (*Dick* 236). She wants to better understand heterosexual, Jewish, cisgender female experience by theorizing it with a view to the histories of philosophy, literature, and art, while paradoxically couching her conceptually rigorous readings within hyper-feminized frames.

Tendentious Jokes and Feminist Aggression

If we read *I Love Dick* as a feminist comedy, Dick functions as the character who Chris entails in her “scapegoat ritual of expulsion” (Frye 165). Even though Chris takes on the scapegoated roles of the abject women in her various facets, it is the patriarch, the phallus, the “Dick” who becomes the ultimate butt of the joke, appropriated by Chris and scapegoated due to his irreconcilability with the new feminist order. Ultimately, the central conceptual conceit of Kraus’s text is that Dick becomes the scapegoat for the evils of the patriarchy—one that is ambivalently desired by, and longed for, by the feminist protagonist. “You were intrigued by this, by images of sex that weren’t heterosexual, a bit disturbed that dicks could be the butt of jokes,” (255) Kraus says to Dick, underscoring the heteronormativity that she perceives his brand of male-authored discourse as complicit with while disclosing her own comedic project in a winking meta moment: as “Dick,” he is disturbed that both he—the person Dick—and “dicks”—men, phalluses, the patriarchy—could be the butt of Kraus’s feminist joke in theory.

According to Bergson, comedy is “a struggle between two stubborn elements, one of which, being simply mechanical, generally ends by giving in to the other, which treats it as a plaything” (106). Bergson uses the metaphor of a spring which is bent and released to describe this comedic struggle: “Now, let us think of a spring that is rather of a moral type, an idea that is first expressed, then repressed, and then expressed again; a stream of words that bursts forth, is checked, and keeps on starting afresh” (106). We find this struggle in the characters Chris and Dick, where Dick in a sense eventually gives in to Chris under duress (Chris outstubs him), becoming her “plaything” in the context of the life of this text. Yet this struggle also takes place

at the level of Kraus's form, where the "release" of a moment of feminist theoretical incisiveness is then "repressed" through a pathetically feminine appeal to Dick's ego and then finally "released" again in an additional demonstration of astute feminist theorizing.

While some of the jokes in *I Love Dick* might bring amusement to sympathetic readers, Kraus's jokes are "tendentious" in the sense described by Freud (*Jokes* 98): there is a purpose to the joke, and that purpose is to critique through a postmodern feminist lens the existing structures of theory in academia and the art world with their unchecked male-authored biases and residual sexism and misogyny. It is a joke that serves a purpose—politically, philosophically, socially—that might meet with someone it offends; it is clear throughout *I Love Dick* whom the jokes in this text are likely to offend, not least of which being the known and named men of academia and the art world who Kraus exposes for their bad behaviour. Freud takes up the mechanics of the exposing joke in relation to exhibitionism and "smut," where "Smut is like an exposure of the sexually different person to whom it is directed" (*Jokes*, 98); the functioning of exposure takes on a different functioning when considered in light of the history of feminist practice like performance and Confessional writing. Beginning with the title *I Love Dick*, we witness Kraus engaging in a tendentious joke. But the question—at whose expense is this joke made?—remains open; the proclamation "I Love Dick" is as much an exhibitionist move on the female author's behalf as it is a tongue in cheek jab at the history of phallocentrism and feminist responses to it.

Monsters and Misreadings: Or, Missing the (Feminist) Point

"A feminist issue?" Hebdige scoffs. "Tell her to take it up with Princess Diana"
- Nic Zembra, "See Dick Sue," *New York Magazine*

Given the use of strategies like “comedic ‘covert’ language” (Barreca 8), Kraus’s comedic work of feminist autotheory is ripe for misreading. Barreca notes how “women writers have traditionally used comedy to subvert existing conventional structures,” even if their work has not been understood as such, and Barreca’s scholarship underlines the importance of not disregarding the contributions of feminist comedy to knowledge (4-5). The nuance of Kraus’s seemingly heavy-handed approach becomes apparent in the ways in which her practice is misread: when her deliberate enactments of female abjection so sufficiently disguises her theoretical point that readers, like Hebdige in the epigraph above, do not understand its feminism. Bergson notes that “The difficulty lies in giving to a joke its power of suggestion, i.e., in making it acceptable” (101). Kraus’s strategy for making her jokes acceptable lie in the ways she herself inhabits stereotypes of women (petty, cunning, hysterical, sexual objects) and rhetorically employs strategies of self-deprecation to couch her incisive critiques.

Barreca articulates the ways in which comedy by women is different from comedy by men, emphasizing how it requires a different framework through which to read (9-10). The terms of women’s subversion, transgression, and humour are different from those of men (so to speak). It is clear that “a different code of subversive thematics” is at work in Kraus’s works, both as comedy and as autotheory. When considering the politics and aesthetics of autotheory as a feminist practice—and as one that, in the case of Kraus, intersects with comedy—we also must consider how these different codes of subversion are at play and the ways in which they are interpreted and critiqued by audiences and readers. That Kraus apprehends criticisms of the autobiographical content of her work, particularly when it comes to the ethics and politics of disclosure, contributes to the comedic and feminist punch of her work.

One of the complicated aspects of understanding *I Love Dick's* contribution to theory is the paradox that, as a work of feminist autotheory, Kraus writes about and through the personal in a way that should not be taken personally. For example, Kraus's patronizing of Dick is a conceptual gesture that inverts the patronizing behaviour that she and other women continue to experience in academic and artistic spaces where a particular canon of male-authored work is valued above work deemed feminist, feminine, or femme. Within the context of her performative and mimetic text, Kraus gets to patronize "Dick" (broadly speaking) to draw attention to the ways in which these power dynamics continue to be constituted within and through discursive, social spaces. In Part II, Kraus relays to Dick an anecdote of a moment "last night" when she was feeling especially patronized in her role as "Academic Wife" by her husband Sylvère at one of the many parties filled with people who possess cultural capital in the leftist and experimental art and academic spheres that they attend:

"It's like last night," I said. "I met Sylvère in New York for a French department dinner. Régis Debray, the guest of honor, never showed and everyone was kind of tense and uneasy. I was bored and spacing out but Sylvère thought I was suffering from a linguistic disability. He took my hand and said in English to the Beckett specialist Tom Bishop. "Chris is an avid reader." I mean, C'MON. Does Denis Hollier say this about Rosalind Krauss? I may have no credentials or career but I'm way too old to be an academic groupie. (Kraus, *Dick* 153)

There is humour in Kraus's self-deprecation and irony, when she positions herself again in the role of "failure," having "no credentials or career" but still having some self-respect (153). Kraus jokes that her boredom in these spaces of male-dominated theory and language has been misinterpreted by her own husband as "a linguistic disability," making a politically incorrect joke about her being mis-read as disabled. By portraying these patronizing power dynamics through the self-reflexive retelling of lived anecdotes, Kraus returns to the theme introduced near the

beginning of the book, when Kraus first met Dick over dinner with him and Sylvère and the men engaged in intellectual conversation while Kraus sat “tripping out on layers of complexity in total silence” (21): namely, that women’s ways of engaging in complex thought and articulating themselves in theoretical ways have long been misread as unintelligent or unintelligible, even pathologized—in this case, as a “disability” (153).

This irony continues as Kraus cites her own work—a text that will become the autotheoretical prequel to *I Love Dick*, entitled *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000)—as “one of the most incredible things I’ve read in years” (*Dick* 137); this self-referentiality and humour is not uncommon in postmodern literature, and Kraus wields such irony to shed light on feminist themes. Kraus credits this text as being Dick’s, even though it is her work: this intersubjective blurring and playful appropriation functions both to protect Dick’s anonymity (she changes the titles of his texts and does not cite any of his actual work) and to stage the dynamics of projection, incorporation, appropriation, and psychosis to hysterical effects. In addition to the structural suppression of feminist theorists and conceptual artists through the pathologization of disclosure and so-called narcissism, Kraus’s work shows the ways in which male-oriented theory not only fails to acknowledge the contributions of women, but in some cases appropriates (the lives and work of) women who conceived the theoretical trends they are then excluded from. Discussing the demographics of American MFA programs through an intersectional feminist lens based on her own observations as an instructor at CalArts, Kraus says:

Equal opportunity for white and Asian artists of both genders has ushered in a massive uniformity. It’s best, of course, for the artist to be heterosexual and better to be monogamously settled in a couple. This guards against messy leaks of subjectivity which might compromise the work and throw it back into the realm

of the “abject,” which, as we all supposedly agree, was a 1980s excess that has long since been discredited. (Kraus, *Video* 17)

This is one example of how Kraus uses sarcasm, alongside other tactics of humour like irony and hyperbole, alongside her practice of theorizing as a way of bringing a feminist “zinger” into a politically serious discussion of institutional politics and aesthetic value systems. By acknowledging hegemonic theory’s rendering of the abject as passé, Kraus makes a joke of the ways in which feminism has been, and continues to be, excluded from what is properly theoretical. This paragraph culminates in Kraus’s citing of Spinoza on ambiguity, and her coining of the term “neocorporate neoconceptual” to describe the Los Angeles art world of the late 1990s. The fact that *I Love Dick* re-performs the abject in fresh ways signals to us that Kraus does not agree with the supposed consensus of the abject being “over”; she turns to sarcasm to poke fun at the rapid cycling of theory trends and the politics of discourse fashionability in a late capitalist America in which the University (and MFA programs in particular) is complicit in the functioning of capitalism and the cycling of these trends.¹³⁵

That the “abject” is a term coined by feminist theorist Julia Kristeva underscores the gendered politics of theoretical fashionability; Kraus is perhaps critiquing the tendency to ossify feminist trends into time-dependent and past-tense moments (like “waves”¹³⁶—the second wave is “over,” the third wave is nearly “over”) that lack relevance outside of their original context, in contrast to the more timeless theory and philosophy by men. The juxtaposition of female

¹³⁵ Kraus might agree that it has been “discredited,” but she is determined to show that this discrediting is a gendered problem that should be acknowledged as such, providing evidence from her own life and the lives of other theorists and artists to back up her claims. This passage positions Kraus as an “outsider” to some extent, a move that we witness throughout *Video Green*, where she positions herself in disagreement with various trends in the art world.

¹³⁶ While I make reference to feminist history through terms like “the second wave” and “the third wave,” I acknowledge the limitations and problems of this mode of historicizing feminism, particularly as Griselda Pollock outlines in her recent “Is Feminism a Trauma? (Pollock, “Trauma” 28).

abjection with theory is a method Kraus uses throughout *I Love Dick*. For example, in scenes like Chris's peeing on the side of the road as she quotes "Marx or Wittgenstein" on negation (*Dick* 151), the humour emerges both from the absurdity of the juxtaposition and from Kraus's performance of un-mastery (not knowing whether it is Marx or Wittgenstein). Humorously, Kraus describes how, in that moment, "...pissing suddenly became so problematic" (151). This is one of many instances in Kraus's work where she brings together earlier postmodern methods of juxtaposition ("collision") that she may have used in film or performance and theatre work with a renewed practice of autotheory—incorporating herself peeing and "Marx or Wittgenstein" as a semantically fruitful collision when it comes to autotheory as counter practice. Here, Kraus bypasses women's imposter syndrome and tendency toward over-compensation and opts, instead, for a performance of informality and un-mastery: a performance which also involves self-protection via Kraus's pre-empting disavowal and critique.

Through the character of Chris Kraus, Kraus stages the threat of contamination that the abject woman posed to the self-contained male theorist in a way that oscillates between somber and satirical. She autotheoretically stages the tensions between the female abject and the properly theoretical in ways that are humorous in order to lay bare the mechanisms of these gendered tensions and the ways they persist into the present. The (female) hysteric has been an object for male theorists to disregard as abject while the same theorists sanctify the (male) schizophrenic as artist and theorist. Consider for example, the ways the transgressive female hysteric has been disregarded as not-theoretical by theorists of "transgression" such as Bataille, with works like *Eroticism* (1962), or Hebdige, in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). This gendered double-standard is something about late twentieth century leftist spheres that Kraus highlights.

Troubling Continental Philosophy: Georges Bataille and Transgression

One of the ways Kraus troubles the terms of Continental philosophy through an autotheoretical feminist framework is her intervention into prevailing theoretical conceptions of “transgression”—the crossing of a certain boundary, the exceeding of a certain limit, or the breaking of a law (where transgression presupposes the existence of a law or taboo that makes the transgression possible as such)—as articulated by the early twentieth century French theorist Georges Bataille. In her characteristically cheeky manner, Kraus hails a group of minor characters in *I Love Dick* as the “The Bataille Boys,” a physical manifestation of male theory fandom that the character Chris Kraus seems to find particularly frustrating. Kraus describes them as Lotringer’s groupies or fan-boys who cluster around him and, in her view, resent Chris’s presence as a woman and as Lotringer’s wife (*Dick* 33). By naming them “The Bataille Boys,” Kraus reminds us of the “teams” of theoretical influence and indebtedness that form in academic spaces—fraternities of sorts.¹³⁷ Many of those who find themselves reading Kraus—whose work is dense with theoretical references—will understand this academic in-joke of juxtaposing Bataille—the leading theorist of transgression and taboo after Freud—with superhero status and ensuing boyish fandom. Kraus describes the religiosity (“beatitude”) of the devotion of these “young white men” to the work of Bataille and, it follows, Lotringer, taking the piss out of their theoretical investments by revealing the violence of those investments through wry description.

Much of the humour of this passage lies in Kraus’s self-deprecation and the rhetorical flips she performs to enact her oblique and vaguely ironic feminist critique: that what is the most

¹³⁷ One example from my own life comes to mind: the Lacan Salon, a group of male Professors and predominantly male graduate students in SFU’s English Department.

offensive about these men's actions is not so much their devotion to horrific and potentially racist images of torture (as "legitimized" intellectually and aesthetically by Bataille's work) but that they are "often rude to Chris" (33). This brings us back to the conflict Kraus establishes in the text's opening pages: that she is socially excluded by Lotringer and his fellow theory guys—emerging and established academics who wield theoretical language and share texts written by men—and that these men are misogynistic. If they are going to be this abjectly masculine, Kraus thinks, then I will be this abjectly feminine; I will become what they already believe me to be: a money-grabbing, "scheming," unattractive wife who uses her husband's power and influence to get ahead (33). Kraus portrays herself as pathetic, scorned, and almost psychotically narcissistic, eagerly taking on the stereotype of the cunning woman as a means of enacting the little power that she has in the situation. This is not to be taken literally so much as a mimetic nod: Kraus becomes that which she is interpellated as in discursive systems that privilege the theory of men. Her personal exclusion functions as "proof," within the conceptual world she has constructed, of the broader exclusionary politics governing intellectual and experimental spheres. Kraus takes the rhetorical leap from coincidence to "proof" in comical ways that nevertheless help drive home her feminist themes, like when she states that Irigaray "bursting into tears while lecturing in a conference on Saussure at Columbia University" *proves* that "there is no female 'I' in existing (patriarchal) language" (*Dick* 241).

Kraus places "transgressive" in quotation marks, a move that, read in the context of her oeuvre, is a nod to the ongoing exclusion of feminist transgression in these definitions and the questionability of the sufficiency of such definitions of "transgression" by canonical theorists like Bataille. Feminist performance scholars and art historians, like Schneider and Nelson, have

called out the arbiters of the modernist canon for marking the “end” of the avant-garde—and with it the “end” of transgression—in the 1960s (Schneider 4), at the very moment when women, queers, people of colour, and other marginalized groups were gaining access to creating and disseminating artwork.¹³⁸ After the end of modernism and the so-called death of transgression comes post-structuralism and Barthes’s “the death of the author” closely followed by postmodernist claims by (white male) scholars that “there are no longer any cultural limits to transgress in the ‘seemingly limitless horizon of multinational capitalism’ (Auslander 1987: 23)” (Schneider 3-4). But what if the limits to transgress are simply not acknowledged as such? What if there is such a thing as feminist transgression and its strategies and terms, like feminist comedy, are different from phallocentric conceptions of transgression? Taking *I Love Dick* as a space for mimetic and self-reflexive experimentation, Kraus says: I’ll show you transgressive.

Arguably, what Kraus is doing in *I Love Dick* is understood more readily by audiences as “a redundant example of female vulnerability, fragility, or self-destructiveness,” rather than as “making a transgressive, probing move” (Nelson, *Cruelty* 206) worthy of theoretical inquiry. Nelson makes just this point about feminist art and its misunderstood acts of transgression in *The Art of Cruelty*. Nelson deconstructs the twentieth century male-dominated avant-garde’s often uncritical devotion to transgression, violence, cruelty, and extremism, taking issue with the premise that this kind of work has the cathartic and/or redemptive power “to restore us, or deliver us anew, to an unalienated, unmediated flow of existence characterized by a more authentic relation to the so-called real” (9); at the very least, the driving force behind these works

¹³⁸ Nelson points out the problem of marking the death of the avant-garde and the death of the public intellectual at a time when greater diversification was taking place: for example, around the 1960s civil rights movements (*Abstractions* xxiii). She points out the problem of nostalgia for an era “when the so-called avant-garde was safely dominated by white men” from Harvard-privilege (xxiii).

should be questioned. In her discussion of works by feminist artists and writers like Kara Walker, Jenny Holzer, and Sylvia Plath, Nelson takes to task what she perceives to be the unjust gendered double standards in the avant-garde's cult of cruelty and its refusal to acknowledge the work of women in the same "transgressive" terms (260).

The argument Nelson makes in *The Art of Cruelty* brings us back to the problematics that Kraus takes up in *I Love Dick*, reminding us that the autotheoretical orientation is a feminist practice that comes up against patriarchal theory's self-serving conceptions of what is appropriately theoretical or artistic. One of the things that Kraus is doing in *I Love Dick* is revealing the limit point implicit in the theory of men who purport to be interested in the "transgressive," and that limit point is transgression in the hands and words of women that makes them uncomfortable. It is also worth noting the lack of representation of women in texts that purport to represent sexual plurality in/and transgression, like *Semiotext(e)*'s 1981 issue "Polysexuality."¹³⁹ Nelson underlines women's exclusion from the "transgressive" in its valued aesthetic form, getting at the same problem that Kraus gestures toward by putting air quotes around "transgressive" in the Bataille Boys' valuation of "the more 'transgressive' elements of modernism" (*Dick* 33). Nelson also points out how women's practices that engage with "clarity and cruelty" might look differently or take different forms than those of men. This is important to the larger feminist arguments posed in autotheoretical work like Kraus's *I Love Dick*: that the practice of disclosure in diary-writing could be acknowledged as "transgressive" (in the theoretically and aesthetically valued, even Bataillean, sense) rather than disparaged for reasons

¹³⁹ In "Polysexuality," an issue of *Semiotext(e)* from 1981 that focuses on plural sexualities and transgressive sex--including "child sex" (Burroughs) and "morbid sex" (Bataille), alongside themes like *jouissance* and the death drive, all but three of the articles are by men.

that are implicitly gendered (with regards to the association of the feminine with narcissism and untruthfulness, as described in the Introduction).

The lens with which Nelson approaches work by predominantly male artists and writers like Nietzsche, Artaud, de Sade, Bacon, Bataille, is shaped by contemporary feminisms. “One may begin to wonder whose interests it serves to keep us believing in, and riveted by, the mythos of this ‘age of extremity’,” Nelson says, “which focuses on knocking oneself out rather than tuning in” (*Cruelty* 44). Establishing a tension between this masculine vanguardist “age of extremity,” on the one hand, and the presumably feminine and/or feminist “tuning in” or turning inward, on the other, Nelson draws a connection to practices of mindfulness and introspection as a counter to practices of violence, whether directed to the self or to others. In her chapter “Women and Cruelty,” she reads practices of cruelty (to the self) in feminist performance art as more nuanced than work by someone like Artaud, though she also includes work by men like Roland Barthes as demonstrating a similarly affirming nuance, framing her practice in light of what Barthes sought to do (13-14). Nelson summarizes the systemic tendency to refuse women artists and writers the luxury of the complicated readings or ambivalent positions warranted to men, particularly when it comes to the incorporation of the death drive in their work:

A woman who delves into the relation between Eros and Thanatos is not typically regarded as someone making a transgressive, probing move, but as a self-abasing traitor aiding and abetting rape culture. Likewise, a woman who explores the depths of her despair or depression isn’t typically valorized as a hero on a fearless quest to render any ‘darkness visible’ [Plath], but is instead perceived as a redundant example of female vulnerability, fragility, or self-destructiveness. A woman who lives, as did Artraud, like a mad animal at the furthest reaches of her sanity, isn’t a shamanistic voyager to the dark side but a ‘madwoman in the attic’, an abject spectacle. (*Cruelty* 260)

Kraus enacts this ambivalent position for a powerful effect, drawing on both her own experiences and cultural history. Continuing the trope of the monstrous woman, Kraus relays to Dick the example of Jim Morrison's mythologized life to show the sexist ideologies rooted in subcultures:

Do you remember the wretched movie Oliver Stone made about Jim Morrison's life? According to Oliver, Jim was a wholesome California boy—cute blond girlfriend, magic mushrooms, milk and freckles—'til he met the Crazy Kike Witches of New York. The Witches dragged him down with their exotic drugs, their wild parties, their mindfuck demonology. They understood his poetry, though. The Witches are why Jim died of an overdose in the bathtub of a Paris hotel. Realize, D, that I am one of those crazy Kike Witches and I understand your fear. (*Dick* 196)

Kraus critiques and rewrites cultural mythology through a feminist lens, calling out narratives in “alternative” scenes for their underlying sexism and misogyny. She demonstrates how the mythology of the woman as evil temptress and the man as innocent victim, with ancient origins in the Bible to the Sirens of Greek mythology persists in the 1990s, with Stone's cinematic representation of a 1960s-70s art and music scene. Joining the woman as ugly wife, hysteric, hag, whore, and sick woman, the witch fulfills this clustering—a kind of reclaimed theoretical harem—of abject female archetypes that Kraus performatively takes on. Kraus stages a reversal of the accustomed power dynamic between men and women, becoming the aggressor instead of the victim; whether this is efficacious is up for question.

In the passage above, Dick, has been truncated to “D,” having been textually castrated by Kraus over the course of Part II. What had previously been the more generalized “crazy”—etymologically tied to psychological sanity while at the same time taking on other meanings through its overuse as slang—has now become the more disconcertingly “crazed,” or actively

maniacal: in this moment, Kraus performs the pathologization that has been historically mapped onto women (in their hysterical abjection). Kraus's critiques of the ways in which patriarchal culture constricts, along with her demonstrating a deep familiarity with the critiques that she will be met with for writing in a way that incorporates herself and her life, form a key part of her rhetorical and formal method. The subtext of what Kraus is saying to Dick is: I am worthy of fear because, as the kind of woman who has been similarly abject-ed, marginalized, and demonized in my life, I am seeking a kind of discursive revenge in this work through, for example, the "monstrous" strategy of disclosure. In the shift from Part I and Part II, Chris's failure as a wife gives way to her success as an artist and a critic: leaving her marriage is positioned as the catalyst to finding her critical voice, signalling the move from Irigaray's reproductive to productive mimesis (*Dick* 116).

Kraus goes on to problematize the gendered double standards that exist around social and cultural mythologies of suicide. It is not simply reclaiming abject female archetypes that Kraus's autotheoretical practice engages in, but ensuring that female mythologies are understood as sufficiently complicated, nuanced, and as sites of agency. Kraus confronts the tendency that patriarchal culture has toward heroizing men and demonizing or devaluing women. She distances her work from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a way of marking her break with the feminist theory before her (like French feminism) and as a way of distancing her autotheoretical practice of feminist theory from the so-called "personal" or "the purely psychological" (*Dick* 196)—characteristics that have been historically mapped on to women's writing at the expense of its acknowledgment as legitimately theoretical or philosophical. Citing the names and lives of

women artists and philosophers who “choose death” (196), Kraus calls out the hypocrisy of pathologizing female suicide while heroizing its male equivalents:

And why’s Janis Joplin’s life read as a downward spiral into self-destruction? Everything she did is filtered through her death. Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Kurt Cobain, Jimi Hendrix, River Phoenix all suicided too but we see their deaths as aftermaths of lives that went too far. But let a girl choose death—Janis Joplin, Simone Weil—and death becomes her definition, the outcome of her ‘problems.’ To be female still means being trapped within the purely psychological. . . Dear Dick, I want to make the world more interesting than my problems. Therefore, I have to make my problems social. (*Dick* 196)

This is to say that, even when a woman is constructing Theory, she is hailed back into the realm of the psychological (and the psychoanalytic) as a discursive framework through which to understand that experience. This section of *I Love Dick* is one of many in which Kraus makes explicit the aims of her practice and provides, I argue, a defence of autotheory as a mode of theory-making that is effectively feminist. Women have long worked to get at the theoretical through the experiential and the emotional, and because of the entrenched divides that continue to privilege male over female, and because of the female’s presumed proximity to the body and the personal and, it follows, irrationality and chaotic matter, their life choices are read not as theoretically significant or critically interesting, but as pathological and pathetic. This is the key thesis in *Aliens and Anorexia*, which focuses on Simone Weil the “anorexic Philosopher” as the primary theoretical intertext alongside Kraus’s own reclaimed narratives of feminist failure. The gendered double standards when it comes to how lives are perceived and in what ways and to what extent one’s life is part of one’s theory continues across Kraus’s discussion of feminist performance artists and conceptualists, including Wilke and the dadaist Baroness Elsa. Similar to

her politicization of anorexia¹⁴⁰ as a potential site of agency and feminist resistance—and her upholding of Weil the “anorexic philosopher” (Kraus, *Aliens* 51) as a deeply important intellectual—Kraus upholds suicide as a viable choice for women to make—or a choice that deserves, in the very least, the same kinds of abstract theoretical, political, and existential considerations as it does when made by men.

There are cases where the feminist politics of blurring art, theory, and life and the explicating of symbolic violence are made quite literal, as we see in the case of Valerie Solanas and her 1967 *SCUM* manifesto and her near-fatal shooting of Andy Warhol in 1968. With the case of Solanas and *SCUM*, we have an example of a feminist response to phallogentric avant-gardes and a radical feminist critique of the male-dominated art world, embodied in the late 1960s by pop artist Andy Warhol. While *SCUM* can be read as a satire, using hyperbole and irony, it also has literal resonances in light of her lived action of critically wounding Warhol in his studio. Heightening the aesthetic connection between a text like Solanas’s *SCUM* and one like Kraus’s *Dick* is the mythology around Solanas’s actions: that she was driven to shoot Warhol because he wouldn’t make a play she had written into a film (Latson). It is conceivable that Kraus is playing with this same tension that Solanas literalized through violence: placing blame

¹⁴⁰ In *Aliens and Anorexia*, Kraus takes issue with Jean-Paul Sartre’s crude understanding of female pain (113). While Sartre disregards the potential for women’s agency in anorexia, Kraus theorizes it as an active stance: one of the key autotheoretical themes that constitutes *Aliens and Anorexia* as a project. Drawing on both her own experience with anorexia and her feminist theoretical engagement with the work of Simone Weil, who in her lifetime had been disregarded as “the anorexic philosopher,” Kraus conceives of anorexia as the enacting of (feminist) agency: “a rejection of the cynicism culture passes to us through its food” (*Aliens* 163). Just as early issues of *Semiotexte* sought the movement from Freudian psychoanalysis to Deleuzian “schizo-analysis,” so too does Kraus move away from psychoanalytic readings of woman as lack to a conception of anorexia that takes into consideration the (cynical) institutional structures of global capitalism. In “Schizoculture,” a 1978 issue of *Semiotext(e)* journal, Seth Neta’s “To-Ana-No-Ye: Anorexia Nervosa” critiques the medicalization of anorexia, “an anti-social practice (self starvation)” in relation to capitalism (Lotringer, “Schizoculture” 133).

on the key players of the art world—as arbiters of value and as gate-keepers of the scene—for one’s plight in life, and enacting a kind of (literal or symbolic) revenge on them in their work.

Nelson ultimately calls for a post avant-garde aesthetics that “dismantles, boycotts, ignores, destroys, takes liberties with, or at least pokes fun at” the avant-garde’s fixation on shock and awe, violence and cruelty (*Cruelty* 265). Nelson’s argument reverberates with the argument Canadian performance artist and scholar Tanya Mars makes on the transformative use of humour in feminist art practice: In “Not Just For Laughs: Women, Performance, and Humour,” Mars foregrounds humour in performance art by Canadian women, insisting on the political and aesthetic seriousness and intellectual rigour of artists who use humour in their work. Humorous work is a counter to the widely upheld tradition of masochistic body-based performance, which Mars argues perpetuates a culture of victimization: “they proffer a culture of victimization” and they rely “on a reactionary response from the viewer, rather than a contemplative one” (21) and hence tend to be more conservative. This critique is notable, as many contend that masochistic body-based work is the true test of our capacity to withstand and express extremes, and that it is “the only true performance art; and that anything else is mere representation, and therefore, just theatre, which is despised” (21).

Kraus’s use of humour is transgressive and involves a degree of violence. But when taken as a meta-theoretical whole, Kraus’s performative moves in *I Love Dick* are an instantiation of the terms of male-authored post-structuralist theory through a post-punk, autotheoretical feminist practice. Let’s take, for example, her process of becoming monstrous in *I Love Dick*, and her exegesis of this process in the chapter “Monsters.” In the chapter “Monsters,” Kraus explicates the parallels between her autotheoretical practice and Wilke’s performance art, extending the

association of Kraus's work with performance-based practices and underlining once more the problems that "narcissistic" modes of making work give rise to, particularly when it comes to reception. Kraus cites the criticisms Wilke's work received in the 1970s from both the patriarchal art establishment and other feminist artists, gesturing toward an affirmation of Wilke's—and, by parallel, her own—practice similar to the argument articulated by Jones.¹⁴¹ Kraus understands that the woman who discloses lived experience is the "monster" who breaks the contract she was responsible to in the role of the philosopher's wife.¹⁴² Later in the chapter, after her self-reflexive discussion of Wilke, Kraus tells Dick directly: "I aim to be a female monster too" (*Dick* 218).

Fast Feminisms and *I Love Dick* as "Happy Accident" of Post-Structuralism

I Love Dick invokes a different kind of feminist ethical space, one which presses up against the violent, the cruel, and the appropriative in ways that I believe enact, with an autotheoretical feminist consciousness, the very terms that the male-authored theory upholds. One way we might understand the violence of *I Love Dick* is through philosopher and performance artist Shannon Bell's reading of Paul Virilio in *Fast Feminism (FF)*, where Bell's notion of "fast feminism" is posited as a "happy accident" of Virilio's speed theory (Bell, *Fast* 12). Bell insists that theory should "...always, always do violence to the original context. For Virilio, the accident, although an unintended and disturbing consequence, is inherent in and created by the very technology or system it comes out of" (12). Bell uses more metaphors of violence in describing her autotheory as "put(ting) a knife to the heart of Western

¹⁴¹ See Amelia Jones's "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art."

¹⁴² I use the term "philosopher" capaciously here, to include related social positionings like conceptual artist, in the case of Oldenburg; given the role of theory/philosophy in contemporary art practices, I do not think this is a stretch.

philosophy” (15). As an “accident,” Kraus’s *I Love Dick* comprises “the unknown quantity inherent in the original substance” (12): namely, the elusive and appropriated female principle, the hysteric, the Young-Girl, the becoming-woman, who is contained in the original substance (post-structuralist theory, experimental theory published by Semiotext(e) in the 1970s-1980s) that then manifests as a “happy accident” in an ambivalently feminist, vaguely violent text like *I Love Dick*. Bell asks “...how does *Fast Feminism* implement Deleuze’s imperative of bugging the author’s work, in this case Virilio’s work, to produce itself as the new offspring?” (13): one way Kraus does this in *I Love Dick* might be the strategy of mimesis discussed earlier in this chapter, or Kraus’s appropriation of both the literal and discursive “Dick” (Hebdige) through the creation of “new offspring” that is autotheory as feminist subcultural practice.

When describing *Fast Feminism*, Bell says: “*Fast Feminism* is situated simultaneously as a complement to speed theory and as the accident of speed theory” (12). She acknowledges how autotheoretical orientations, like the positioning of “the body as the basis of intellectual work” is also found in the works of male-authored philosophers¹⁴³—in this case, Paul Virilio’s work (12)—but that the male-authored work reaches a limit point which Bell’s own theory, as embodied fast feminism, exceeds. This limit point is the bringing together of life, theory, and art, or what Bell calls “theory as enactment” (13): the living of one’s theory and the basing of one’s theory on what one has lived. Similarly to Bell’s *FF*, Kraus’s *I Love Dick* can be read as both a feminist complement to post-structuralism and as an accident of post-structuralism, particularly when we consider Kraus’s post-hysterical performances alongside the practices of theorists like Deleuze

¹⁴³ In my introductory chapter, I take up the intersections between what I am calling feminist autotheory as a practice and earlier works of philosophy authored by men, tracing the autotheoretical impulses through the works of Freud, Nietzsche, and Derrida.

whose work, at different times, presses up against the autotheoretical.¹⁴⁴ Like Bell, Kraus's work is infused with speed, taking a fast-moving, hyper-saturated approach to writing theory. Of course, like theory more broadly, autotheory contains multiplicities. While Kraus takes the piss out of Bataille (*Dick* 33), Bell joyously relishes in Bataillean theory,¹⁴⁵ inhabiting the excess through her queer feminist body while not so much critiquing Bataille's terms as reconfiguring them through a juxtaposition with the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas (14). Both Kraus and Bell create an autotheoretical and performative persona that is simultaneously them and not-quite-them, who inhabits the practices and theories instantiated in the text: for Kraus it is "Chris Kraus" and for Bell it is "FF," an abbreviation for the "Fast Feminist."

Post-Confession and the Feminist "I"

Over the course of the twentieth century, with its undulating waves of art and literary movements, there is an interesting divide between those who more readily want to get rid of subjectivity or the "I"—most often white men—and those who wish to hold onto it and use it in new, experimental, or subversive ways. The confessional and experiential can be wielded in ways that are experimental and generative for theory, literature, and art. The tension between "the personal" and the "I" on the one hand, and "experimentation" (and the "I" as "multiple," "in flux") on the other, is a conceit throughout Kraus's work that has historical precedent across the

¹⁴⁴ Take, for example, Guattari's journal entries published as the *Anti-Oedipus Papers*.

¹⁴⁵ We see this in *Fast Feminism*, the textual trace of Bell's performative and autotheoretical practice of feminist ejaculation. As Bell writes in "The Will to Laughter: A Fast-Feminist Bataillean Narration": "Back in Toronto, FF paid a visit to the pagan convent, affectionately dubbed the Pussy Palace and home to Bataille's fast-feminist Don Juans. . . FF amused herself by reading *Civilization and Its Discontents* for the next day's lecture" (138). In Bell's text, Bataille is posited as contemporary theory's Bacchus around which queer and feminist bodies, like that of FF (the Fast Feminist, an alter-ego that Shannon Bell takes on for the course of the performative philosophy work that is *Fast Feminism*), relish in a Bataillean jouissance of painful pleasure and pleasurable pain.

histories of literature and art. With its project of deconstructing subjectivity and the lyrical “I,” and foregrounding the materiality of language over its representational qualities, Language poetry positioned itself in direct opposition to the Confessional poetry tradition of the 1950s. In literary history, the feminist politics of “confession” are fraught; the work of Kraus and Semiotext(e) Native Agents can best be described as post-confessional, drawing from a history of Confessional writing while also troubling it in performative ways. The Native Agents series publishes writing by women and queers working in this post-confessional mode: writing that is aware of both the contributions and, perhaps, the aesthetic, political, and theoretical limitations of the “Confessional” writing of the 1950s, demonstrated most explicitly by Plath and Sexton. Following in the wake of Acker’s violent post-punk feminist forms, we get texts like Myles’s inflammatory poem “On the Death of Robert Lowell,” in which Myles, speaking from a lesbian working-class position and from within a New York poet tradition, expresses open disdain and disregard for the founding father of Confessional poetry and questions the validity of his suffering or “his imagined/Pain”: “I fucking hate wasps,” Myles’s poem reads (*Inferno* 166-67).

While experimental movements began to shy away from the “confessional” as Lowell defined it, there were moments—like in the early 1990s—when the autobiographical “I” began to return. In his work on the downtown New York literary scene between 1974-1992, Brandon Stosuy writes how “in the early ‘90s, seasoned writers began to show a new tendency toward reminiscence and memoir—sure signs of a change of the guard” (Stosuy 348). Drawing attention to the gendered basis of a rejection of the “personal,” Myles writes:

Frank O’Hara always wrote poems about his artist friends and now he had been dead for ten years but Alice [Notley] wasn’t over it exactly. I had been in two poetry workshops with men before and the men said that personal poetry was

done. For them I stopped writing it, and with Alice I could begin. It was just different for women. Not in that stupid Ron Silliman way where story is for us (women) and people of color but that the form itself wasn't finished. (*Inferno* 207)

Myles's strategy here recalls Kraus's, where the writer bases her argument on her own lived observations and invokes a generalized (binary) gender divide as it manifests aesthetically in the given counterculture. Most importantly for an understanding of autotheory as feminist practice is Myles's thesis here that "the form itself wasn't finished" (207): that the inclusion of the "auto" is not solely for reasons related to 'identity politics'—to include the voices and perspectives of women and BIPOC¹⁴⁶—but also for aesthetic reasons related to formal concerns. In *I Love Dick*, Kraus incorporates filmic and performance-based aspects of her practice into the fabric of her autotheory: the "I" that Kraus constitutes throughout is a post-postmodern one, one that is able to hold lived experience and "where you really are"—a kind of sincerity, if you will—with the postmodern values of irony, "change and fragmentation" (*Dick* 139). Kraus proposes that this mode of writing is actually "more serious" than more "a-personal" forms like "collage"; this passage contributes to the theme I perceive in autotheory that the forms being proposed and enacted are in fact better equipped to handling the concerns of theory today.

Take for example Kraus's self-reflexive use of the first person or "1st Person" in Part II of *I Love Dick*, which she frames in terms of her creating "art theories" (*Dick* 138).¹⁴⁷ Not unlike

¹⁴⁶ BIPOC is an acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, and is commonly used as shorthand in social justice organizing in Toronto, the city where I am currently based.

¹⁴⁷ Kraus explains how she created "art theories" to explain her "inability" to use the 1st Person in her work: "Back to the 1st Person: I'd even made up art theories about my inability to use it. That I'd chosen film and theatre, two artforms built entirely on collisions, that only reach their meanings through collision, because I couldn't ever believe in the integrity/supremacy of the 1st Person (my own)" (*Dick* 138). Indeed, describing what she is doing as creating "art theories" is notable for my discussion of autotheory as a feminist practice that often functions in proximity to art world discourse and practices of art writing and criticism. In addition to describing her creation of "art theories," Kraus gestures toward the kinds of work she had been making in her early days as an artist: using the formal technique of "collision" or juxtaposition to create meaning, rather than using the 1st Person. This description is faithful to the 'real life' story of when Chris Kraus met Sylvère Lotringer in 1980 (Blair).

the mimetic function, Kraus explains how her process of getting to the first person involved using “ciphers” (138) to displace her desire to write as herself. A cipher can refer to both a figure that stands in for something but has no value in and of itself, or as a “secret or disguised manner of writing” that involves “de-ciphering” (OED, “cipher”). While she does not explicitly refer to herself as “Dick,” Dick functions as a different kind of cipher that Kraus appropriates to her own ends. She also makes use of other intertextual identifications¹⁴⁸ in her “ciphering” project, including Emma Bovary and Jane Bowles. It becomes apparent, particularly in the shift from Part I to Part II, that Chris’s projected desire for Dick is not so much desire for him as it is a desire for her to be able to voice her (theoretical, political, aesthetic) views and be heard as a thinking woman and as an artist with something intelligent to say; Chris appropriates Dick as the “ideal reader” who will, according to Chris in her self-reflexively hysterical state, listen (130).

What do Kraus’s disclosures in *I Love Dick* perform? For one, they perform the function of grassroots feminist organizing, where disclosure becomes a means of holding men (publicly) accountable for their actions in a context that might not otherwise do so. That there might also be a feminist politics of transparency¹⁴⁹—more along the lines of a personal disclosing about one’s own stakes, positionings, and vulnerabilities along the lines of what the utterance “full

¹⁴⁸ Autotheory marks a convergence of both these intertextual “collisions” and the 1st Person; in Kraus’s autotheoretical work, intertextual parallels are drawn between figures like Ulrike Meinhof and Simone Weil, for example, in *Aliens*, that are extended even further through the drawing of parallels between the 1st Person Chris Kraus and these intertextual figures. So, Chris Kraus—her life and her work—becomes a text that functions in parallel to Simone Weil—her life and her work. Postmodern techniques of juxtaposition across disciplinary, generic, and medial lines come to exist alongside the use of the first person and autobiographical disclosures in ways that extend, as I argue throughout, both the aesthetic and political resonance of the work. We move from intertextual “collisions” in the abstract—as formal strategy with a critical distancing insofar as the “I” is not invoked—to intertextual “collisions” where the speaker’s own life, work, and positioning factors in to the equation.

¹⁴⁹ In a letter to Dick, Kraus states that “My personal goal here—apart from anything else that may happen—is to express myself as clearly and honestly as I can. So in a sense love is just like writing: living in such a heightened state that accuracy and awareness are vital” (*Dick* 130). Kraus goes on to speak of the risks of such “honesty,” the stakes of such transparency, vulnerability, and exposure.

disclosure” performs—is also gestured to in Kraus’s work, which I take up at more length in the following chapter on queer feminist practice. Practices of autobiographical disclosure have been and continue to be a pivotal part of the formation of individual and collective feminist identification.¹⁵⁰

Blurring Art and Life

Just as Kraus points out the contradictions in the field of contemporary theory, often to comedic effect—contradictions which, at their heart, are often based in gender—so too does she point out the limits of the twentieth century avant-garde’s proclaimed desire to blur art and life. This move to blurring art and life is integral to the performative turn—from works in the 1950s by Goffman and J.L. Austin through to the 1980s with the discipline of Performance Studies that Richard Schechner institutionally inaugurated—as well as in other twentieth century aesthetic and philosophical movements, like Dadaism, which playfully and performatively proclaimed an end to clear boundaries dividing art, philosophy, and life. And yet, feminist autotheorists like Kraus and, as I’ll discuss shortly, Jones observe the gendered hypocrisies as well as the literal limits that such a blurring of the divide between art and life. The failure to translate this blurring into actual application is a problem that autotheory as feminist practice is well-positioned to confront. By obfuscating the line between art and life in *I Love Dick*, Kraus generates a work of

¹⁵⁰ Disclosure has a long history as a feminist practice of consciousness-raising, political mobilization, and aesthetic approach, taking shape based on the historical context within which these practices take place. The disclosure of what was once “private” to other women was central to the formation of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s; the term “consciousness-raising” came to describe these practices of disclosing lived experience as a means of becoming conscious of the ways in which the “personal” has political resonance as a systemic or structural phenomenon: a consciousness which lead to the tenet of “the personal is political.”

autotheory that satirizes the terms of theory from a third-wave—and prophetically fourth-wave—feminist perspective.

“This incident congealed into a philosophy: Art supersedes what’s personal,” Kraus writes to Dick: “It’s a philosophy that serves patriarchy well and I followed it more or less for 20 years. That is: until I met you” (*Dick* 230). She credits her meeting Dick with prompting her into the autotheoretical mode, explaining what other feminist theorists have acknowledged before her: that the view that “Art supersedes what’s personal,” that art renders superfluous or irrelevant the lived and the embodied, is a view that facilitates the interests of patriarchy, and is one which autotheory as feminist practice directly confronts. Take Shannon Bell’s methodology in *Fast Feminism*, for example, a text that provides a theoretical framework for, and exemplary practice of, autotheory as post-Butlerian¹⁵¹ feminist practice: “FF’s philosophy is lived. Actions count. One resists with one’s body. The operative principles in *Fast Feminism* are that as FF I never write about anything I haven’t done and that I locate the enactments inside a philosophical discourse” (*Fast* 11). Here we see how Bell’s practice intersects with an auto-ethnographic impulse that foregrounds the philosophical and the performative in a manner I name autotheoretical. Bell emphasizes the status of the autotheorist—as she performs and as she ejaculates—as “first and foremost a philosopher,” defining her “embodiments of philosophy” as Badiouian “events” that are attuned to the concerns of “pragmatic philosophy” (11-12). As one

¹⁵¹ The ways that post-third wave autotheorists like Bell and Kraus approach gender and the self is one shaped by a post-Butlerian context in which Butler’s advancement of the notion of “gender performativity” pervades discourse and understanding; to quote Bell in *Fast Feminism*: “The Delphic oracle is said to have instructed Socrates to ‘know thyself’. The fast-feminist philosopher knows that there is no essential self and that the no-self knows no gender; that anatomical sex need not coincide with gender expression; that gender as a set of cultural body practices and sex as the practical and pleasurable use of sexual anatomy are social artifices” (45). Indeed, the context within which Kraus’s approach to feminism takes place might best be described by Bell when she defines the “postfeminism of the poststructuralist variety” which her own work *Fast Feminism* operates in proximity to (*Fast* 16-17).

finds in Bell's work, autotheory has the capacity to extend existing ideas from feminist theory and practice historically to new effects:

Practice————> Theory————> Practice

The first arrow from practice to theory denotes the imperative of theorizing based on what one has lived, experienced, or embodied: for example, Bell's championing of Stelarc's practice, where "New philosophy, significantly different thoughts and ideas, come about through radically redesigning the body" (*Fast* 14). The view here, which autotheorists like Bell and Kraus enact, is that one cannot theorize something that one has not physically experienced or done. The second arrow from theory to practice denotes the transmuting of theory into practice: to take what one believes or upholds in theory or in principle, in the abstract, and apply that to a life lived. Both the practice->theory and the theory-> practice are views upheld by feminist theorists like hooks, who maintains that in order for theory to be truly feminist and "liberatory," it must bridge theory and practice (by being accessible, for example) and that feminist theory is, most basically, a critical wrestling with "the concrete" (hooks, *Transgress* 70).

As I read through the canon of contemporary literature and theory, I encounter figures—often men—whose questionable and, in some cases, criminal moves in their life lead me to question their legitimacy as a thinker whose work is politically and ethically relevant. As a mode of practicing theory and philosophy that underscores the significance of the writer's, artist's, or theorist's life to the practice of said theory and philosophy, autotheory presents a ripe space to begin to take up these tensions. My own experience throughout undergraduate and graduate studies in the Humanities is one where little, if any, attention has been paid to the lived actions of certain contemporary writers—whether it is Burroughs's shooting his second wife Joan Vollmer

in the head, or Althusser strangling his wife to death—and to focus instead on their reputable contributions to contemporary philosophical, theoretical, and literary thought. Feminist theorists have engaged gender, race, and class injustices in their work, and millennial movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp point to the mainstreamizing of these historically marginalized feminist views: someone might lose their job, for example, when the behaviour is unsavoury (think Al Franken leaving his Senate post after a photograph surfaced of him groping a woman as part of a comedic bit), or be sentenced through the court system when the behaviour is outright illegal (such as the recent Bill Cosby hearings).

The question of what behaviour is so bad that it will lead to the writer's or artist's work being unredeemable is one that autotheory as a contemporary feminist mode may need to wrestle with in coming years. The act of refusing to watch a television show or a comedy sketch—or perhaps, more tellingly, to be able to acknowledge its contributions to culture as properly “feminist”—continues to ripple out as more and more men are ‘outed’ for their bad, sometimes even criminal, behaviour: whether it is Louis C.K. who repeatedly exposed himself to female colleagues, or Aziz Ansari who was accused of sexual misconduct by a woman who went on a date with him. With Kraus's *I Love Dick*, we find the early bubbling-up of this impulse within feminist politics: Kraus discloses her lived experiences to shed light on larger, structural forces behind this man's behaviour—behaviour which we see echoed throughout culture.

Outing Bad Behaviour: The Feminist Politics of Disclosure

The widespread popularity that *I Love Dick* has received in its subsequent editions (2006 in America, 2015 in the UK) has been attributed in part to the shifts in culture brought on by

blogging, social media platforms, and the “confessional culture” of “over-sharing” (Gross) that these new technologies facilitate. Reflecting on the contrast between the demonization of *I Love Dick* in 1997 and its celebration in 2016, Kraus points to the “more porous . . . boundaries of privacy” that we are accustomed to today (Armitstead and Kraus). Kraus’s radical blurring of ‘art’ and ‘life’ in *I Love Dick* is one of the reasons why her work reverberates with millennial feminists: in a post-internet age of widespread disclosure made possible by social media—seen most recently with the #MeToo movement which, emerging from grassroots feminist efforts historically, has had mainstream effects in popular culture—Kraus’s disclosures translate to an urgent and contemporary feminist politic. To be sure, a large part of Kraus’s practice is taking issue with specific theorists and their lived actions, drawing attention to contradictions and hypocrisies between rhetoric and practice. Whether it is French post-structuralist men like Guattari excluding women from their anthologies of theory (*Dick* 227), or a revered Professor behaving in sexually inappropriate ways with students, Kraus does not hesitate to call specific people out. In the case of the latter, it is Schechner, founder of the discipline now known as Performance Studies, who Kraus outs for sexual misconduct (173).

Autotheory as a feminist mode circulates in a context when women’s believability is suspect and the default assumption around women’s disclosures is that those who disclose are spiteful, attention-seeking, and fabricating truths.¹⁵² The trend has been that in cases of rape and sexual assault, where the literal and emotional costs for the women who come forward are high and the legal-justice system shows little chance of having their back, the women who testify

¹⁵² Kraus preempts the description of women writers and artists who employs strategies of disclosure in her work: “...bitches, libellers, pornographers, and amateurs...” (*Dick* 72).

against their aggressors tend to be blamed rather than believed.¹⁵³ The problem is further complicated when the victims of patriarchal violence fail to perform as “perfect victims,”¹⁵⁴ a term that has been circulating recently in feminist spheres to protest the idea that a victim must behave in a perfect and upstanding way in order to be believed and/or receive sympathy or the possibility of justice.¹⁵⁵ Within the body of *I Love Dick*, Kraus too fails to be a perfect victim, and those moments of disclosing her own questionable behaviour in the book can be read as further associating her with failure. That *I Love Dick* is not straightforwardly feminist—and that the protagonist or “heroine” is not a perfect victim—might contribute to its resonance with fourth-wave feminist audiences.

The performative turn, and the institution of Performance Studies by Richard Schechner at NYU, are contexts that Kraus uses to trouble contemporary theory from a feminist perspective. Performance becomes a key point of entry¹⁵⁶ for Kraus to engage in a roasting of the male figureheads of twentieth century theory, being as it is, a particularly fashionable discourse across

¹⁵³ This is the phenomenon referred to as “victim blaming” or “blaming the victim,” first coined by sociologist William Ryan in his 1971 book *Blaming the Victim* with regards to the ways in which ideology dictates how the poor and socially disenfranchised are blamed for their own misfortunes.

¹⁵⁴ The “perfect victim” myth functions in a similar way to perpetuate a structurally sexist society in which rape culture and “blaming the victim” continue to be widespread problems. Perhaps this is part of the point of autotheory’s feminist politics of disclosure: the women authoring autotheory are not one-dimensional victims of the patriarchy, even as they are oppressed by it. As bell hooks convincingly notes, men are oppressed by patriarchy too (“Patriarchy” 1). Women can be complicit in patriarchal violence, which is not to “blame the victim” so much as to acknowledge the intersectionality of oppression and the agency that women have—agency that can ‘over-correct’ and re-enact the kinds of bad behaviours they have learned. At one point in her *Diaries*, Hesse’s behaviour veers into stalking: she lives across from ex-husband Doyle’s studio, witnessing moments through his window that she records (Speed, “Hesse” 3). Kraus is similarly imperfect, and was called out on her ‘bad behaviour’ that she enacted in and through *I Love Dick* by the book’s presumed eponymous antagonist, British cultural theorist Dick Hebdige.

¹⁵⁵ The problem of requiring “innocence” as a standard for justice is taken up as an intersectional problem in Jackie Wang’s *Against Innocence* published by Semiotext(e), where Wang reveals the ways in which the discourse of innocence perpetuates a structurally racist society in which blackness is always already associated with criminality and guilt (32).

¹⁵⁶ Kraus positions performance art as having been her “in” to the cultured world of art and discursive practice that Sylvère occupied. For a time, Kraus made artwork in performance art spaces, creating performances that referenced literary and theory histories: “Kraus met Lotringer in 1980, when she wrote and staged a performance piece called “Disparate Action/Desperate Action,” in which she gave a monologue ‘conflating *Middlemarch*’s Dorothea Brooke and the German left-wing terrorist Ulrike Meinhof” (Blair).

academia and the art world at the time of Kraus's writing. Performance art functions as a motif throughout *I Love Dick*, alongside Kraus's own reflections on the politics and aesthetics of Performance Studies—symbolized most obviously in the real-life character of Richard Schechner. In the text, Kraus is positioned as having knowledge of “performance”: as a student of it in the 1970s, as a practitioner of it in the 1980s, and as a witness to the ways it has evolved through the 1970s to the 1990s. Extending the self-awareness of Kraus's text, *I Love Dick* functions as much as its own referential source text as it does its exegesis or critical elucidation. To be sure, the chapter entitled “The Exegesis” brings together the different themes in the text, opening with a reference to Acker's *Blood and Guts* and moving into a discussion of feminist performance art, first person narration, and the gendered tensions between the intellectual and the sexual. This is also a section where Kraus discloses the troubling behaviour of known men in the realm of the arts, academia, and theory.

The chapter begins with a post-coital conversation between Kraus and Dick: they have just slept together (although this in no way changes Dick's relative antipathy towards her). They discuss David Rattray—“our favourite ghost” (172)—a writer Kraus upholds as an influence of hers throughout the text. Here, over pillow talk with Dick, Kraus begins to disclose the ways in which she, as an editor, “made allowances for David's bad behaviour” and how David's literary success affected his wife: “he got bigger while his wife who'd been on the scene with him shrank until she nearly disappeared” (172). It is in this moment where Kraus sheds light on her own complicity in the very structures she is critiquing, and the ways in which she has enabled the behaviour she is now calling out. Speaking of this “early 80s art world” that consisted “mostly (of) men” (179), Kraus and Dick have the following exchange:

“He was part of the generation that ruined women’s lives,” I told you. “It’s not just that generation,” you replied. “Men still do ruin women’s lives.” (172)

By framing canonical figures in the contemporary art and theory spheres as “the generation that ruined women’s lives” (172), Kraus makes explicit her feminist intervention into the experimental canon and grounds this intervention in her lived experience with the particular people comprising that social scene.

Reflecting on hers and Dick’s exchange within the context of her lived experience as a young artist who navigated the art world in the early 1980s, Kraus moves to her experience taking Schechner’s “Aboriginal Dream Time Workshop,” disclosing Schechner’s inappropriate sexual behaviour and exploitative power dynamics. This strategy of “‘identified disclosure,’”¹⁵⁷ which involves naming male artists and holding them accountable for their lived actions toward women artists as grassroots feminist activism, has taken off in feminist-influenced movements that, recently, have gained attention in mainstream media. This is seen, for example, in the ongoing protest movements by feminist artists and activists in the name of Cuban performance artist Ana Mendieta, where protestors call attention to the suppressed place of Mendieta’s work in major institutions and to the concurrent injustice of the strong institutional support that the work of Carl Andre—Mendieta’s husband and accused (and now acquitted) killer (Smith).¹⁵⁸

Kraus then moves back to the comedic realm of hyperbole, stating that Schechner is responsible for having “ruined” her life broadly speaking (172). She then calls him out explicitly:

¹⁵⁷ The notion of an “identified disclosure” comes from VIDA: Women In Literary Arts’s 2016 “Report From the Field: Statements Against Silence,” which discusses the “de-identified disclosures ... from women who have experienced traumatic interactions with a respected literary arts community member” (VIDA).

¹⁵⁸ Carl Andre, husband and suspected killer of Cuban feminist performance artist Mendieta, was tried and acquitted for her murder. Protests took place at the Tate Modern in 2016, where “Members of the activist groups WHERE IS ANA MENDIETA and Sisters Uncut were on hand to protest the inclusion of ... Andre’s work in the Tate Modern’s extension, and the exclusion of Ana Mendieta’s work” (Smith, “Tate”).

“J’ACCUSE,” (I started typing) “Richard Schechner.” Richard Schechner is a Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, author of *Environmental Theater* and several other books on anthropology and theater and editor of *The Drama Review*. He was once my acting teacher. And at 3 a.m. last Wednesday night it occurred to me that Richard Schechner had ruined my life. And so I’d write this broadside rant and wheatpaste it all around Richard’s neighborhood and NYU. I’d dedicate it to the artist Hannah Wilke. . . “J’ACCUSE RICHARD SCHECHNER who through sleep deprivation amateur GESTALT THERAPY and SEXUAL MANIPULATION attempted to exert MIND CONTROL over a group of 10 students in Washington, D.C.” (*Dick* 173)

Returning to her mimetic strategy of couching feminist critiques in self-deprecating claims that are complicit with negative stereotypes about women, Kraus describes her disclosures about Schechner as a “broadside rant” (173). And yet, instead of moving ahead with her threat to out Schechner by “wheatpast(ing)” these disclosures around his neighbourhood and place of employment (which was, and still is, NYU), she tells her story of what happened within the parameters of her autotheoretical text. As she writes, Kraus makes known her allegiances with those feminist artists before her who were particularly misunderstood—especially Wilke—stating that the self-implicating disclosures that she is able to make in 1997 are less “embarrassing” than they were in the 1970s when Wilke was making work (173).

Kraus’s consequential disclosures about these men feature as a kind of after-thought amidst her own autotheoretical revelations, another rhetorical device Kraus uses to strategic effect. As she writes through the Schechner anecdote, she comes to articulate how, as a young woman, the power she had access to was sexual instead of cerebral since the patriarchy continues to view the two as mutually exclusive. Writing of how she hungered to be a part of critical discourse but how the “greater truth” of her “cunt” precluded her from being an equal participant, Kraus states:

Richard seemed to like our morning conversations about Brecht and Althusser and Andre Gorz, but later on he turned the group against me for being too cerebral and acting like a boy. And weren't all these passionate interests and convictions just evasions of a greater truth, my cunt? (*Dick* 173).

Drawing from her experience as a student in Schechner's workshop, and now writing from the more mature perspective of a woman nearing forty, Kraus reminds the reader how theory—even in its more experimental, art-world, and leftist manifestations—is embedded in gendered power dynamics that have historically suppressed the voices of women and others who are gender non-conforming. Given the ways in which strategies of disclosure continue to be used as a primary recourse for women who have experienced sexual impropriety and violence—after years of being failed by the systems in place to protect them—Kraus's text continues to ring true for feminists today.

Kraus uses her experience in Schechner's workshop to remind us that theory is gendered and sexualized, and that the questions of who accesses and authors the work that is understood as “theory” is a feminist issue. In this scene, Kraus writes through how her own gender—or gender failure¹⁵⁹—precluded her from being taken seriously in intellectual conversations when she was an art student in the 1970s. Again, Kraus demarcates the difference between influential men of art and academia who occupy the realm of the mind, and the women who always already occupy the realm of the body. Emphasizing this context as a fundamentally sexualized terrain, Kraus observes how her female peers used their sexual appeal and physical attractiveness to access

¹⁵⁹ Looking back on her younger self with an autotheoretical eye, Kraus understands how her younger years were characterized by a kind of gender failure: in spaces like Schechner's Aboriginal Dream Time Workshop, she was neither actually a boy (but was “acting like” one (Kraus, *Dick* 173)) nor was she properly a girl because she wasn't foregrounding her sex appeal. While Kraus does not make mention of transgender discourse within *I Love Dick*, performatively re-inscribing a cis-centric gender binary of male/female and boy/girl instead, Kraus seems to be seeking out a more capacious understanding of the gender spectrum in moments such as these. Her approach to gender in this section is one informed by Butler's theory of gender performativity, which holds that gender is less a preexisting identity and more the product of a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, “Performative” 519).

these spaces, whether it was “Liza Martin” wearing platform shoes during yoga class or “Maria Calloway” from whom Schechner received a blowjob (174). Maria Calloway is the most tragic figure here, having done these sexual favours for Schechner without ever having been allowed access to register for the workshop. Satirically, Kraus points out hypocrisies and lapses between rhetoric and practice in these kinds of spaces. Schechner has established what seemed to students at the time to be a transgressive, experimental, exploratory, and intimate space for learning about ideas becomes, in actuality a space of violated boundaries, cultural appropriation, and exploitation. This becomes the basis of Kraus’s “accusation.”

Following her experience as a student at Schechner’s workshop, Kraus explains, she decided to start working at a topless bar in order to pay rent; the economic realities of being a student heighten the already fraught sexual politics: this is an example of Kraus instantiating the schizophrenic impulse of linking two non sequiturs in terms of causation¹⁶⁰. In a scene that is both visceral and uncomfortably bare, Kraus communicates the contradictions facing women—as gendered, sexualized, objectified, fetishized—who seek to engage intellectually (and be listened to or heard): “I was investigating the rift between thought and sex or so I thought, letting lawyers smell my pussy while I talked” (174). By configuring the “pussy” and “cunt” as that which *gets in the way* of Kraus accessing theoretical questions, Kraus emphasizes “the rift between thought and sex” on at least two (meta) levels; she reveals the ways in which the binary

¹⁶⁰ “Schizophrenia consists of placing the word 'therefore' between two non-sequiturs” (Dick 226).

oppositions dividing men/women, mind/body, and intellectual/sexual persist.¹⁶¹ Kraus places responsibility on Schechner for her venturing into sex work, a move that can be read more figuratively than literally.

Kraus reiterates her thesis that while the academic, artistic, and scholarly men were “getting famous,” the women were “paying for our rent and shows and exploring ‘issues of our sexuality’ by sharing to them all night long in topless bars” (183)—that men have access to theory, legitimacy, and (intellectual) fame¹⁶² while women are relegated to more base concerns of labour, the body, and sex. By placing the “exploring ‘issues of our sexuality’” in scare quotes, Kraus gets at the irony of how theory and practice continues to be divided, gesturing to the fact that actually living or embodying different elements of marginalized sexual practices is not truly theoretical, a state of affairs which autotheory as a feminist practice turns on its head. Kraus

¹⁶¹ Kraus cannot ‘transcend’ her body, even when she goes so far as to protest the “cynicism” of our patriarchal culture through her “anorexia,” a matter taken up in more detail in *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000). Returning to the notion of mimesis as a means of women accessing “the master discourse” of philosophy or theory, Kraus explains how her relationship with Lotringer began: she was (consensually) sexually “degraded” by Lotringer, “having sadomasochistic sex with the downtown Manhattan luminary Sylvère Lotringer” (177). Of course, this sexual relationship would turn into a marriage through which Kraus gained access to Semiotext(e) press, starting her own feminist series “Semiotext(e) Native Agents” of which works like *I Love Dick* is a part.

¹⁶² Part of Kraus’s practice in *I Love Dick* involves various gendered inversions, including her appropriation of “Dick” (as an inversion of male theorist’s appropriation of women). In the 1980s, New Museum founder Marcia Tucker listed the initiatives that female artists had advanced in the 1970s at the height of the feminist art movement, including “the use of a subjective, personal voice,” “overtly political content,” and “performance as autobiography” (Chave 159). Tucker points out that male artists were the ones “who became famous and repeated the economic rewards” of these developments, drawing attention to the palpably different valuations that the subjective, the personal, the autobiographical, and the political take on depending on the gender of the author/artist. This connection between the female and the personal, the narcissistic, and therefore the degraded or devalued functions persist, and Kraus’s autotheoretical project functions to draw our attention to these gender-based differences that are insidious and non-coincidental: that are engrained in theory.

confronts the problem of the fundamental incompatibility¹⁶³ of women being both theorist and slut, both mind and body, both (literally and figuratively) naked and speaking as an intellectual.

This incompatibility is established by Kraus in the opening scene, and continues as a conceit throughout the work with her returning periodically to the scene of her working at a topless bar in her early twenties to pay for school; Kraus juxtaposes her cunt and her spread legs with her uttering references to literature and other vaguely intellectual topics. This scene becomes a metaphor that Kraus turns to when referring to the larger problem of women's association with the embodied and the sexualized precluding them from the intellectual. This scene can also be read as embodying the tensions of autotheory: the woman being spread open and exposed—as sexual, as flawed—while uttering anecdotes, making references to theory and literature and art that, depending on the audience (of “Dicks”), might be interpreted as nonsensical or unintelligible, as “Some Strange Scene” (154). This scene bears significant resemblance to sex-positive feminist performance art works of the 1980s-early 1990s: most notably, Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement*, in which the artist inserts a speculum into her vagina for audience members to come up and observe her cervix while Sprinkle speaks into a microphone, directly addressing the viewers.

¹⁶³ Prior to the post-structuralist turn in theory, gender-based binary oppositions were often taken as a given, organizing Western thought according to unchecked patriarchal privileging. Women were associated with the body and its supposed irrationality, excess, and disorder while men were associated with the mind and its presumed rationality, moderation, and civility (Carson 124). Feminist thinkers like Anne Carson, who in “The Gender Of Sound” unpacks these gendered oppositions in relation to the history of sound, point out how engrained this binary way of thinking is in patriarchal society, and how women's fundamental association with the body and uncultivated matter has lead to their abject and immoral status as hysterics and madwomen, witches and whores (120). Because of their supposedly inherent connection to the body—a connection that, according to the organizing logic of Cartesian dualism, was seen as preventing them from an engagement with the mind, women were considered essentially non-conceptual and irrational. The conceptual was the purview of men, and women, reduced to their bodies, continued to exist in the margins of cultural production—creating work and making noise that was perceived as unintelligible, unintelligent, hysterical, and narcissistic. This begins to change in the 1960s, as civil rights movements and the second wave of feminism upend the politics of the social in a way that continues to resonate up through to the present. Jameson contextualizes these movements as part of a larger decolonization that begins in the third world in the late 1950s (Jameson, “Periodizing” 180).

Other artists, including Fraser, Bell, Finley, and Davis enact similar juxtapositions of the exposed and/or sexually explicit body and the enunciating, intellectual subject in their performance practices. Both Sprinkle and Bell's "post-porn feminist"¹⁶⁴ practices involve the articulation of feminist theory alongside sexually explicit practices—sex work, in the case of "prostitute performance artist" Sprinkle, and female ejaculation, in the case of Bell.¹⁶⁵ In *Official Welcome*, Fraser performs a speech that "mimick(s) the language and gestures of archetypal figures associated with the art world, including patrons, museum directors, curators, critics and artists" (Martin); as she performs the speech, she begins to remove her clothes, stripping down to her underwear and heels and then, finally, to her nude body. First performed in 2001 at the MICA Foundation in New York and subsequently performed in spaces like Art Basel and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Andrea Fraser's *Official Welcome* is a practice that brings together performance, conceptualism, and institutional critique (Gad iii). Juxtaposing the embodied and the autobiographical with the cerebral and the theoretical, the importance of feminist performance art as a precursor to, and/or early example of, autotheory as a feminist practice cannot be overstated. In one of Kraus's many moments of "exegesis," she explicitly states that "Hannah Wilke is a model for everything I hope to do" (Dick 172). Kraus then takes this a step further, performing a kind of rhetorical baptism of Wilke *as* theorist through paratactic juxtaposition, hailing Wilke as "Hannah Wilke Wittgenstein" (215); this is not unlike her citing of David Rattray on Simone Weil as the female "counterpart of Nietzsche" (*Aliens* 104).

¹⁶⁴ This term comes from Sprinkle, who uses it to historicize her practice in light of the history of feminism and pornography: "Annie popularized the term 'Post-Porn' on the occasion of her 1989 one-woman show, which originated as a series of vignettes that she had performed around New York since 1981. In later incarnations, the piece became known as *Post-Post-Porn Modernist*" (Cody 11).

¹⁶⁵ Post-porn feminist practices like these function as a confrontation to the Western metaphysical tradition which posits body/mind as binary oppositions: Sprinkle's practice reveals that she can be a self-identified whore and a theorist, a practitioner and a thinker, a conceptual artist and a sex worker (Bell, *Whore*; Sprinkle, *Hardcore*).

What does it mean for Kraus to place the blame of the suppression of women artists and intellectuals on particular known and named men, specifically here, Schechner and Burden? It might be a reversal of the mechanisms of structural sexism and victim-blaming to hyperbolic effect; or a way of pointing to particular men as metonymic of larger patriarchal problems. In *Video Green*, Chris Burden¹⁶⁶ features as a metonymy of male art world power, influence and complicity in what Kraus views as gendered double standards when it comes to what artwork is valued or recognized as aesthetically and conceptually important; Kraus positions Burden, in his capacity as a professor in a CalArts MFA program and arbiter of institutional and aesthetic valuation, in opposition to his young women students, like 27 year-old artist Jennifer Schlosberg:

“But why,” conceptual artist Chris Burden asked his 27 year-old graduate student Jennifer Schlosberg, with faux-paternalistic concern, “do you make yourself so scary?” Burden, as I’m sure you will recall, burst onto the international contemporary art scene when he convinced a friend to shoot him in the arm . . . while Burden was himself an MFA student. (*Video* 58)

Kraus explains how Burden called his student Schlosberg’s work “unethical” because of its use of disclosure as a strategy in her work that was “based on social interactions” at the art school (*Video* 60). Kraus defends the work as “a brilliant chronicle of the very qualities that define contemporary LA art: ambition, exclusion, and anxiety,” (59), and believes that it was the artist’s impersonal¹⁶⁷ and “maddeningly opaque” performance of the (female-authored) personal that frustrated the (male) critics more than anything else (63). Kraus connects the politics and

¹⁶⁶ Kraus asks: “Why did Chris Burden’s female contemporaries retreat to teepees? . . . ‘My art’, declared Burden one year before, ‘is an examination of reality’” (*Video Green* 63). Rather than saying “1960s-1970s female performance artists and conceptual artists,” Kraus says “Chris Burden’s female contemporaries,” enacting what the art world more broadly enacts: reading women against the male standard, as counterparts who are found lacking.

¹⁶⁷ Alongside her foregrounding of the personal is Kraus’s acknowledgment of the place of the impersonal in work by women. She politicizes the impersonal as that which is often disregarded, scorned, or censored, especially when it is wielded by women in the context of otherwise personal material: the impersonal therefore advances as a politically viable strategy for women to make use of alongside personal work.

aesthetics of disclosure in work by female artists to the abjection of these artists from the cultural sphere; there is something about disclosure that is imperative to feminist work, and when this disclosure is precluded by men in the name of ethics and exposure, this work by conceptual female artists is stifled and suppressed. Dramatizing this divide in conceptual art and theory, Kraus portrays the female conceptualists, tired and angry at this systemic suppression, moving “to live around New Mexico in teepees, or become massage therapists and cranial-sacral healers” (61). As Wilke notes in the epigraph to this dissertation, Vito Acconci can literally masturbate in an art gallery—or Burden can be shot in the arm by a friend—and be recognized as a canonical conceptual artist for doing so, but women’s art is continually disregarded as narcissistic, non-conceptual, or unethical: a problem that Kraus addresses in a manner similar to Wilke’s.¹⁶⁸

Troubling Continental Philosophy: Semiotext(e) and Psychoanalysis

Lotringer founded Semiotext(e) as “a vehicle for introducing French theory into the United States” (Schwarz and Balsamo 206). He had been a student of Roland Barthes, and like Barthes had shifted from an interest in structuralism and semiotics to an interest in post-structuralism. While Lotringer had been hired to teach structuralism at Columbia, he was more passionate about the possibility of “engineering a nonacademic intellectual movement” and “reinvent(ing) the concept of revolution in America” through post-1968 French post-structuralist theory (207). Semiotext(e) became a space for “the interface between the globally dominant American culture industry and the French theorization of the post-1968 experience” (209), predominantly publishing theory written by European and American men. Semiotext(e) press is a

¹⁶⁸ In *Video Green*, Kraus writes: “By 1980 Guy Trebay was sniffing in *The Village Voice* that Hannah (Wilke)’s vagina is ‘now as familiar to us as an old shoe.’ Has anybody ever said this about Chris Burden’s penis?” (215).

hub for vanguard writing that straddles the line between critical theory, fiction, philosophy, art criticism, non-fiction, and activist texts.

In contextualizing Kraus's feminist autotheoretical practice, I turn to what I perceive to be Semiotext(e)'s own gender trouble around the place of the psychoanalytic to demonstrate the ways in which gendered divides persist into post-structuralist and postmodern theory that purports to deconstruct gender and sexuality but that nonetheless remains dominated by cis male voices. Given the role of Semiotext(e) Native Agents in publishing work that I find particularly interesting for autotheory,¹⁶⁹ I turn to a 1994 interview conducted by Henry Schwarz and Anne Balsamo entitled "Under the Sign of Semiotext(e): The Story according to Sylvère Lotringer and Chris Kraus." Reading this as both an archive and part of Lotringer's and Kraus's own performative self-mythologization, I consider the narrative of Semiotext(e) as demonstrative of certain gendered problems which Kraus's *I Love Dick* confronts.

In 1990, Semiotext(e) press bifurcates into male-authored "theory" and female-authored "fiction," with Kraus curating the latter work into a series called Native Agents. In its early days, Semiotext(e)'s Native Agents series foregrounded post-confessional experimental writing by predominantly white women, many of whom are queer and/or working-class.¹⁷⁰ The texts converge around themes of the female body, performance art, countercultures, sex work and pornography, alternative and queer sexualities, female madness, drug use and intoxication, and coming-of-age narratives, most if not all from a female-identifying point of view. In many ways,

¹⁶⁹ One of these early Native Agents texts, Rower's *If You're a Girl* (1990) is described by Rower as "transfiction": a mode of writing which combines real life and fictional "intervention" (1).

¹⁷⁰ While many of the writers in Native Agents are marginalized in different ways—working-class and poor, lesbian and bisexual, survivors of rape and sexual abuse—it is difficult to ignore the lack of representation of women of colour in its early days. This has changed in recent years, with Semiotext(e) publishing works by women of color such as Jackie Wang and Veronica Gonzalaz Peña.

Semiotext(e) Native Agents galvanized forces that had previously been latent or disconnected from each other, including post-punk feminism and third wave feminisms. Influenced by the work of Kathy Acker and her post-Beats approach to writing and feminism, Native Agents constitutes a young experimental canon of female “I”s who are writing themselves and disclosing their taboo experiences (of drug use and altered states, sexuality, madness) in ways that are not so much Confessional (in the 1950s Plath and Sexton sense) as post-confessional and post-feminist.¹⁷¹ Under Kraus’s direction, Native Agents positioned itself as space for an experimental feminist counterculture; while it made space for working-class and lesbian women exploring transgressive themes around sexuality and identity, it remained predominantly white, a matter which has been remedied in Semiotext(e)’s more recent sub-series, publishing works by women of colour from Jackie Wang to Veronica Gonzalez Peña.

In Schwarz and Balsamo’s interview with the then-couple, Kraus explains how her husband Lotringer was comfortable publishing fiction by women (in Semiotext(e) Native Agents, curated and conceived by Kraus) but not theory, as feminist theory was seen as too wrapped up in psychoanalysis (whereas Semiotext(e) sought to align itself with the Deleuze and Guattari strain, in opposition to Freud). When pushed on the matter, Lotringer explains that his resistance to publishing feminist theory was “because of its psychoanalytic bent” (212). In terms of theoretical alignments, Semiotext(e) sided with Deleuze and Guattari and therefore stood in

¹⁷¹ In broader culture, the 1990s saw “the repeated declaration ... that feminism was over” (Pollock “Trauma” 29) and the onset of what was referred to as a “post-feminist” era. Native Agents emerges in what has been called the third wave, when essentialist notions of “women” are suspect and “feminism” itself is a term approached with caution. The ambivalence toward the “feminist” label, and the more complicated approaches to feminist problems like misogyny, rape, and reproduction characterize the work. Some advantages of this work is the generic unruliness and the ways in which these texts open up a conception of theoretically informed feminist writing that engages with the self in ways that are contradictory, transgressive, and ambivalent. While I refer to the work of Native Agents as first-person post-confessional, McKenzie Wark calls it “first-person non-confessional,” underscoring the distancing of the practices of feminist writing in Native Agents’ from earlier practices, like the sincerity of Confessionalism or the pre-Butler conceptions of gender and femininity in French Feminism’s *écriture féminine*.

opposition to Freudian psychoanalytic theory.¹⁷² With the exception of Kathy Acker, with whom Lotringer had been romantically involved, Semiotext(e) did not begin to publish work by women until Lotringer began his relationship with Kraus in the 1980s.¹⁷³ It is difficult to ignore the fact that the only women Lotringer was publishing were the two he was sleeping with (Acker) or marrying (Kraus), though it does provide some evidence for Irigaray's thesis on the mimetic function—namely, that women can only access phallogentric language and discourse through mimetic roles, such as by “having a *fling with*” a philosopher (Irigaray, *This Sex* 150). Furthermore, with the dawn of Kraus's sub-press within Semiotext(e)—Semiotext(e) Native Agents—the work of women was still not being framed as “theory” but, rather, as “fiction” and as work inflected by autobiography.

Implied by Lotringer throughout the interview is the view that being introspective and self-critical is antithetical to being theoretical in the postmodern context, a view that stands in contrast to the premise of autotheory.¹⁷⁴ It is also implied that women can only have access to

¹⁷² We see this in the sub-title of Semiotext(e)'s “Anti-Oedipus” issue in 1977: “From psychoanalysis to schizopolitics.” No women are included in this issue, which features work by Lotringer, Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, Artaud, amongst others.

¹⁷³ Schwarz and Balsamo describe it somewhat euphemistically: “In the late 1980s, when Lotringer began associating with NY-based filmmaker Chris Kraus, he became aware of the severe imbalances of women's representation within both the journal and the Foreign Agents series” (212).

¹⁷⁴ Any proximity to the “auto” involves a move towards the feminine and the feminist, something which theory as a masculine enterprise shirks off and deems abject (or “useless”). Lotringer repeats throughout the interview that, rather than being “self-critical” in the face of his theoretical blind spots (to women, feminism, people of colour) he actively moves in the other direction “to balance things out”: it is a movement into the future that does not involve looking back. What is perhaps most striking about this interview is the way in which Lotringer, with Kraus's assistance, apprehends and then disavows feminist critique; as I write this, I can't help but know that it isn't very *cool* to enact a feminist critique of Semiotext(e): to do so would be to get caught up in some kind of anti-theoretical identity politics, or to engage in “useless” autocritique, or limit my capacity for theory and abstraction and rigour by aligning myself with something as confining as the label “feminist.” It is possible that Chris Kraus's winking disavowal of the “feminist” label in her work is a resistance to being “pinned down” to a “single community,” just as Lotringer's efforts in the Semiotext(e) journal was to cultivate “an organized schizophrenia . . . a conscious attempt to avoid being pinned down” (Schwarz and Balsamo 210-11).

writing fiction, while theory remains the purview of men since the only theory women were doing, according to Lotringer, was psychoanalytic:

Lotringer: So the idea was instead of criticizing or being criticized, [quietly we issued the point of view series], and we start going the other way. So that basically we balance things out and go on.

Kraus: Sylvère's idea about this was that it was acceptable in the fiction series to publish only women, but he never wanted women in the theory series because the only women he knew writing theory were doing psychoanalytic theory, which he wasn't so interested in. And then the fiction series wasn't introspective or psychoanalytic at all in that way. It was a very public 'I'. The same public 'I' that gets expressed in these other French theories. (Schwarz and Balsamo 214)

That women are given space to write fiction but not theory is a key point in my theorization of autotheory as a contemporary feminist practice. Fiction by women is permissible, but the stakes of theory and the terms of the theoretical debates that you buy into with theory—especially the “high theory” (Di Leo) of 1970s French post-structuralism—are too high. Emerging out of the 1980s and transpiring in the early 1990s, *Semiotext(e) Native Agents's* writing resonates with postmodern feminist theory by theorists like Donna Haraway, whose “The Cyborg Manifesto” argues for a feminist politics of “partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves” (“Cyborg” 297). Another problem that arises in the above exchange is Lotringer's resistance to “auto-critique” in his capacity as literary critic, editor, and cultural theorist. He describes the act of “self critique” as “useless” (Schwarz and Balsamo 216), re-entrenching the divide between disclosure as feminist politic on the one hand and concealment as masculine shroud in theory and philosophy on the other. The above exchange between Kraus and Lotringer seems to presuppose a false dichotomy between the introspective and “personal”

on the one hand and the polemical, political, and public on the other hand, a dichotomy that feels particularly disingenuous.

Is feminist theory synonymous with psychoanalytic theory in the way that Lotringer says it is? In *Gender Trouble*, Butler confronts the problem of what she calls “psychoanalysis as feminist metatheory,” critiquing those who have used psychoanalysis as a means “to construct a coherent female subject” (332). Using methods of deconstruction, Butler underscores how psychoanalysis is a narrative that fails to take account of itself as such (332); she configures feminist theory’s uncritical adoption of psychoanalytic theory and its narrative closure as problematic. That said, many feminist theorists working in the 1970s seemed aware of the problem of psychoanalysis’s hegemonic position in feminist theory. In its inaugural issue, British feminist journal *m/f* (1978-1986) stated that they see psychoanalysis as insufficient, anticipating American postmodern feminist positions like that of Butler’s (Adams, Coward, Cowie 7). While there is some truth to Lotringer’s claim of the connection between psychoanalysis and feminist theory, particularly in the 1970s French context from which much of the theory Lotringer published was coming from, it ignores the contributions of marxist and socialist feminist theory, for example, in Britain, Italy, and America, as well as radical feminist theory. I think of Silvia Federici, for example, the Italian American Marxist feminist whose work has arguably been appropriated by male autonomists in Italian and French ultra-Left theory. Regardless of whether Lotringer is correct in denouncing 1970s feminist theory for its psychoanalytic leanings, Lotringer is complicit in this re-entrenchment of theory as what Irigaray called a “master discourse” (*This Sex* 149) or what Lotringer calls a “cultural position of power” through his definition of what constitutes interesting and relevant theory.

In their essay “Further Materials Toward a Theory of the Man-Child,” Moira Weigel and Mal Ahern provide a sharp feminist critique of the French philosophy collective Tiquun’s book *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (2012), a treatise on the disembodied metonymy of capitalism described as “the Young-Girl.” Weigel and Ahern state that the kind of theory represented by Tiquun’s *Young-Girl* has exhausted its relevance and efficacy as philosophy and political activism. Worse yet, the authors argue that a complacent acceptance of Tiquun’s *Young-Girl* signals a dangerous tendency within Western culture in which “thoughtful people (are) ready to accept that a layer of irony suffices to turn hateful [misogynistic] language into the basis of a sound critique” (Weigel and Ahern). The authors’ firm stance on the discourse and argument of *Young-Girl* being “hateful”—specifically towards women and girls—and their unwillingness to accept the text in all its postmodern, ironic appeal resonates with Kraus’s exposing of underlying sexist issues within cool, contemporary theory in *I Love Dick*.

In *The Feminist Memoir Project*, DuPlessis and Snitow write that “So it was that many who became feminists began by questioning the radical questioners” (7). Through the 1970s onward, Semiotext(e) was considered to be on the leading-edge of theory and experimentation: these predominantly male theorists were “the radical questioners” and were upheld as such. In their historiography of the second wave of feminism (1966-1970s), DuPlessis and Snitow point to the centrality of addressing the tension between progressive groups and the latent suppression and oppression of women by these groups in the formation of feminist movements¹⁷⁵. It is “by questioning the radical questioners” (7) that women moved from being women involved with

¹⁷⁵ DuPlessis and Snitow explain: “There were contradictions between the radical ethos in such groups as SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and their proud, unthinking male chauvinism. Women in these groups began to see how the movements to which they had given their passion and energy were exploiting them. They began to wonder if ‘liberation’ could apply to the women” (6-7).

male-authored/male-lead political movements to being politicized as feminists. We see this move throughout *I Love Dick*: the premise that Kraus, as a woman, has become an outsider to the rebels—Sylvère, Dick, “the Bataille Boys” (33)—as well as to the establishment of the neoliberal university and the commercial art world. Kraus is well aware of the rebel-status of Sylvère and his cadre of theorists in the academic and intellectual spheres; she describes Félix Guattari and his once girlfriend Josephine as “French theory’s Sid and Nancy” (*Dick* 83), alluding to the infamous couple from the Sex Pistols and establishing this connection between 1970s French theory and punk rock. The connection between punk culture and Semiotext(e) is apparent throughout the 1970s-1980s; quintessentially postmodern, the journal utilized a punk rock DIY aesthetic that incorporated BDSM imagery, appropriated footage from texts like psych med ads, and work by American punk rock band The Ramones featured alongside theorists and artists like Deleuze and Guattari, Burroughs, Acker, Foucault, John Giorno, and Phillip Glass.

Despite the different contexts, Kraus’s strategy bears resemblance to earlier (second-wave) feminist politics even as it marks notable deviations from it. For example, her decision to appeal to Dick’s ego and perform a hyper-feminized romantic obsession in how she interacts with him—declaring her love of, and primary loyalty to, the phallus in the very title of her book—resembles second-wave feminist strategies of calling out the men in social justice movements while making sure not to appear too threatening or un-feminine while doing so (DuPlessis and Snitow 7). That this has been an effective feminist strategy is notable, and explains—alongside Irigaray’s mimetic function—why Kraus might have chosen this strategy both as a means of enacting feminist change and as a means of sending up both the histories of male theory and art and the place of women and feminism in spaces of male theory and art through irony. Just as the

second-wavers wondered “if ‘liberation’ could apply to women,” (7) so too does Kraus wonder if “theory” could apply to women’s work. Given the exclusion of women as theorists from even the most progressive and open-minded spaces of theory, it is no wonder that Kraus might wonder this.¹⁷⁶ The creation of *I Love Dick* as an autotheoretical send up of leftist male theory becomes a way to problematize such exclusion, often to comedic feminist effect.

As outlined above, it is clear that in the world of Semiotext(e) (as it has been defined by Lotringer and, more recently, Kraus) “feminism” is associated with psychoanalytic theory, particularly feminist critiques of psychoanalytic theory as seen in the work of Irigaray and those who are often referred to, at least in the North American context, as the French Feminist theorists—de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva (Moi viii; Grosz, “French” 1). Kraus’s writing is characterized by this perpetual oscillation between the desire to “transcend” her gender like men have been permitted to do for millennia, and the imperative of enacting feminist politics. In contrast to 1970s French feminist theory, which found a kind of discursive agency and poetic refuge in the body—a body that had been historically excluded or distorted by male-authored theory—Kraus demonstrates a desire to “transcend” the gendered particularities of her body in a way that men have been able to. Paradoxically, Kraus writes autotheoretically to “transcend” herself; feminist scholars from Irigaray to Jones have written on how women lack access to transcending themselves and their gendered bodies in the ways that men do.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, recent work by Kraus and Nelson mark a distancing from psychoanalytic theory, with the writers opting for theoretical frameworks alternative to the psychoanalytic while at the same time gesturing toward and defamiliarizing psychoanalytic

¹⁷⁶ As an American vanguard press committed to publishing French post-structuralist theory, Semiotext(e) is known for publishing work on such “transgressive” subject matter as “schizo-culture” and “polysexualities.”

terms through their autotheoretical engagement with “the personal.” For Kraus, this move is tied to her staging of the gendered tensions in theory, using herself and Lotringer as key players in the performative debate. In Part I of *I Love Dick*, Kraus demonstrates a loyalty to her husband’s position, saying “If Sylvère and Chris were not so militantly opposed to psychoanalysis, they might’ve seen this as a turning point” (*Dick* 25). And yet, the letters that constitute the first part of *I Love Dick* are steeped in psychoanalytic influence, with Kraus’s identification and projection (60), and her describing her past self as “the anorexic open wound I used to be” (28). This could also be interpreted as Kraus conceding her past self as being indebted to frameworks of psychoanalysis through her (personal) identification with its terms. Kraus tells Dick that her practice is not so much psychoanalytic as it is performative (211), explaining that it is Dick who hails her work as “personal and private; my neurosis”—perhaps a meta reference to the context of Semiotext(e) and the phallogentric lenses which reads feminist work as such.

Troubling Continental Philosophy: Deleuze, Guattari, and Schizophrenia

But I’m using you to create a certain schizophrenic atmosphere, OR, love is schizophrenic, OR, I felt a schizophrenic trigger in our confluence of interests—who’s crazier than who? - Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*

Semiotext(e) has a history of intellectual indebtedness to madness as discourse and as practice. Semiotext(e)’s first conference held in 1975 at Columbia entitled “Schizo-Culture” jump-started an intellectual and cross-disciplinary trajectory that would ultimately include “madness” in their publishing mandate: “Publishing works of theory, fiction, madness, economics, satire, sexuality, science fiction, activism and confession, Semiotext(e)’s highly curated list has famously melded high and low forms of cultural expression into a nuanced and

polemical vision of the present” (Semiotext(e)). In Semiotext(e)’s 1978 “Schizoculture” issue, schizophrenia is lauded as an affirmation against oppressive structures, like the unconscious attempts at formation in institutions, the Oedipal structuring of the subject, and the Symbolic Order. In this way, schizophrenia is configured as a countercultural process and a kind of material-discursive shorthand that resists particular modes of power and formation. Over the course of the twentieth century, “schizophrenia” and the “schizophrenic” came to be seen as having literary and theoretical value: from Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, “schizo-culture” occupies a privileged positioning in experimental and leftist approaches to theory, literature, and the politics and aesthetics of representation. Yet the hysteric, as the historical manifestation of female-gendered madness, continues to be suppressed.

A feminist question that emerges is why, in a context where the schizophrenic is acknowledged as a thinking subject whose ontology engenders new knowledge, does the hysteric remain an object, rather than a subject, of theory? Why is it that the schizophrenic or the junky can occupy a privileged place in postmodern theory while the hysteric is either denigrated and marginalized or, when granted some discursive agency, confined to the realm of fiction?

In a 1980 interview, Irigaray articulates the gendered divide between the concomitant valorizing of schizophrenia and suppression of hysteria in certain “progressive,” namely educated and leftist, “circles”:

In certain circles, certain forms of madness, especially schizophrenia, are at the moment valorized ... But I have never heard the word ‘hysteria’ being used in a valorizing way in these progressive circles. Yet there is a revolutionary potential in hysteria. Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desires ... a movement of revolt and refusal ... It is because they want neither to see nor hear that movement that they so despise the hysteric. (Whitford 47-48)

Hysteria is one manifestation that women's disobedience to patriarchy takes. In contemporary theory, hysteria tends to be discussed through the frameworks of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis or Foucauldian biopolitics; from the 1970s onward, feminist theorists have troubled dominant conceptions of hysteria, with works like Bell's proffering of what she calls "posthysteria" as a performative positioning with agency. Writing through the example of "D'or" ("the posthysterical" version of Freud's case study subject Dora), Bell states: "A major radical transformation from the nineteenth-century hysteric to the twenty-first-century posthysterical is a transformation in discourse and, of course, in the agency embedded in that discourse" ("Posthysteria" 189). Bell describes the "female ejaculatory agency" of this posthysterical figure "D'or," turning to the example of female ejaculation—one that emerges autotheoretically, performatively, and physically from Bell's own practice as an artist and a philosopher—as merely one illustrative example of "the discursive transformation wrought by the posthysterical" (208).

Kraus is sure to remind us of the gendered biases at work within the discursive and social contexts of contemporary theory, literature, and art, and the fact that these kinds of criticisms are founded on fundamentally sexist ideologies. "Not all autobiography is held to the same standard," Kraus states. "Take, for example, the junkie memoir. Can anyone be more self-absorbed than an addict? And yet reviews of Jerry Stahl's terrific *Permanent Midnight* and Richard Hell's *Go Now* were all discussions of these men's books and not their characters. As the late Kathy Acker wrote about Cain's Book, "Alexander Trocchi...taught me that writers do not make up stories but attempt to find the truth"' (Kraus, "Private" 3). The problem of upholding

work by male addicts and schizophrenics as literature, theory, and art while disregarding the work by women that could be seen as a “female” equivalent is a political and discursive feminist problem that autotheorists like Kraus respond to.

Just as Kraus uses the practice of autotheory as a self-reflexive and performative mode to stage the gendered dramas of contemporary theory to establish the tension between men as intellectuals and women as non-intellectual, fundamentally sexual bodies, she extends this oversimplified binary divide to the motif of madness in theory, revealing the ways in which gendered ideologies continue to privilege certain forms of “madness” over others, particularly when it comes to how “madness” is configured and understood within French and American post-structuralist theory. Schizophrenia and its discursive inscription in contemporary theory as the “schizo” or “schizoid” position has historically been gendered as male, while hysteria or the “hysteric” position continues to be gendered as female. Within the conceptual world of *I Love Dick*, a world which Kraus performatively and meta-theoretically constitutes from an autotheoretical positioning, Kraus mimetically inverts this gendered order to destabilize these gendered ossifications, rendering the female hysteric as “schizo” and the male theorist as “hysteric” through a saturated intertextual practice of intimacy and identification.

Addressing Dick, Kraus describes herself and what she is doing in *I Love Dick* in terms of schizophrenia, describing the autotheoretical study that is *I Love Dick* as “this entire schizophrenic project that’d started when I met you” (235). The identification with the schizo position—codified as the male manifestation of madness—entrenches Kraus’s appropriation of the phallus to mimetic feminist ends over the course of *I Love Dick*. While Kraus unpacks the ontology of schizophrenia as constituted by and through post-structuralist theory, she intimates

that her identification with Dick is schizophrenic, and not hysteric, and in this way deepens her discursive identification with, and/or desire for, the male-authored discourse of post-structuralism. Instead of clearly aligning herself and her language with her feminist forbearers, Kraus appropriates the language and ideas of the contemporary theory that her husband upholds: her writing gestures to an alignment with Deleuzian theory, for example, as when Kraus describes her own understanding of desire as being constituted by a Deleuzoguattarian excess rather than a Freudian psychoanalytic conception of lack (*Dick* 239). In this way, we are reminded of how Kraus's work makes use of mimesis as a means of subverting phallogentric structures from within them, rather than critiquing them from far away.

As Kraus plays with the mimetic function in her role as "philosopher's wife," she signals her dissatisfaction with the situation of her life and moves to a space of hysterico-intellectual performance. The reader follows the character "Chris Kraus" as she attempts to find a space within which she can write herself, but it is always in relation to these men who fail to be adequate mirrors. She might say something intelligent, but she has no legitimate place from which to speak it: Lotringer and Dick, on the other hand, have the phallogentric histories of philosophical discourse at their disposal. They are the cultural theorists who laud male inscriptions of schizophrenia and other subcultural modes, while she remains the vaguely hysterical woman, "tripping out on layers of complexity in total silence" (*Dick* 21). While women disclosing their own lived experience in explicitly autobiographical ways has historically been deemed monstrous and narcissistic, Kraus argues that schizophrenic writing of the "alt.male canon" is itself "histrionic" (24), reiterating the larger points she has made about the male-

authored histories of literature and philosophy (and, in turn, reiterating the argument of feminist philosophers that precede her, including Irigaray).

Not only is the “alt.male canon” that includes the schizophrenic writings of figures like Burroughs, narcissistic—and I use “narcissism” here to describe a writing of the self rather than something to be pathologized (as it continues to be for women’s literature, criticism, and art)—it excludes writings by women that might properly be considered similarly “schizophrenic” or “mad.” Much of Kraus’s practice in *I Love Dick* involves her revealing the gendered blindspots of male-authored contemporary theory and the ways in which it continues to disregard—or otherwise abject—women’s theoretical contributions to notions of subversion, madness, and transgression. Kraus writes of how schizophrenia in “female writing” is less defined by clear boundaries as it is in the male writing known for its paradoxically cohering schizophrenic aesthetic, because for women, “the schizophrenic state remains a CONSTANT within the condition of being female in this culture” (“Continuity” 23). Because of this lack of clear boundaries dividing art from life, and because of how the “schizophrenic” state of existing as a “divided self” characterizes female experience in patriarchal culture, Kraus argues that women’s inscriptions of schizophrenia and other forms of madness are likely to be misread or, even, missed altogether (*Dick* 241). Recalling the argument Kraus made about the gendered dynamics in contemporary theory’s conception of “transgression”—and her feminist critique of the related “alt.male canon” (24) of “the Bataille Boys” (33)—Kraus makes the case that the ontological and phenomenological state of being a woman in patriarchal culture is one that is always already schizophrenic. This is, Kraus argues, reflected in the cultural output of female writing:

The schizophrenia of female writing is more pervasive. It doesn't stop. It's sense-surround. And because the schizophrenic state remains a CONSTANT within the condition of being female in this culture (as any woman writing hard enough soon comes to realize) female writing (re) presents a more generous nimble state of schizophrenia. It's devious, and also more inclusive. (Kraus, "Continuity" 23-24)

Kraus's argument reverberates with that made by Jones in *Irrational Modernism*, where Jones argues that the Baroness actually "lived" Dada while the male Dadaist artists kept their Dadaist art clearly separate from their "otherwise bourgeois lives" (5): the saddest irony, of course, is that the Baroness's embodying of Dadaist philosophy ends up precluding her from being recognized as a Dadaist artist at all. It is this kind of gendered injustice that Kraus unpacks in *I Love Dick*.

Consider for example, Piper's 1972-1975 performances as the *Mythic Being*, in which she performatively engages in "what (Audre) Lorde called 'acting like a man'" (Bowles 621). Piper describes her performance of becoming a racially ambiguous and exaggeratedly male persona in terms of schizophrenia (662). Both Piper and Kraus appropriate and mimetically enact countercultural masculinities to subversive feminist effects. In Kraus's case, it was 1970s French poststructuralist male theorists on the Left, and in Piper's case, black masculinity in the civil rights era of activism. Kraus's troubling of the politics and aesthetics of "schizophrenia" as advanced by male writers, artists, and activists through the twentieth century is linked to her more generalized troubling of Performance Studies and 1960s-70s "hippie" philosophy. Kraus approaches the practice of theorizing schizophrenia with a keen awareness of the failures of alternative approaches to psychiatry (such as those of Laing or Guattari) to be successfully implemented by actual institutions: she describes a purportedly "experimental" psychiatric institution in New Zealand, for example, as being "not so much an experiment as an outlet for misguided hippie altruism" (*Dick* 228). As she critiques the fraught politics at the heart of

1960s-70s countercultural mental health movements, she points out the ways in which women's experiences of "schizophrenia" and other forms of "excess" are continually precluded from these critical conversations and social experiments.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, as Kraus notes in her essay "Continuity," lived experience equals intensity equals schizophrenia (23). With this meaning in mind, Kraus's *I Love Dick* is an enactment of feminist schizophrenia: it foregrounds her lived experience as an onslaught of autotheoretical intensity. This definition of schizophrenia as excessive intensity bears resemblance to Deleuze's definition of hysteria, proffered in his reading of hysteria through the paintings of Francis Bacon: "The hysteric is at the same time someone who imposes his or her presence, but also someone for whom things and beings are present, *too* present, and who attributes to every thing and communicates to every being this excessive presence. There is therefore little difference between the hysteric, the 'hystericized,' and the 'hystericizer' (Deleuze, *Sensation* 50). According to this definition, male artists, philosophers, and writers from Bacon to Sartre to Flaubert constitute hysterics; as Deleuze insists, "Sartre meant nothing less when he called himself a hysteric, and spoke of Flaubert's hysteria" (*Sensation* 51). Kraus's enactment of hysteria in *I Love Dick*, like her "hystericizing" of men who exist in proximity to her (like Lotringer), is consistent with Deleuze's definition here. Autotheoretically and performatively, Kraus enacts hysteria through her "attributi(ng) to every thing" and "communicat(ing) to every being" her "excessive presence" as feminist autotheorist who brings everything back to her.

Through what I argue to be Kraus's performative, autotheoretical enactment of deterritorialization, the reader witnesses the deterritorializing process of hystericization take place over the course of *I Love Dick*. In a symbolic way, Kraus deterritorializes the male post-

structuralist through her lived hysteric position, implicating the man in her posthysterical and discursive coming-of-age as a writer and a theorist. Taking “Sylvère Lotringer” as a cipher and transmogrifying him into a hysteric like Chris is part of Kraus’s autotheoretical critique of theory and affirmation of a different way of theorizing—namely, one that encompasses female abjection, like hysteria, as authoring theory. Kraus uses strategies of performativity and theatricality to stage the gendered play of theory in postmodernism and enact an autotheoretical practice. One way that she does this is through her representation of the character of Lotringer as both her husband (on whom she is “parasitic¹⁷⁷”) and as an influential editor of post-structuralist French theory in late capitalist America. By extending the theoretical principles she takes issue with to their logical conclusions, Kraus reveals gender-based biases in the discrepancy between theory as rhetoric and theory as practice. Just as she does with the “transgression” of “The Bataille Boys” who glaringly exclude female-enacted “transgression” in or as theory, so too does Kraus expose the paradox of women’s exclusion from postmodern theory texts that appropriate them: as in the case of Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-woman,” for example or, perhaps less obviously, Deleuze and Guattari’s post-Freudian conception of desire as vital energy that overflows the bounds of the subject (in a context where women and femininity have, historically, been disregarded as intellectual because of the kinds of energetic and affective excesses valued in the Deleuzoguattarian system).

The spectre of the male hysteric as a literal and conceptual possibility haunts *I Love Dick*, specifically in Kraus’s representation of Lotringer’s character as it develops in the narrative.

While Kraus is read as the primary hysteric in *I Love Dick*, Kraus performs Sylvère as potentially

¹⁷⁷ In “Manic Impositions: The Parasitical Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle,” Anna Watkins Fisher proposes the metaphor of parasitism to understand Kraus’s work as feminist performance (223).

hysterical too. In “Part I: Scenes From A Marriage,” Kraus presents “Exhibit A: Chris and Sylvère’s First Letters” and “Exhibit B: Hysteria - Part I. Sylvère Flips Out” as evidence, or, what she calls “case studies” (Armitstead and Kraus) to back up the claims that she makes on the politics and aesthetics of theory and gender. By having Lotringer becoming-hysteric, Kraus enacts the tongue in cheek move of “deterritorializing” the male theorist, where deterritorialization is the process of “the decomposition of the socius on the surface of his own body without organs” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 35)—a “coming undone” (322). In this way, Kraus performatively enacts Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, eroding the stability of categorical difference between the husband in his role as theorist and the wife in her role as hysteric. By placing Sylvère in proximity to personal acts of disclosure, and by having him perform these more vulnerable actions himself in the context of the text, Kraus begins the performative process of conceptually deterritorializing the male theorist—a process whereby the theorist is figuratively “becoming-woman” or, more specifically here, becoming-hysteric.

Over the course of Part I, Chris discursively contaminates Sylvère with her hysteria as she writes to Dick, having the character “Sylvère” become hysterical and obsessed-with-Dick too. Notably, Kraus’s act is grounded in the particular gendered nuances of the field of contemporary theory; the work of Deleuze and Guattari makes room for such a “contamination” through the process of “becoming-woman” in and through women’s literature. Prior to the practice of writing letters to Dick, Sylvère had remained self-contained, distanced, and even “repressed” about his own autobiographical experiences, including his lived trauma as a Jewish Holocaust survivor that Kraus repeatedly references to throughout her work. Kraus acknowledges Sylvère’s latent obsession that he radically compartmentalizes and keeps separate

from his theoretical work, saying that “In all these years Sylvère’d never written, really, anything he loved or anything about the War (same thing)” (*Dick* 35). According to Kraus, this gap in Lotringer’s way of doing theory—keeping what he loves and what he has lived separate from what or how he theorizes—hinders him both from developing as a self-actualized human and a politically efficacious contemporary cultural theorist.

Through her “obsession” with Dick, Kraus influences Sylvère in such a way that he too becomes “obsessed” (*Dick* 37). Kraus explains how Lotringer has long been “trying to find some link between Artaud’s madness and the madness of WWII” (35), alluding to autotheory and the hysteric as potential keys to his theoretical conundrum. By having Lotringer become hysteric, Kraus stages a Deleuzoguattarian process of deterritorialization: she offers him the possibility of doing theory in a different way, of getting in touch with his own “personal” within the context of his own practice as a theorist and as a man living in the world. As Lotringer becomes swept up in the madness that Chris’s obsession with Dick represents, he expresses his hesitation: “‘Knowledge’ is supposed to be my concern,” he says, fearing that he and Chris may be going out of bounds from reason and what is proper to theory and epistemology (55).

Once Lotringer himself takes part in the hysteria that Kraus invokes, Kraus experiences an intimacy with him that had been fading up to that point: the man becoming-hysteric becomes the condition of possibility for true connection between husband and wife. The scene of deterritorialization is a scene of manic elation between Chris and Sylvère, who “laugh hysterically, sitting on the floor. Because Chris is a 90 wpm typist she and Sylvère maintained eye contact while he talks. Sylvère’s never been so prolific” (*Dick* 38). She names this moment of Sylvère’s becoming-hysteric as his moment of peak proficiency, implying that there is a direct

connection to engaging in the kinds of autotheoretical feminist practices that Kraus engages in, including her embodying of the hysteric toward theoretical ends, and being intellectually productive. Here, Chris occupies the role of theoretical influence for a moment through her engagement with feminist histories of hysteria and practices of the ‘personal’. This scene of deterritorialization is also a scene of the free-flow of the energies of excess and desire that Deleuze and Guattari theorize in opposition to psychoanalytic conceptions of desire as lack: Kraus describes the shift in the room and the coming together of Lotringer as man and Chris as woman in terms of energetic excess. In the space of deterritorialization, they embody these Deleuzian terms: the BwO—so central to Deleuze’s conception of hysteria (*Logic* 44)—the plane of consistency (the plane of desire), and the plane of immanence.

Sylvère’s association with hysteria is consummated when he engages in disclosures of the personal through the epistolary form of his letters to Dick. Through the practice of writing letters to Dick with Chris, Sylvère becomes “crazy” like Chris is “crazy” (*Dick* 44), admitting his own obsessions and vulnerability as experienced through this encounter. His engagement with practices of the “personal”—coded as female, and/or feminist—brings Sylvère closer to Chris. I propose that what Kraus is performing here is a defence of autotheory as a feminist mode. When the male theorist or male theory implicates himself in practices of the personal, of the hysterical, an elated encounter of intimacy and connection that crosses gender difference is made possible. Once again using irony to humorous effects, Kraus says “And now Sylvère and I are the weird girls,” (52) implicating her husband Sylvère in a process of “becoming woman.” In describing Lotringer as becoming hysterical or “crazy” as she does, Kraus draws from a Deleuzoguattarian

conception of subjectivity as something that is not settled while demonstrating the capacity for connection and understanding across sexual and/or gender difference.

When he becomes-hysteric through Kraus's appropriating practice, "Sylvère Lotringer" the character in Kraus's text approves of her way of writing and legitimizes it as constituting "a new genre": in contrast to the history of men suppressing women writers and artists from using their lives (which include those men) in their work—which we found earlier in Kraus's references to both Flaubert and Oldenburg—Lotringer not only does not censor this mode of feminist practice but facilitates it figuratively—in the world of the text, writing a letter to Dick that ties Kraus's work to legitimate art modes and critical theory. Of course, it is not so much the "actual" Sylvère writing or disclosing these things as it is Kraus staging Sylvère doing so, appropriating Sylvère's name and signing off letters as Sylvère that are, conceivably given its tone and the letters signed off by Chris that preceded these, written by Chris. As artist, Kraus constructs a scenario in which the power dynamics are levelled out between the heterosexual couple: in which the role of hysteric is not reserved solely for the woman. Kraus articulates this as the couple "finally inhabiting the same space at the same time," describing it as a kind of post-orgasm state of restful bliss (*Dick* 53). Kraus's project of self-reflexively deterritorializing Lotringer to the point of feminization, with the added meta-theoretical level of Lotringer's indebtedness to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, is part of her practice of establishing autotheory as a legitimate and epistemologically destabilizing mode of practicing theory.

Just as Kraus deterritorializes the theorists by turning them into feminized hysterics, so too does Kraus masculinize herself and transmute her hysteria into a kind of self-aware schizophrenia. Kraus demonstrates a deep awareness of the twentieth century male-authored

theory on schizophrenia, and enacts the negation of the self characteristic of schizophrenia as defined by R.D. Laing, the father of the anti-psychiatry movement and an influence on the theoretical terrain of Semiotext(e)'s *Schizo-Culture*. In another letter to Dick, Kraus cites Laing's work on schizophrenia and alludes to knowledge being autotheoretical in a way that, in Kraus's characteristically self-deprecatory way, preemptively excludes her from that knowledge:

I want to write to you about schizophrenia—"The schizophrenic believes that he is no-one," R.D. Laing)—even though I haven't got a wooden leg to stand on in relation to this subject, having never studied it or experienced it firsthand. But I'm using you to create a certain schizophrenic atmosphere, OR, love is schizophrenia, OR, I felt a schizophrenic trigger in our confluence of interests—who's crazier than who? Schizophrenia's a state that I've been drawn to like a faghag since age 16. (*Dick* 221)

Kraus speaks disingenuously (or ironically?), once again positioning herself as something other than an intellectual: instead of speaking about schizophrenia who has "studied it" or "experienced it" (*Dick* 221), Kraus states, she inscribes herself once again into the subject-positioning that she continually disavows—that of the "academic groupie" (153) or more specifically in this case, in campy and performatively appropriative (here, of queer culture) fashion, a figurative "faghag" to contemporary theory (221). This kind of ambivalence is at the heart of *I Love Dick* and its feminist themes, with the inner conflicts of the character Chris reflecting the external conflicts related to gender, philosophy, knowledge, and experience.

Kraus both becomes schizo and "becomes Dick": she appropriates Dick—the literal person and the symbol (phallus, but also male Theory)—as a feminist tactic, going so far as to tell him "I was becoming you" (254). On the one hand, this is an instance of Kraus performing the heterosexual woman as pathologically obsessive: a threat to be abject-ed. On the other hand,

this gets at Kraus's identification with men, particularly when it comes to the freedom that men have to transcend their gender—an identification here that can be understood in terms of this move from hysteric to schizo. Kraus does not describe her writing in feminist terms: in contrast to “women's writing,” for example, she describes her practice in Scene I of *I Love Dick* as a “DICK-tation” (38). Kraus takes the definition of schizophrenia advanced by the French post-structuralists and runs with it, realizing her writing might be understood in this way:

(When your head's exploding with ideas you have to find a reason. Therefore, scholarship and research are forms of schizophrenia. If reality's unbearable and you don't want to give up you have to understand the patterns. ‘Schizophrenia,’ Geza Roheim wrote, ‘is the magical psychosis.’ A search for proof. An orgy of coincidences). (*Dick* 226)

Kraus articulates her autotheoretical practice as emerging from a kind of schizophrenia, citing this desire to “understand the patterns” of one's experiences and to draw on “scholarship and research,” theory, and other intertexts to back up the “proof” that you gather from living (*Dick* 226). Given Kraus's methods and exegeses, autotheory's mode of intertextual identification and concatenation could be conceived of as properly schizophrenic (227), as could feminist autotheory's methods of performative becoming and transparency (231). Kraus refers to the “orgy of coincidences” here with a heavy-handed irony: how one theorizes and which objects of study they choose is a gendered problem. It is not so much a coincidence that these male French and American theorists choose to uphold schizo-figures (like Burroughs) as important, while continuing to ignore the female iterations of such ‘schizo’ impulses, like the hysteric or other female manifestations of chaos, intensity, and presence. Kraus uses words like “chance” and “coincidence” throughout her auto-theorizing of schizophrenia to ironic effect. In *Aliens and*

Anorexia, Kraus cites Deleuze, Guattari, and Burroughs on chance as “a means of trumping chaos, discovering a more comprehensive secret unity in the world” (51).

In acknowledging women’s exclusion, Kraus is also specifically calling out Dick and Sylvère who have the curatorial and editorial capacity, and cultural cache, to change the canon if they wanted to.¹⁷⁸ Relaying an anecdote from a dinner at Félix Guattari’s, Kraus explains to Dick how she proffers an answer to this gendered problem—she suggests a woman whose work she sees as being a good fit with the male Chaosophists: “‘What about Christa Woolf?’ I asked. (At that moment she was founding a neo-socialist party in Germany.) Finally the communist philosopher Negri graciously replied, ‘Christa Woolf is not an intellectual’” (*Dick* 227). The question of whether this anecdote—like any of Kraus’s anecdotes—actually happened aside, as a scene it illustrates the gendered presumptions at work that lead to women’s ongoing (*actual*) exclusion from male-authored and male-edited spheres of ‘experimental’ theory, at least at the time of Kraus’s writing. In a 1980 issue of *Semiotext(e)* edited by Lotringer and Christian Marazzi on “Italy: Autonomia: Post-Political Politics,” Negri’s work is included alongside “the main leaders and theorists of the Autonomist moment” (Lotringer, *Autonomia*); out of 46 entries, two are by women and one makes mention of feminism. The argument has been made that the Italian autonomists whom Lotringer is curating actually appropriated the work of unacknowledged women theorists and activists, including the Autonomist Silvia Federici, whose writing on labour, women’s work, and witchcraft continues to be read by feminist artists, writers, and scholars today. As if to demonstrate, at the level of form, Kraus’s nuanced allegiance to the Confessionalists that precede her, Negri’s statement triggers a Plathian moment of perception in

¹⁷⁸ “In Félix’s book *Chaosophy* there’s a great discussion on schizophrenia between him, Deleuze, and eight of France’s leading intellectuals. All of them are men. If we want reality to change then why not change it?” (227).

Kraus. She confronts a kind of existential nausea where the thingness of things becomes visible in a new way, like a description we might find in Sartre's *La Nausée* or Plath's *The Bell Jar*; and it is moments like these where Kraus's work as "intellectual vaudeville" comes through ("Continuity" 25). This moment also reads as Kraus incorporating the presence of women's labour and the violence of women's exclusion in a way that is, in Kraus's characteristically ambivalent way, both somber and somewhat satirical:

Sylvère would moderate a live discussion between Félix [Guattari] and Tony [Negri] and the German playwright Heiner Müller. They needed one more speaker. It seemed strange that people would be interested in any conversation between such a homogeneous crew: four straight white European men in their 50s, all divorced and now with childless younger women in their early 30s. Sometimes coincidence is just depressingly inevitable. (*Dick* 227)

Kraus repeats this word "coincidence" with the same irony: that these men are all the same is not so much a coincidence as it is a structural or systemic phenomenon. The patriarchy, Kraus seems to say, manifests as older heterosexual white men with much younger wives—even in so-called progressive spaces like experimental, radical, or alternative theory. That Kraus is complicit in this is not something she hides: she is one of these childless younger women, though having just turned forty she seems to mark a shift between herself and these younger women, another way in which she stakes out outsider status for herself. We also see here why Kraus's work might be experiencing a renaissance of interest among millennials, with the swelling of intersectional feminisms online and the tendency for more people to publicly challenge a given panel's or exhibition's demographic make-up. Once again, the exclusion or suppression of women's contributions to theory is not just a feminist problem but an aesthetic one too. When Lotringer calls for "dadanalysts" and "schizo-revolutionaries" in "Libido Unbound: The Politics of

Schizophrenia,” much is missed by not looking to women artists and theorists. Instead, the gap is reinforced by Lotringer: “We cannot change society without simultaneously unhinging the individual and all the power mechanisms that maintain his position (logic, dialectics, meaning)” (“Libido” 9). It takes Kraus to literalize this unhinging to performative effects in *I Love Dick* and to make explicit this remarkable lacuna.

Art Failure and the Question of Subjectivity

Kraus positions herself and her autotheoretical aesthetics as counter to what she refers to as “the Institution,” or the California art school where she teaches, and in her later works (*Lost Properties, Where Art Belongs*) she continues to address the social, political, aesthetic, cultural, and economic problems of MFA programs in the United States. In particular, Kraus attempts to dismantle the 1990s Los Angeles art world that she associates with the hegemonic ideology and style of “neocorporate neoconceptualism” (*Video* 17); the “blankness of contemporary art, which references the futility of gesture” (159); the modernist notions of autonomy and mediumistic self-reflexivity that Clement Greenberg and Rosalind Krauss upheld as “medium specificities” and which continues into the postmodern era as “meta” (128); “an *atmosphere* of meaning without the burden of any *particular* meaning” (98); and the primacy of “surface” over depth, symbolized in the conceit of video art (109).

Kraus opens her 1999 essay “Deep Chaos”—a discussion of the installation art of Los Angeles artists Christiana Glidden and Julie Becker—with the following anecdote:

At the art school where I teach, there’s a lot of talk about “multiple subjectivities.” “You will never succeed as an artist, your work’s too personal!” the smart pretty girl sneered at her dumbfounded classmate, and everyone agreed. While the word

“personal” is generally used as a pejorative, *multiple* subjectivities—the knack of being everywhere and therefore nowhere in particular—are seen to be a very good thing. Everybody knows it’s better to construct a narrative than tell a story, that it’s okay now to be a girl, so long as you don’t want to talk about it. (*Video* 79)

The concluding sentence of the passage above gets at both the problems of a supposedly “post-feminist” present and the belief that it is better to “construct a narrative” than it is to “tell a story” from personal experience (*Video* 79). A fashionable notion in postmodern theory, “multiple subjectivities” could also point to the fragmented “I” that French post-structuralist theory espouses. That Kraus’s essay in defence of feminist art practices that draw from real life is entitled “Deep Chaos” is noteworthy: in *I Love Dick*, Kraus turns to Guattari’s *Chaosophy* (edited by Lotringer) as exemplifying the ways in which postmodern theory continues to be dominated by men; she makes reference to “the spokesmen of the chaos generation,” including Norman Mailer and William Vollman (208). Kraus reveals how women have been doubly suppressed through their de facto association with chaos and embodiment and their simultaneous exclusion from “chaos” as it is revered in a particular strain of post-structuralist theory.

Kraus metonymically uses the practice of diary writing, coded as female, to theorize the position and the potentiality in feminist practices of “the personal” more generally. Kraus repeatedly refers to the diary-writing course that she teaches at an art school: she describes the women (or rather, *the girls*) who take the course as comprising a demographic that is simultaneously bright and abject, fated to fail (*Video* 122). Self-deprecatorily, Kraus portrays the kinds of women who insist on using the materials of their life in their artwork as tortured, misunderstood, and destined for “failure” in the given art and academic institutions: in a neoliberal, patriarchal, capitalistic University, the woman writer who writes through her own self

and life is, in Kraus's view, doomed to fail. Given what the reader knows about Kraus and her autotheoretical way of working, Kraus's words can be taken with a grain of salt: while there is truth to what she is saying, her point about failure is intended not so much literally as it is a way of underlining the issues that women (and gender non-conforming, trans, genderfluid, and genderqueer) writers and artists will face when they choose to use their own lives and bodies in their work. Once again, Kraus uses the strategy of establishing certain character types, even using exaggeration and stereotyping to enhance the humour of her work, to reveal the power dynamics that exist in spaces where theory is lauded.

Similar to the symbolic dramas of theory and gender that Kraus stages in *I Love Dick*, Kraus uses particular character types to stand for different sides of postmodern theoretical debates. The "smart pretty girl," who will navigate the institutions with ease and attain a certain kind of "success," disparages practices coded as female on her way to attaining this success: the "smart pretty girl" here successfully navigates the patriarchy, rejecting that which is discursively "female" in order to do so. On the other hand, the girls who value and engage in practices of "the personal," are portrayed as countercultural, intuitive, and shrouded in "failure." Kraus positions herself and the other "diary writers"—female students whose sensibilities and sensitivities are portrayed as at odds with "the Institution" (of California art school, CalArts, MFA programs, but also patriarchy, white supremacy)—as a counter to the discourse of "multiple subjectivities" and its implied complicity in the patriarchal hegemonic order of things. If "the personal" and the particular subjectivity is connected to female and/or feminist practice—and "generally used as a pejorative" in the postmodern context—it is the less committal "multiple subjectivities" that postmodernism privileges. She articulates the problematic of "the personal" as a specific

speaking self versus “multiple subjectivities” in the latter as it manifests in an avoidance of meaning and personal responsibility. These “multiple subjectivities” are resonant with the hegemony of the “schizo” position in postmodern theory particularly as it relates to the hysteric. The “multiple subjectivities” and “the knack of being everywhere and therefore nowhere in particular” (Kraus, *Video* 79) upheld by postmodern theory and the contemporary art world (in Los Angeles during the 1990s when Kraus was writing the text), stand in contrast to Kraus’s desired mode of writing: the particular and localized practice of autotheory.

In “Stick to the Facts,” Kraus discusses how MFA students in the process of professionalizing their practices have been “bullied into legitimizing their work within some form of discourse. This discourse (like life itself) is, 80 percent of the time, disingenuous, and entails attaching oneself to those who at that moment exercise power” (132). In order to be properly understood as contemporary artists, artists must engage with theory—or what Kraus refers to more generally here as specialized “discourse”: theory that is, at the time of their MFA studies, fashionable and powerful. Kraus is attached to this discourse through her relationships with men: she is an “Academic Wife” (145) to Lotringer who is a cultural critic embraced by the New York arts scene and she pines after another cultural critic “Dick.” Kraus stages these attachments to the influential discourse—as lived personal relationships and acquaintances—whether through anecdotes about Kosuth’s birthday, studying with Schechner, or having dinner at Guattari’s house. Kraus’s jokes rely on knowledge of these discourses in order to be understood; at least some knowledge of this context and the stakes and claims of the theorists being cited is required to get the joke. Arguably, Kraus’s *I Love Dick* is not critiquing post-structuralist theory *per se* as much as it is critiquing and poking fun at the fetishization of theory as “The

Law” (Stuhr-Rommereim and Kraus) and the ways it manifests in culture to the exclusion of women. To understand Kraus’s winking interpellation of the social grouping she names “The Bataille Boys,” you have to have some recognition of the theoretical positionings and how theorists have framed themselves and their thinking socially and institutionally.

Similarly, in Iranian-Canadian artist Sona Safaei-Sooreh’s *V+I*, a series of commercially-produced mugs feature the names of theorists, art critics, and artists as corporate logos: Lacan, Barthes, Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard, Michael Asher, Andrea Fraser, Boris Groys, Nicholas Bourriaud, Pierre Bourdieu, and John Guillory. In addition to the larger theme of theorists as branding and the “buying in” of artists and students to particular theoretical camps, there are meta nods to Safaei-Sooreh’s particular choices: the fashionability of Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* in art and academia at the time of the artist’s MFA studies, for example; or John Guillory’s work on cultural capital and canon formation in relation to the theme in Safaei-Sooreh’s work that theorists take on particular value in cultural capital that is comparable to financial capital. At the level of content and form, Safaei-Sooreh’s mugs performs the aesthetic of “neocorporate neoconceptualism” that Kraus critiques at length in *Video Green*, her take on MFA programs and the contemporary art scene in late capitalist Los Angeles at the dawn of the twenty-first century: Safaei-Sooreh literalizes the neocorporate neoconceptual thrust by staging the commodification of intellectualism and the process by which theorists become brands.

A conceit at the heart of *I Love Dick* and *Aliens and Anorexia* is Kraus’s status as a failed filmmaker who is doomed not to succeed in the art world and academia. And yet Kraus’s writing now has a strong fanbase, which Fiona Duncan terms “the cult of Kraus,” she teaches at the European Graduate School, and her films were displayed in a monographic exhibition in Los

Angeles in 2018. Is the potency of *I Love Dick* lessened when the author herself attains the kind of success she critiqued in her male counterparts: being invited to speak at prestigious literary, art, and academic spaces, and being paid for cultural work? Even as Kraus possesses more power and cultural capital today than she did when she wrote *I Love Dick*, her exposing of imbalanced power dynamics in leftist spaces is a complicated contribution to theory that warrants study by scholars of theory and literature.

Conclusion

Despite it being over twenty years old, and despite the speed with which “feminism” as a movement can move past the waves that precede, there is something about *I Love Dick* that continues to resonate with feminist readers today. Kraus’s experimentation, which pushes up against the limits of what is proper both to the patriarchy and to feminism, stands as an example of the potency of artistic and comedic spaces for testing the limits of what is possible, desirable, or effective. Rather than take Kraus’s actions in the book literally, we might observe her use of mimetic instantiation and performativity within the larger conceptual context of her writing. Writing from the position of a failed artist who is married to a man wielding significant editorial power in shaping the discourse of contemporary theory in America—theory which, in turn, shapes understandings of art—Kraus subverts the systems that suppress her from within. Through explicit self-awareness, reflexive relaying of anecdotes, and informed disclosure, Kraus is unfaithful in her assumption of the role of philosopher’s wife, engaging in an extended performance around the figure of “Dick” as part of her “transformation toward self-definition” apart from her husband and, it follows, the patriarchy.

CHAPTER 3

The Reparative Practice of Queer Feminist Autotheory:

Performing Citationality and Intertextual Intimacy in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*

Citation is feminist memory.

- Sara Ahmed, tweeted by Bhanu Kapil

What can I do about all the years I defined myself as a feminist? I have no other alternative but to revise my classics, to subject those theories to the shock that was provoked in me by the practice of taking testosterone. To accept the fact that the change happening in me is the metamorphosis of an era.

- Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie*

In this chapter, I approach American writer Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015) through frameworks of performativity and affect theory, considering the aesthetics and politics of citationality as a reparative practice of reading and writing theory. Attuned to its performative use of citation, I read *The Argonauts* as the site at which two lineages of queer theory converge: a gay male authored post-structuralist lineage represented by Roland Barthes and a queer feminist affect lineage represented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹ Integral to my reading of *The Argonauts* as a performative queer feminist text are the notions of citationality and citation; reading the text as queer feminist mimesis, I consider the ways in which the conceit of a discourse of love and the act of writing with, to, or for an other present aesthetic and ethical tensions within autotheory as feminist practice. With this return to mimesis, I draw once again on Luce Irigaray's notion of the mimetic function (Irigaray, *This Sex* 76) to understand the strategic and, as discussed in Chapter 2, performative ways in which women and the gender non-conforming access the "master discourse" (149) of philosophy and theory in order to transform these discursive

¹ In so doing, I also theorize antecedents of autotheory within the larger histories of queer theory.

structures from within. Focusing on the relationship between Nelson and her partner, transgender American artist Harry Dodge, and the ways in which Nelson interpellates Harry within the citational structure of *The Argonauts*, I reflect on the ethics of autotheory as a site of identification, intimacy, and inter-subjectivity in the context of queer feminist cultural production in the 2010s. I draw on Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama* (2012) as a text that similarly thinks through the problem of writing about others with whom the writing "I" is involved, as a way of better understanding Nelson's moves in *The Argonauts* in the larger context of queer feminist autotheoretical practices.

I attend to the ways, through citation, that autotheory engages with others alongside the *autos* or self. As an alternative to singular conceptions of authorship, I look to the role collaboration plays in recent queer feminist autotheoretical texts that employ performative modes of citation. Specifically, I look at the visual art works of Allyson Mitchell, Deirdre Logue, and Cauleen Smith to flesh out my reading of citationality as a performative feminist strategy driven by an intersectional politics of strengthening community and solidarity networks through the oscillation between the "auto," the "theoretical," and the "other." I conclude my discussion on *The Argonauts* with a consideration of how Nelson queers the hegemonic discourses of queer theory in the last few decades through autotheoretical strategies of intertextual identification with Susan Fraiman's figure of the sodomitical mother (69). Reading *The Argonauts* through Sedgwickian frameworks of reparative reading provides insight into the ways in which intertextual identification and intertextual intimacy engender experimental modes of theorizing in the present. Alongside issues of citationality, this chapter returns to questions of textual pleasure, the rhetoric of honesty, and the possibility of feminist community and communion.

Maggie Nelson as Autotheorist

Nelson's *The Argonauts* is a work of autotheory that brings feminism into conversation with queer theory, generating a text that is responsive to philosophical and theoretical questions relating to queerness and normativity, relationships and family structures, feminism and motherhood, and language. Autotheory, the nascent term that I take to describe a particularly performative mode of post-1960s feminist practices, becomes a means to unpacking how, in what ways, and to what effects the personal is political given the concerns of contemporary feminism and queer theory. The history of feminist art, writing, and scholarship has often turned to the self in order to engage with theory. And yet the extent to which these impulses overlap, and the inclusion of other generic impulses like fictionalization in the merging of "theory" and "the self" eludes any simple summation, as do the ways in which writers and artists working in this contemporary mode of "autotheory" use intertexts and citations in performative ways.

Like other works of autotheory, Nelson's writing has been described as exceeding existing categories of genre and form, and she upholds the work of other writers who work in such cross-genre modes; Nelson particularly reveres the work of Anne Carson, whom she describes as having a "resistance to categories" in her approach to writing: "This resistance to categories has in fact come to characterize some of the most exciting work by women poets in recent years, even when it's not as 'fuck you' in sentiment. I'm thinking, for example, of Anne Carson's spectacular melding of literary criticism, scholarship, poetry, and prose, which extends a 'not-caring' attitude out to the categories of 'poet' or 'poetry' themselves" (*Abstractions* 215). Nelson understands the generativity of women's poetry practices that move across literary theory

and criticism, academic scholarship, and prose for the ways those disciplines can augment the poetic. As art historian, Nelson has also reversed the exploration, writing about poetry practices in relation to painting, as in *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (2007). The desire to write in ways that better reflect the transdisciplinarity of critical thinking and practice today continues to develop among art writers, critics, curators, and artists, and Nelson's practice is demonstrative of this trend.

As someone whose work has come to largely shape what is now being called autotheory, it is no coincidence that Nelson herself is skilled at working across genres. An experimental poet, essayist, biographer, art critic, and art and literary historian, Nelson writes adeptly across genre, discipline, and form. Nelson began as a poet, but soon became known for her works that bridge the genres of "true crime" and autobiography; *Jane: A Murder* (2005) tells the story of Nelson's aunt's murder in 1969, and the corresponding *The Red Parts: A Memoir* (2007)² is a postmodern lyrical narrative which follows Nelson and her family through the process of attending the trials of Nelson's aunt's murderer. Approaching these works as a poet, Nelson has written works that are more recognizable as poetry, including *Something Bright, Then Holes* (2007), *Shiner* (2001), and *Bluets* (2009). Nelson has also made insightful contributions to the fields of modern and contemporary art history and art historiography. In *Women, The New York School, and Other True Abstractions*, Nelson takes up the longstanding paradoxical relation between women and abstraction, where women are both "the antithesis to abstraction or transcendence" and that which is fundamentally unintelligible within the representational schemas of patriarchy (10). Bringing a feminist perspective to bear on the work of three generations of poets and painters,

² *The Red Parts* was republished by Graywolf Press as *The Red Parts: Autobiography of a Trial* in 2016.

Nelson demonstrates the more theoretically capacious ways that feminist frameworks can be applied to questions related to the avant-garde and aesthetic theory.

For example, Nelson unpacks the problematics of historically demarcating the death of the avant-garde and the death of the public intellectual at a time when greater diversification was taking place within the avant-garde: namely, during the 1960s, with the civil rights movements and feminist movements (xxiii). She observes this as an intersectional feminist problem, one that resonates with other gendered and racialized art historical issues that she will take up a few years later in *The Art of Cruelty* (2011). Nelson cites poet Rachel DuPlessis's reading strategy as shaping her own feminist practice in art historical texts like *True Abstractions*:

In reading, thinking, and writing about women associated with the New York School, I have tried to avoid looking for or claiming any “specificities of their artistic productions.” Instead I have tried to enact a certain kind of feminist reception—one which DuPlessis has described as “a reading strategy that puts no limits on the nature of the work, is agnostic as to whether it conforms to this or that version of womanhood, nor even cares whether the writer can be assimilated to (available, contemporaneous, consistent, or currently approved) feminist positions” (*Scene* 189). Such a strategy doesn't look for the return of the repressed as much as it aims to pay close attention to art made by women. (*Abstractions* 211)

Her transdisciplinary approach demonstrates how one might bridge more traditional feminist impulses, such as writing women into the canon, with broader theoretical concerns, such as theorizing how to define the avant-garde. In *The Art of Cruelty*, Nelson deconstructs the twentieth century vanguard's valuation of extremism, cruelty, and shock-and-awe in favour of something more attuned to the nuances and problematics of violence on a philosophical level. Calling for a post-avant-garde aesthetics resonant with a feminist impulse, Nelson states that:

The most interesting of this work—past, present, or future—is or will be that which dismantles, boycotts, ignores, destroys, takes liberties with, or at least

pokes fun at the avant-garde's long commitment to the idea that the shocks produced by cruelty and violence—be it in art or in political action—might deliver us, through some never-proven miracle, to a more sensitive, perceptive, insightful, enlivened, collaborative, and just way of inhabiting the earth, and of relating to our fellow human beings. For as Arendt puts it succinctly in *On Violence*, “The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world.” (*Cruelty* 265)

Rather than accepting the avant-garde's long-held presumptions that violence and truth, or cruelty and rigour, are intricately connected, Nelson asks whose interests are served from this “age of extremity,” which focuses on knocking ourselves out rather than tuning in (*Cruelty* 44)? Rejecting the presumed cathartic cruelties of male modernist artists (11), Nelson opts instead for Barthes's aspiration “to live according to nuance” (14).

Having previously held the post of Creative Writing Chair at the largely studio-focused California Institute of the Arts and recently moving to the University of Southern California for the position of Professor of English, Nelson stands as an example of the contemporary feminist writer who moves between the roles of practitioner and theorist or scholar with ease; this is a common characteristic of others working autotheoretically, including Kraus, Rankine, and Doyle. Autotheory has emerged in the contemporary as a way of describing those practices that exceed the conventional categories of academia and arts practices: auto-theoretical practices are often ones that criss-cross registers and frameworks; that press up against the limits of generic legibility; and that integrate theory and practice, life and art, in fresh and often direct ways.

Autotheory as Queer Feminist Practice: Converging Queer Theory's Lineages

Such a direct integration of life and art, of theory and practice, can be found in Nelson's *The Argonauts*, where Nelson contextualizes the autobiographical narrative of her relationship

with Dodge within an intertextual terrain of theory citations. On first glance, *The Argonauts* appears to be a kind of memoir populated by citations of philosophers, theorists, and writers like Irigaray, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Preciado and Carson in the margins of the page. In this way, Nelson draws attention to the text as autotheoretical. Sourced from literature, theory, and art, the citations are chosen by Nelson as part of her autotheoretical practice of theorizing her own lived material—her life—through these texts and, in the process, revealing the personal to be theoretical, social, ethical, aesthetic, and political. This move takes the second wave feminism precept of “the personal is political” and extends it to a post-postmodern or meta-modern context: one in which sincerity takes on new charge and recourse to binary oppositions like ironic/sincere becomes difficult.

As one reads more closely, it becomes clear that *The Argonauts* is a discursive meeting space for at least two lineages of queer theory—lineages which are positioned alongside Nelson’s own queer life. The first lineage is represented by Roland Barthes, a gay male French theorist who serves as a hinge between structuralism/semiotics and post-structuralism and whose queerness, while significant to his work in contemporary theory, remains latent in his texts. The second lineage is that of Sedgwick, a queer feminist affect theorist who identifies as a fat woman and a gay man (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 256). Nelson performatively weaves these lineages together within the poetry tradition of the New York School and Wittgensteinian language games to write a work of autotheory that constitutes, through its citations, a feminist canon that spans the literary, the artistic, and the philosophical. Nelson revisits Barthes’s and Sedgwick’s theory through the perspective of her autobiographical experiences and theoretical investigations as a writer and a scholar, approaching their work as intertextual kin. In doing so, Nelson probes the

feasibility of a normative/transgressive binary for queer theory³ in the contemporary moment, asking what it looks like to engage in queer family-making, and what a maternal erotics that evades Freud might mean. As textual conditions of possibility for more explicitly autotheoretical works like this, Barthes's and Sedgwick's frameworks are catalysts for *The Argonauts*.

In addition to the autotheoretical reverberations of Barthes's texts, his queerness,⁴ his performative integration of philosophy and autobiography, and his lifelong experience with chronic illness⁵ position him as an important precursor to what I am theorizing here as a post-1960s feminist practice of autotheory. Barthes's formative contributions to the development of both structuralism and post-structuralism—two key movements in Western twentieth century thought—exemplify his capacities as a writer and as a literary theorist who can move swiftly between modes. Jonathan Culler notes that, “At the height of his fame as a Structuralist, Barthes published two books which greatly altered his reputation: *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973), whose speculations on reading and pleasure made clear the ethical cast of his thought, and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975), whose graceful theorization of ordinary experience and whose seductively self-deprecatory tone gave him a new status as a writer” (20). In the early to mid 1970s, in the wake of the revolutionary changes brought on by 1968 in France and 1969 in America, Barthes was enlivened by an experimental impulse that saw him shift from his structuralist, semiological output to a less comprehensible (in the eyes of his contemporaries in

³ As a subfield of contemporary theory, queer theory has advanced from niche status to an established academic field with its own scholarly journals and Departments.

⁴ Roland Barthes's queerness has been a subject of scholarly work; Nicholas de Villier's *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* takes up the queerness of Barthes's work and persona through the framework of “opacity” rather than of the closet, which opens up generative possibilities for my own reading which is attuned to Barthes's work as performative and autobiographical (de Villier).

⁵ Culler writes of Barthes's recurrent, life-long struggle with tuberculosis (18, 22).

the academy) mode of theorizing now known as post-structuralist. These post-structuralist works, such as *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, might also be read as autotheoretical in that the autobiographical becomes a performative way for Barthes to practice theory.

Describing Barthes's varied output as an esteemed literary critic and a "champion of the avant-garde," Culler writes that:

Many of Barthes's works are idiosyncratic, falling outside established genres: *L'Empire des signes* combines touristic commentary on Japan with a reflection on signs in everyday life and their ethical implications; *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is a strangely detached account of the life and works of one "Roland Barthes" and evades the conventions of autobiography; *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* is specimens and formulae of lovers' talk rather than a study of love; and *La Chambre claire* must be called meditations on favourite photographs rather than an analysis of the art of photography. (Culler 11)

Here, Culler posits a conflict between the properly demanding work of "analysis" and "study," on the one hand, and the more experimental and auto-oriented engagements on the other: an opposition that, at the time of Culler's writing (autotheory as a term not being in use then), seems irreconcilable. Culler's assumption in the passage above seems to be that Barthes's *La Chambre claire* cannot be both a properly scholarly "analysis of the art of photographs" and an anecdotal musing on Barthes's own "favourite photographs" (11). For a literary scholar like Culler, the rigour of analysis, even in the post-structural and postmodern context of the early 1980s within which Culler is writing, continues to be at odds with the perceived softness of the auto, even if that auto is performative, as it is in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. While Culler praises the later works of Barthes's for championing a generic outsider-ness within the hegemonic institutions of French literary theory and criticism, there remains a perception on Culler's part of

the incommensurability of the autobiographical and the analytical that feminist autotheory as a practice challenges.

We can better understand Barthes's unconventional and contested approach to theory when we consider these issues in relation to feminist autotheory. Culler acknowledges the ways Barthes's unique approach to writing theory makes his work vulnerable to misunderstandings, yet he does not proffer a solution to this problem other than his own generous reading of Barthes's oeuvre: "Barthes's admirers repeatedly court the risk of trivializing his works by making them *the expressions of a desire rather than arguments to be pondered, developed, or contested*; and Barthes himself encourages this by mocking his past procedures" (14, my emphasis). Culler seems to lack a conceptual schema that can adequately conceive of a writing practice that is both "the expressions of a desire" and "arguments to be pondered, developed, or contested" (14): that is to say, a practice that is autotheoretical in its deliberate incorporating of personal experiences of desire into theoretical modes of argumentation. Later in his discussion, Culler acknowledges the text's value as theory, stating that "*Le Plaisir du texte*, despite its repeated reference to corporeal pleasure, is also a theoretical work" (97-98), though his thinking remains one of binary opposition (between bodily pleasure and theory) rather than integration.

Feminist theory and art practice, on the other hand, are plump spaces of possibility for integrating embodied conceptions of pleasure and desire into a theoretical practice (and vice versa). In the mid-1980s, Sedgwick emerges as a force in literary theory and criticism as well as in the burgeoning field of queer theory; works like *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) and, shortly after, the *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) mark her transition from more conventional scholarship of nineteenth century literature, to modes of

theorizing homosexuality and homosociality within and around literary discourses and texts. From the early 1990s through to the 2000s, Sedgwick's writings will come to shape the subfield known as queer feminist affect theory, with works like *Tendencies* (1993), *Fat Art/Thin Art* (1994), and *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003) deftly criss-crossing the registers between erotic and cognitive, and destabilizing existing conceptions of "queerness" while at the same time grounding her writings in the everyday politics of LGTQ+ lives. She is known for emphasizing the role that pleasure plays in theoretical writing, and an autotheoretical impulse is present in works like *Tendencies*. Sedgwick consistently writes theory from the first person in ways that are performative, lyrical, politically engaged, aesthetically complicated, multi-sensorial, and dripping in affect. Her writing challenges the irreconcilability between the theorist's professed desires and the demands of critical argumentation, and extends Barthes's ideas of textual pleasure to newly queered ends.

Barthes opens his 1975 "biographical novel" (Culler 17) with an epigraph that states, "It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel" (Barthes, *Barthes* 1). In doing so, Barthes frames the text and the photographic images that follow as novelistic. It is not clear whether this means the work is fictionalized (as opposed to "truly" autobiographical), or whether it is a performative straddling of the fictional and the factual. Emphasizing speech and orality aligns the work with the performative (or the theatrical), as the reader is told to imagine the words that follow (in a book entitled *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*) as coming from the mouth of a constructed character (like the reader might do when they read a play). In this way, it resembles Nelson's writing *The Argonauts* from the first person as "Maggie Nelson," or Chris Kraus's creation of the meta-character "Chris Kraus" in *I Love Dick*.

Music and performance played a formative role in Barthes's development; he played piano through adolescence and, while studying languages in University, founded a drama group (Culler 18), and so was attuned to artistic and performance-based practices. Following the publication of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, Barthes was welcomed by the College de France in 1976: though as Culler puts it, "Barthes refused to be professorial and immediately published *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977)" (21), a work which elevated the language of lovers—vernacular and private as it was—to the status of theory. "Nothing could have been more foreign to the concerns of the literary and theoretical avant-garde," Culler argues, "but this unorthodox work proved extremely popular and helped make Barthes much more than an academic figure" (21). *A Lover's Discourse* solidified Barthes's place as a public intellectual and popular writer alongside his status as a scholar and a theorist. Now, he could be seen as a writer in the more artistic sense of the term—or, to use the terms I'm employing in this dissertation, a (creative) practitioner as well as a theorist.⁶

Reparative Reading and the Affects of Autotheory

Barthes's and Sedgwick's works are formative in foregrounding pleasure and desire—both as discourses and as personal-affective experiences—in the space of theory. Art historian Rosalind Krauss writes that, "Barthes underscored the implications of the death of the author: if the unity of the work could no longer be secured by its point of origin, it must be sought in the contrapuntal pleasures of its reception—in a burgeoning nexus that Barthes now baptized

⁶ I say this, even as I am aware that autotheory as feminist practice challenges my very ability to parse "theory" from "practice," or theorist from practitioner, in such a way.

‘text’” (*Perpetual* 258). The pleasures of the text is a post-structuralist question as well as a queer one, a matter latent in Barthes’s work and emerging more explicitly in Sedgwick’s.

We might better understand the “epistemological practice” Nelson undertakes in *The Argonauts* if we consider it in relation to Sedgwick’s notion of reparative reading practices which she defines against what she calls “paranoid practices,” or the “widespread critical habits” that are “perhaps now nearly synonymous with criticism itself” (Sedgwick, *Touching* 124). Writing in “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” Sedgwick presents paranoid reading and reparative reading as two different but non-oppositional modes of engaging texts through “reading” and theorizing. Sedgwick’s coining of “paranoid reading” is a reference to what French philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” a mode of critique Ricoeur uses to describe theory of “the position of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their intellectual offspring” (Sedgwick, *Touching* 124-125). Sedgwick’s choice of “paranoid” as a refining of Ricoeur’s “suspicion” comes in part from the “concomitant privileging of the concept of paranoia” in the aforementioned work of Freud (125).

For Sedgwick, reparative reading emerges in response to what she understands to be the limits of paranoid reading, especially in the context of queer theory and ongoing attempts by queer theorists to hone politically efficacious “antihomophobic theory” in a discursive context where the “phobic dynamics” of paranoia continue to predominate critique (*Touching* 126-127). Sedgwick maintains that the “hermeneutics of suspicion” have “...made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller” (124). She perceives limitations that come with practicing criticism solely through a paranoid positioning (such as that

of deconstruction), arguing that paranoid reading should not be the only epistemological mode. By introducing the reparative as an alternative mode of epistemological practice—one that is, in Sedgwick's view, particularly resonant for queers—Sedgwick offers a response to her own theoretical question: "How are we to understand paranoia in such a way as to situate it as one kind of epistemological practice among other, alternative ones" (*Touching* 128). She turns to Melanie Klein and Silvan Tomkins as theoretical guideposts to flesh out this theory of reparative reading as epistemological practice. Sedgwick encourages her readers to see paranoid reading not as synonymous with "critical theoretical inquiry" altogether but, instead, as "one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds" (126); vibrating along this dialectic between the paranoid and the reparative, Sedgwick reveals to readers the simple truth that paranoid reading is merely one way of practicing theory and criticism among others.

The reparative for Sedgwick involves the question of pleasure. Sedgwick defines "the reparative motive of seeking pleasure" (*Touching* 138), and she perceives the movement toward the reparative as a shift in drive from focusing on "strategies for forestalling pain" to a practice of "a sustained seeking of pleasure" (137). The shift to the reparative can be seen as a shift in intentionality and teleology: instead of the "negative" strategy of "forestalling pain"--and having this as one's "paranoid" end goal--the reparative practice is driven by the "positive" strategy of aiming for or "seeking" out the sensorial, possibly relational, experience of "pleasure," and in this way (137).

I have approached feminist autotheory in its different manifestations—whether it is Piper's conceptual art and body art in the 1970s or Kraus's experimental art writing in the 1990s—as a practice that engages hegemonic modes of theory, criticism, and other discourses through a

positioning grounded as much in one's self, subjectivity, or embodiment as in the theory and philosophy being processed. For Piper, this means engaging with the writings of Kant; for Kraus, this means engaging with French post-structuralism and other proximal modes of contemporary theory and criticism, such as Performance Studies. For Sedgwick, this means engaging with the lineage of theory encompassed in Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" and its paranoid modes of critique. Over the course of her essay on paranoid reading and reparative reading, Sedgwick in many ways defines the reparative as what it is not—namely, paranoid—as she demonstrates, through anecdotes, what a move toward the reparative might mean.

If the paranoid is "a strong affect theory" (Sedgwick, *Touching* 130)—meaning "wide-ranging and reductive" (145)—then the reparative might be thought of as a weak theory; if the paranoid is "reflexive and mimetic" (130), and primarily invested in establishing "symmetrical epistemologies" (131), then the reparative is more multiple in its directionality, less invested in its own suspicious mode of "knowing," less "defensive" (147), less indiscriminately committed to "exposure" as its primary theoretical drive, and more open to yet-unknown possibilities the epistemological-affective freedom of not knowing. In place of the reflexive, anticipatory orientation of paranoia, the reparative involves a movement toward unknowing or not knowing: as Sedgwick writes, "...to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise" (*Touching* 146). In *Reading from Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus*, Jonathan A. Allan elaborates on Sedgwick's theory of reparative reading in terms of its affective interest in this possibility of "surprise" or the as of yet-unknown: on Sedgwick's reparative he

writes, “There is something disconcerting about a theoretical position that surrenders the paranoid search for meaning and knowledge in favour of pleasurable surprises” (8). Eschewing the paranoid position, with its hyper-vigilance (130) and its politically stultifying “faith in exposure” (130)—a faith which, Sedgwick convincingly reasons, is misguided in the current social and political context (140)—the reparative reader seeks “new environments of sensation for the objects they study by displacing critical attachments once forced by correction, rejection, and anger with those crafted by affection, gratitude, solidarity, and love” (Allan 8).

Extending this aesthetics of affection and solidarity, queer theorist Heather Love says she finds Sedgwick’s reparative mode “enabling,” going on to describe the ways in which this translates into her life as a queer woman and her understanding of how one can practice theory in ways that make “intellectual and affective space for others” (“Truth” 235). She emphasizes that this mode of theorizing is one that “grant(s) permission” for different ways of reading, feeling, and being in the world:

Insofar as Sedgwick helped to launch queer literary studies, she played a significant role in allowing me to have a job that I could tolerate in academia, or even in a profession at all; along with a handful of others, she helped to make it possible for me to live a queer life that I could never have imagined. In addition to this most direct sense in which I have been enabled, there is also the fact that Sedgwick in her work explicitly sought to clear intellectual and affective space for others—to grant permission. (Love, “Truth” 235)

In “Gender and the Lure of the Postcritical,” Elizabeth Weed underlines the significance of Sedgwick’s essay on reparative reading in formulating contemporary, cross-disciplinary practices that counter dominant modes of theorizing: “the essay was for many liberatory in its irreverence for critical protocols that had long held sway in the academy” (Weed 155). Weed’s description of

Sedgwick's "weak theory" resembles Halberstam's discussion of "low theory" in *The Queer Art of Failure*, with both weak theory and low theory constituting practices that run counter to the "high theory" (Di Leo 175) or "strong theory" (Weed 155) of paranoid critique. Weed positions Sedgwick's reparative reading as a critical alternative or "counter practice" (Weed 155) to "the hermeneutics of suspicion" that, as mentioned, characterize the "Marx-Nietzsche-Freud" lineage of theory: "What fuels Sedgwick's argument is her view that much of cultural criticism had become formulaic and predictable, with reading after reading dedicated to the exposure of the obvious" (155). Weed argues that, in our "postcritical" context, theory is no longer about "demystifying protocols" or "consolidating the already known" as it is doing something else: what this is remains open to defining, though Sedgwick's reparative reading practices—and, I suggest, autotheoretical practices—provide possible responses.

Moving into a reparative practice is not necessarily an easy transition, especially for those who are accustomed to reading texts in a "paranoid" way and who are incentivized by academic institutions that encourage those kinds of readings. In her interview with Genevieve Hudson, Nelson states that, "I can't really partake in straightforward academic writing because its language too often obscures this relation, or it relies on a logic of paranoia: pointing out the blind spots in someone else's thinking and going in for the kill. I can do that—my father was a lawyer, and a certain legalistic bloodlust runs hot in me—but I don't think it's my best mode" (Hudson and Nelson). Nelson is aware of her own capacity for "a certain legalistic bloodlust" that enables the incisive paranoid readings of the most ruthless lawyers (and scholars), while also conceding that it is not her "best mode" (Hudson and Nelson): she acknowledges that the capacity for paranoid readings is within her (running through her veins) while acknowledging that there

might be a better way of being. As women committed to practices of theorizing, both Nelson and Sedgwick acknowledge the existence of critical practices beyond the paranoid that are possibly more efficacious—or differently efficacious—for feminist aesthetic and intellectual life.

In tune with her efforts to realize non-oppositional ways of thinking, Sedgwick does not only affirm those practices that are “purely” reparative, but she is, as she explains, “interested in doing justice to the powerful reparative practices that, I am convinced, infuse self-avowedly paranoid critical projects, as well as in the paranoid exigencies that are often necessary for nonparanoid knowing and utterance” (128-129). Sedgwick conceives of a shuttling between paranoid and reparative in a way that resists their inscription as binary oppositions: paradoxically, someone can have “paranoid exigencies” as part of a larger practice of “nonparanoid knowing and utterance,” for example, or have “powerful reparative practices” that, ultimately, “infuse self-avowedly paranoid critical projects” (*Touching* 128-129). In an autotheoretical manner, Sedgwick then offers an example from her own life in order to illustrate what a reparative practice that emerges from paranoid exigencies might look like. The example she turns to is a conversation around the HIV epidemic that Sedgwick had with the named and known activist scholar Cindy Patton in the 1980s: the conversation that prompted Sedgwick’s thinking around “paranoid” readings in the first place (123). Sedgwick writes, “For example, Patton’s calm response to me about the origins of HIV drew on a lot of research, her own and other people’s, much of which required being paranoiastically structured” (129); the “paranoiastically structured” (129) responses of queers and others living at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic serves as an example of the “paranoid exigencies” that, for Patton (and, later Sedgwick)—after a period of processing, acceptance, reflection within the context of community—come to be

transmuted into a reparative practice. Sedgwick positions her lived experience as a catalyst for theorizing, and this experience becomes the material through which complicated philosophical questions—like “What does knowledge *do*...?” (124)—are processed and unpacked. By grounding the abstract in the concrete of one’s lived, embodied conversations and encounters (ripe as they are with affect), and transmuting personal material *as* theoretical in ways that are “affect-oriented” and less ego-centric (146), Sedgwick reveals the reparative as autotheoretical in orientation (and the autotheoretical as a move toward the reparative).

Reparative reading can also be seen as Sedgwick’s own reparative response to her critique⁷ of paranoid reading as a hegemonic mode of reading in the academy: “The monopolistic program of paranoid knowing systematically disallows any explicit recourse to reparative motives, no sooner to be articulated than subject to methodical uprooting” (*Touching* 144). Because of its anti-hierarchical impetus and its ameliorative nature (144), reparative reading, much like other feminist innovations in theory and art, is vulnerable to dismissal as frivolous or unserious—especially given its drive toward unknowing (146). Sedgwick was aware of this, stating that “In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naive, pious, or complaisant” (*Touching* 126). Reflecting on the limitations of the reparative at her time of writing (2003), Sedgwick observes:

The vocabulary for articulating any reader’s reparative motive toward a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it’s no wonder few critics are willing to describe their

⁷ Insofar as Sedgwick critiques paranoid theory for its “trust in exposure” (*Touching* 141) that, while exposing certain facts about power, for example, does little to actually respond to those problems after they’ve been exposed, and does not acknowledge the current cultural context of known, widespread violence and the ways in which “visibility itself constitutes much of the violence” (140).

acquaintance with such motives. The prohibitive problem, however, has been in the limitations of present theoretical vocabularies rather than in the reparative motive itself. (*Touching* 150)

While paranoid reading certainly has its place, Sedgwick, writing at the end of the twentieth century, argues that it has become tired and, at worst, unaware of its own problematics: “To keep arriving on this hyperdemystified, paranoid scene with the ‘news’ of a hermeneutics of suspicion, at any rate, is a far different act from what such exposures would have been in the 1960s” (*Touching* 143). It is time, Sedgwick maintains, for another way of practicing theory and critique—one more attuned to the politics and aesthetics of queer feminist affect theory.

At the time of Nelson’s writing (2015), autotheory provides a way around some of these limitations that Sedgwick perceives in paranoid reading by offering a theoretical vocabulary that might bridge the reparative as Sedgwick conceives of it with the rigorous (in ways that resist the tendency to equate the reparative with something intellectually lax or conceptually thin). By exposing the citational undergirding of her own autotheoretical project, Nelson writes in a way that repairs (however performatively) the disjunct between the paranoid and the reparative as reading practices. With regards to which texts she tends to gravitate to, Nelson proclaims that she is interested in those whose lives and work consists of “baffling the paradigm, with ardor” (*Argonauts* 18). Like Sedgwick, Nelson demonstrates an ongoing interest in the ties between “rigor” and “ardor,” where rigor⁸ refers to severity and extreme strictness while ardor⁹ refers to passionate heat and desire (62). This comes through both in *The Argonauts* and in her earlier work *The Art of Cruelty*, where she inquires into the relationship between cruelty and

⁸ Rigor is defined as “Severity in dealing with a person...extreme strictness; harshness” (OED, “rigour” 1).

⁹ Ardor is defined as “Heat of passion or desire, vehemence, ardent desire; warmth of emotion, zeal, fervour, eagerness, enthusiasm” (OED “ardor” 3).

rigour, violence and truth; Nelson turns to examples of male artists like Francis Bacon whose aesthetic philosophy holds that art ought to “return us to life more violently” through violence and cruelty which are, in Bacon’s view, more “true” (Nelson, *Cruelty* 8). Is there a violence to rigour? If a text or a work of art is critically rigorous, is this to say that it is severe, violent, or cruel in its criticality? If autotheory by Nelson and Sedgwick holds the tension between rigor and ardor, how does this complicate existing conceptions of what constitutes critically rigorous work? To respond to this question requires knowing who the audience is: a contemporary queer feminist audience might be more receptive or sympathetic to reparative modes of practicing theory than a more conservative, “straight” audience that remains invested in paranoid readings as the sole mode of theorizing.

In her writings around the paranoid and the reparative, Sedgwick preempts critiques against the reparative and emphasizes that to engage in reparative practices does not mean one is unaware of the seriousness or urgency of issues in the world: “To be other than paranoid . . . to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does *not*, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression” (127-128). She writes:

No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes *a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks*. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them. (*Touching* 150-151)

The affects of the reparative might be more attuned to “affection, gratitude, solidarity, and love” than the paranoid affects of “correction, rejection, and anger” (Allan 8). Concomitant with the

turn to the reparative comes a move toward theory that is “less drive-oriented than affect-oriented,” another reason why Sedgwick, as a theorist, begins to move away from Freud’s epistemological dominance (with Freud’s Oedipal structures and drives) toward other thinkers in proximity to psychoanalysis, like Klein—engaged in psychoanalysis but from a school of thought different from the Freudian school (Object Relations Psychoanalysis)—and Tomkins—an unexpected and, until Sedgwick’s and Frank’s resuscitative reading of his work in *Shame and its Sisters*, a fairly obscure figure in the field of psychology (*Touching* 146).

With her move to the reparative, Sedgwick is interested in questions like: what does a particular piece of knowledge entail or *do* for the theorist as a subjective “seeker, knower, or teller” who has particular theoretical projects and aims (*Touching* 124)? Autotheory as a feminist practice emerges in response to this very question, becoming one of those places to “unpack the local, contingent relations” that paranoid reading, in Sedgwick’s view, have made it difficult to engage (124). In *The Argonauts*, the strategy of intertextual identification emerges as a more intimate, relational way of reading texts (and the lives and mythologies associated with those texts¹⁰) and, in turn, better understanding the nuances of one’s own life and subjectivity through the practices of reading and study. For example, throughout the book Nelson theorizes jealousy through the perspective of her own lived experiences of feeling jealous in her relationship with Harry, lending herself gravity by positioning her own anecdotes alongside those of queer and feminist literary figureheads whom she respects such as Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas.

Nelson can be seen to be undertaking “a different range of affects, ambitions, and

¹⁰ By this I mean that the author of the book, for example, is entailed in this mode of reading in addition to the characters within the “text” proper; in this way, intertextual identification as we find it in works like Nelson’s *The Argonauts* and Kraus’s *I Love Dick* presents a contemporary mode of reading that transgresses earlier, modern modes of reading in English literary studies, such as New Criticism, which frowned upon looking outside of the text or entertaining such fallacies as the “intentional” or authorial one.

risks” (Sedgwick, *Touching* 150) than if she were to, say, provide a close reading of a text about jealousy without implicating herself or her own life in that reading, or purporting to write about jealousy with the sole aim of “exposing” some epistemological truth about its violences (Sedgwick, *Touching* 124); that said, I do not believe Nelson’s practice in *The Argonauts* to be “purely” reparative, and in this way it is paradoxically even more resonant with Sedgwick’s own reading of the reparative in which the paranoid and the reparative—while defined against each other—cannot be said exactly to be oppositions. In like manner, when Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue mimetically draw and construct gluten free papier-mâché sculptures of their favourite feminist and queer theory texts—a collaborative practice which the two artists and lovers/partners engage in their studio, and which I take up later in this chapter—they undertake “a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks” (Sedgwick, *Touching* 150) than those involved in a deconstructive reading of a text, where theory—approached less as a beloved textual ally and more as an object of study—is paranoiacally approached in an effort to “expose” some kind of preempted truth about it and to fortify one’s own scholarly positioning. With this in mind, it is worth mentioning that in *The Argonauts*, Nelson builds an argument for her own queerness and legitimacy as a (queer) theorist through autotheoretically engaging broader theoretical questions related to the ontology of queerness and, in this way, Nelson’s practice of autotheory might best be understood as one that straddles the reparative and the paranoid.

Sedgwick seeks to move beyond binary oppositions like radical versus normative, and does so through an autotheoretical practice grounded in queer citation practice and a more reparative (or less paranoid) mode of reading. Sedgwick’s definition of the reparative is intimately tied to intertextuality, and more specifically, queer intertextuality or kinship: “At a

textual level, it seems to me that related practices of reparative knowing may lie, barely recognized and little explored, at the heart of many histories of gay, lesbian, and queer intertextuality” (*Touching* 149). As reparative practice, queer intertextuality becomes a space for theorizing identification, intimacy, and relationships in autotheoretical texts. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson’s citationality can be read as an instantiating of the performativity of knowledge: a making-visible of the performativity and citationality of knowledge through an invocation of queer feminist textual allies. This includes, for example, knowledge that the “I” possesses about one’s own life: lived, experiential, intimate, autobiographical knowledge, such as those forms of knowledge on which the genre of memoir is predicated. The project of *The Argonauts* is specifically queer, grounded in the histories of queer theory with an eye to queer theory’s futures. At the same time, the project of *The Argonauts* is a broader philosophical one as well, concerned with questions of knowledge, truth, and rigour in language and in life.

Autotheory and Citationality: Performing Citation as Feminist Practice

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler defines performativity as a “citational practice”: “Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (2). In Butler’s view, citationality is an integral part of performativity and works in tandem with the iterability of performativity to engender the possibility of the constitution of subjectivity and its transformations. Following Butler, citationality is the site at which frameworks of performativity converge with the academic practice of referencing source texts. In my own use of the term, I move between both of these senses of “citationality” as I theorize queer feminist autotheoretical

works by Nelson and others like Cauleen Smith, Bechdel, and feminist art collective FAG. Expanding on Derrida's response to Austin's speech act theory, which introduced the term "performative utterance" to describe those utterances that *do* something (for example, "I promise," or, during a wedding ceremony, "I do"), linguistic anthropologist Constantine V. Nakassis defines citationality as a "reflexive interdiscursive capacity of semiotic practice" (54). Even though "Not all acts are reflexive about their citationality" (51), the great majority of feminist and queer feminist autotheory texts seem to be, shedding light on their own citationality in different ways. Reading through texts by Barthes, Nelson, Bechdel, Rankine, or taking in visual art work by Mitchell and Logue, we witness citationality as an integral, performative aspect of autotheory as a feminist practice across media. Not only are these authors and artists reflexive about citationality through practices of autotheory, they integrate the practice of citation into the work as an integral part of the work's content and form.

Nelson re-articulates Butler on performativity, and the ways in which Butler's theory of performativity as advanced in *Gender Trouble* continues to be misunderstood. Articulating this in *The Argonauts*, Nelson rewrites Butler's own words: "Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to resignify. This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in" (15). As mentioned, in Nelson's *The Argonauts*, aspects of both Barthes's and Sedgwick's oeuvres are iterated through the prism of Nelson's own lived experience as a cisgender, queer woman living in California in the twenty-first century. The fact that Barthes's work was a key point of reference for Nelson becomes clear as soon as one reads the paratextual elements of *The Argonauts*. Nelson references Barthes in the title, drawing from Barthes's story of the ship *The*

Argo, a “fabled craft whose repeated rebuildings result in a ship that shares no scrap of timber with its prior iteration, yet somehow remains itself” (Salamon 303) to frame the text in relation to themes of transformation and becoming. Nelson makes reference to this in the book’s opening pages, connecting the symbol of the Argo ship and motifs of love, repetition, language, and time: “the subject who utters the phrase ‘I love you’ is like ‘the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name’” (*Argonauts* 5). Like its own Argo, Nelson appropriates the structure and form of *A Lover’s Discourse*, iterating it to queer feminist effect: through her own autobiographical discourse and choice of citations, she enacts a “rebuilding” (Salamon 303).

In the opening of *A Lover’s Discourse*, Barthes includes a section called “How this book is constructed,” which provides the reader with some context behind the book’s premise and structure; in this way, it bears resemblance to a work of conceptual art, which might be framed with an artist statement to provide the reader or viewer with a point of entry to the work. *A Lover’s Discourse* is structured as a series of what Barthes calls “Figures”—“fragments of discourse,” anecdotes from the lover’s life that framed within small provocations, with the title at the top of the page serving as the “argument” (5) and a dictionary definition of a word (most often a verb, but sometimes a noun) serving as a kind of epigraph. Finally, Barthes includes his “References”—names, titles, and initials—in the margins of the page, in a manner which Nelson repeats in *The Argonauts*. Part of the legacy of post-structuralism, for which Barthes’s writings were formative, is the understanding of any literary or cultural text as a “tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture” (Barthes, “Death” 4). Barthes’s argument in “The Death of the Author” challenges the long-held view that the literary text originated from the author alone as the singular source of the text’s meaning—a perspective that has perpetuated the

Romantic view of the authorial genius. As a text, *The Argonauts* is reflexive about its constitution as a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 146). We see this in the ways that citations—the names of the authors whose work is being quoted or summarized—populate the margins of the page to be read alongside, or as a part of, the text’s “body.”

Barthes explains that *A Lover’s Discourse* is a “simulation” of a lover’s discourse rather than something recorded from life, positioning his practice as one that moves away from the psychoanalytic and toward the performative by using theoretical and performance metaphors, such as “to stage an utterance” (3), and approaching the fragments of discourse as akin to physical, embodied “figures.” “The word,” Barthes writes, “is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptance” (3). Barthes frames the work as performative, making clear how he “stage[s] an utterance, not an analysis,” and composes a “structural” portrait rather than a psychological one through the text of *Lover’s* (3). As a “simulation” of discourse written by the theorist who proclaimed that “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation” (Barthes, “Death” 148), this work puts into practice Barthes’s theory, bringing together a range of voices or texts to comprise a performatively monologic dialogue on the languages of love.

On his use of References—which have been called quotations but which I prefer here to call citations¹¹—Barthes explains:

¹¹ In the translation of Barthes’s “The Death of the Author,” included in the anthology *Image - Music - Text*, it is written, “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146). Other translations, such as that on UbuWeb, write it: “the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture.”

In order to compose this amorous subject, pieces of various origin have been ‘put together.’ Some come from an ordinary reading, that of Goethe’s *Werther*. Some come from insistent readings (Plato’s *Symposium*, Zen, psychoanalysis, certain Mystics, Nietzsche, German lieder). Some come from occasional readings. Some come from conversations with friends. And there are some which come from my own life. (*Lover’s* 8)

With the form and structure of *A Lover’s Discourse*, Barthes demonstrates a palpable move toward the autotheoretical. He brings together the names and titles of different authors and texts—many philosophical and theoretical—with interlocutors from his own life (8) to reflect on philosophical and discursive questions relating to the nature of romantic love; he refers to the different reading practices that give rise to these different types of citations as “ordinary reading . . . insistent reading . . . occasional reading. . . conversations with friends,” (8) and it is worth pointing out that, in this way, Barthes shares a concern with Sedgwick (and Nelson) over types of reading practices (and the different discursive and epistemological modes they engender).

Even as Barthes seeks to shift the emphasis away from the author as the single origin of a text’s meaning (“Death” 146) and toward the reader as the new “destination” for a multiplicity of meanings (148), Barthes remains the one who assembles the different texts and, like a documentarian, nevertheless retains a large amount of control in constructing the narrative (open-ended as it may be) which the reader will then read. Though he places the words “‘put together’” in quotes that rhetorically mimic air quotes, Barthes nevertheless does put together different references next to his own words and reflections, drawing from diverse literary and theoretical sources in an undoubtedly postmodern way. Instead of two lovers speaking to or with each other, *A Lover’s Discourse* comprises one man “speaking within himself, amorously, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak” (Barthes, *Lover’s* 3). The “other” here is objectified

("the loved object") and silent ("does not speak"), while the lover/speaker—a vaguely autobiographical Barthes—speaks "within himself" about the problematics and affects of being in love based on his own experience of this state (3). The speaker is positioned as a kind of mad-man for love, a point about which the text is reflexive. By including fragments such as "I am crazy" (120-121), the conceit of the speaker as a split self "speaking within himself" is at home with contemporaneous French theoretical writings of the 1970s, including Deleuze and Guattari's work on "schizoid," and other experimental approaches to post-structuralism and schizophrenia that Sylvère Lotringer of *Semiotext(e)* translated and published for an American readership.

One of Barthes's aims in writing this text was to elevate the discourse of lovers—an everyday discourse, as well as a private discourse—to the realm of theory. The discourse of lovers was, at the time of his writing, one "completely forsaken by the surrounding language: ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority (sciences, techniques, arts)" (2). In postmodern fashion, Barthes brings together the "low"—lover's speech—with the "high"—philosophy and theory. Barthes composed the text with a view to the mass public, hoping these "figures"—anecdote-like fragments of phenomenological states of being and affects that one experiences in romantic relationships—would be recognizable from their own lives. He emphasized how the work's success lies in this kind of reception from the reader: "A figure is established if at least someone can say: 'That's so true! I recognize that scene of language'" (4). The meanings of this cross-genre work, which integrates philosophy and theory, autobiography, lyric, and popular writing, are grounded in lived experience—both from the perspective of the author (Barthes, but also the

“tissue of citations” (“Death” 4) which he points to as such through the references in the margins) as well as the reader (who, as Barthes notes, is a co-producer of the text’s meaning).

Within the text of *A Lover’s Discourse*, the citations in the margins are the trace of Barthes acknowledging the source of an idea, and in this way he maintains—however ambivalently—the status of the author (or a text, as when Barthes references *Symposium* instead of Plato or *Werther* instead of Goethe) as originary. Barthes’s references are intended to be less “authoritative” and academic, and more “amical” or friendly (Barthes, *Lover’s* 9). His approach to referencing is more playful than references typically are in scholarly work, and in this way Barthes iterates the forms and practices of academic writing in new directions. Affectively charged, Barthes writes how the names and titles that he cites in the margins mark his recollection (how much can memory be trusted?) of an idea that “has seduced, convinced, or ... momentarily given the delight of understanding (of being understood?)” (*Lover’s* 9). The moment that a text resonates with the understanding—that faculty of reason that Kant (and Piper) sought to conceptualize—is also, perhaps, a moment of “being understood” (9).

Barthes’s references include the names of philosophers, theorists, and writers (or others who had active writing practices, including Flemish mystic Ruysbroeck and French aristocrat Mme. de Sévigné). Most but not all of the names Barthes cites are names of European men, many of whom are French or German. These include Nietzsche, Freud, Goethe, Proust, Baudelaire, Sartre, Winnicott, Lacan, Rousseau, Balzac, and de Sade among others. With Freud and Nietzsche present, Barthes’s citations include the majority of those names that are synonymous as the progenitors of “theory,” or the critical tradition that Ricoeur calls “the hermeneutics of suspicion” (32). A conceit in Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* is that one becomes

interpellated by the discourse of love when one is in love or loved by someone who is in love: through autotheoretical vignettes organized by a given word (“image/image” (132), or “magie/magic” (163)) and by a phrase (““I am crazy”” for “fou/mad” (120), or ““I am odious”” for “monstreux/monstrous” (165)), Barthes extends this conceit by reflecting on the discourse of love as someone who, performatively, has been interpellated by this discourse and is, accordingly, experiencing various emotions and internal conflicts. Ultimately, Barthes presents the lover’s discourse as a paradox: on the one hand, the language of lovers can be theorized or rendered theoretically; on the other hand, this language of lovers is an extra-discursive affective experience that exceeds the terms and parameters of discourse as linguistic and semiotic. By rendering the language of love as a discourse worthy of those investigated by such theoretical heavyweights, and by framing this discourse as a practice of theory, Barthes lends the language of love and affection the weight of the academy.

In *The Argonauts*, Nelson extends this paradox of the lover’s discourse as she attempts to autotheoretically inscribe the affects of her own experience of being in love. Within the citational field of *The Argonauts*, Harry Dodge becomes the subject/object of a lover’s discourse—namely, that of Maggie Nelson’s. Extending Barthes’s project in *A Lover’s Discourse* to newly explicit, autotheoretical ends, Nelson both interpellates Dodge within the context of the text, and, later, comes to “cite” Dodge as a citation amongst other influential citations (names of theorists, writers). In this way, Dodge becomes both the subject of Nelson’s discourse of love and a citation within the discursive framework undergirding *The Argonauts* as autotheoretical. Nelson borrows from Barthes’s text both in form and content, citing some of the same names that he does: Lacan makes an appearance, as does Winnicott. But just as Barthes draws references from

the context within which he is writing (literature and literary theory and criticism in France in the 1970s) so does Nelson draw references from the context within which she is writing (literature and literary theory and criticism, but also feminist theory and queer theory).

Nelson begins with Wittgenstein, framing her text as being concerned with philosophical questions pertaining to language: another alignment with Barthes. But as she moves along, we can see how contemporary theory has diversified and taken shape in different sub-sets of theoretical practices over the past few decades. There is representation from some key post-structuralist contemporary theorists (Deleuze, Foucault, Butler), psychoanalysts and psychologists (Donald Winnicott, William James), French feminists (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig), and other feminist theorists, many who write on art, photography, and film (Susan Fraiman, Susan Sontag). As Barthes references Tao and other Eastern practices and traditions, like haiku (97), Nelson references American Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chödrön, as well as other American figures who have written on Buddhism in a Western context, like Allen Ginsberg and Dodie Bellamy. Nelson cites names of canonical queer theorists both past and present—Foucault, Butler, Bersani, Preciado—alongside queer affect theorists and queer feminist phenomenologists Sedgwick,¹² Sara Ahmed, and Eula Biss. Given her background as a poet, Nelson also cites poets like Eileen Myles, Denise Riley, Lucille Clifton, and Anne Carson, as well as postmodern dance artist Deborah Hay. Ginsberg and Deleuze are figures that haunt the text, featuring throughout *The Argonauts* in relation to women with whom they had relationships relevant to their theoretical and literary writings. In the case of Ginsberg, it is his mother, Naomi Ginsberg, who Nelson shifts the attention to with the citation “Naomi Ginsberg, to Allen” (64), a

¹² Butler and Sedgwick make the most appearances in the margins of *The Argonauts*, underscoring how integral Butler’s frameworks of performativity and Sedgwick’s approach to affect theory are to Nelson’s practice.

gesture that gives a kind of performative voice to Naomi for whom Ginsberg wrote his famous poem “Kaddish” as part of his mourning process. For Deleuze, it is Claire Parnet, with whom he co-wrote *Dialogues* in 1977: they return as a coupled citation throughout *The Argonauts* (“Gilles Deleuze/Claire Parnet” (7, 82, 102)) as Nelson autotheoretically writes through her own anxieties of collaboration and authorial merging (Nelson *Argonauts* 47).

The citational practices in Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse* and Nelson’s *The Argonauts* are performative, and in both cases the theoretical frame provides a literal, visual frame within which the body of the text is formally contained. By iterating the academic practice of appropriately referencing one’s source texts in ways that have new visual resonances on the page, and drawing the eye’s attention to the citation in ways that the reader is unaccustomed to, Barthes and Nelson engender new kinds of reading experiences. These citation practices extend beyond mere intellectual acknowledgment to something more reparative. Barthes could place the author’s name in a parenthetical reference, as one does in an academic essay; instead, Barthes and, now, Nelson, takes the name of the person being cited and places it in the margins of the page, so that the eye—moving from left to right (and top to bottom) along the page—reads the names in the margins first. It is also, perhaps, a mimicking of the process of reading; as we saw in the documentation of Piper’s *Food*, processing a complicated text might involve the reader scribbling notes in the margins of the page, marking those sections which resonate with the reader, or flagging those particularly challenging sections that the reader needs to come back to. In this way, Barthes’s and Nelson’s citation practice could also be a mimicking of the hand, and a foregrounding of the performativity and materiality of subjectivities and texts: a theme we find throughout experimental poetry practices in the twentieth through to the twenty-first centuries.

With the citations placed in the margins beside the body of the text, we might read this positioning through the framework of Sedgwick's performative affect theory, which seeks to make space for the haptic, the tactile, and following from Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, the spatial in critical writing practices. In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick presents the spatial positioning of "beside" as a conceit in the text, where "beside" makes space for "a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (8). Just as the margin is a space ripe with affective meaning, so too is it a space ripe with queer meaning. Historically, as defined by the OED, to be on the margin, or "marginal" was to be "below or beyond which something ceases to be possible or desirable" (OED, "marginal"), and to be "marginalized" describes the circumstance of being oppressed or subordinated in culture, whether as a woman, a person of colour, a lesbian, a transgender person, and so on. Among other critical practices, queer theory has taken impetus from Derrida's theoretical practice of deconstruction (which decenters the center) in articulating politically generative positionings from the margins—a project which we see continuing with recent work by transgender feminists and other queer feminist thinkers. A significant way that Nelson's work is an iteration, in the sense of Butlerian and Derridean iterability, of Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* is in her invoking a canon of queer theory, and making visible the queerness of her theory and its references in a way that Barthes, while a gay man writing theory in queer ways, was not.

Is this kind of citationality part of a feminist politics of transparency, where the artist seeks to be transparent about their influences and the various sources from which their ideas come? In *Getting Personal*, feminist scholar Nancy K. Miller defines personal criticism (a genre

that I introduce as an antecedent to feminist autotheory in the Introduction) as meta-theoretical and self-reflexive (xii). When describing what is most feminist about personal or narrative criticism, Miller says it is “the self-consciousness these modes of analysis tend to display about their own processes of theorization; a self-consciousness that points to the fictional strategies inherent in all theory” (xii). By being self-reflexive and transparent about one’s “own processes of theorization” (xii), one points also to the constructed-ness and subjectiveness of theory more broadly as a mode of knowledge production. This is a significant feminist act if we consider it in light of Irigaray’s critiques of phallogentric theory shrouding the fact that it originates from a subjective, embodied, and gendered (male) theorist. In Miller’s view, it is the making-transparent of one’s own processes of theorizing that underscores the feminist politics and aesthetics of narrative criticism. Writing autotheoretically in *The Argonauts*, Nelson traces contemporary lines of influence, paying homage to those whose work shapes her thinking; it is a text grounded as much in her own practice of living as it is in the vital ideas within the feminist and queer texts that she cites.

In the denouement, Nelson cites her partner as “Harry” three times in the margins (*Argonauts* 129, 131, 133), his name taking up that space as a “legitimate” citation. By referring to Harry by his first name only, Nelson marks a point of difference between Harry, the beloved, as a citation and theorists or writers like “Beatriz Preciado” (53) or “Michel Foucault” (64) who are referred to by first name and surname, underscoring Foucault’s “author function”—his refutation of Barthes’s “Death of the Author” (Foucault, “Author” 209). Part of a feminist and queer feminist citation practice involves destabilizing hierarchies of influence with a relational politics (an affectively-charged, twenty-first century take on “the personal is political”) in view.

By concluding her practice of citing texts with citations of “Harry,” Nelson brings the text as an homage to Harry (or to her feelings of love for Harry, two different but related matters) to a kind of ouroboros-like closure. Speaking during an interview after the book’s publication, Nelson points to writers whom she respects who engage in a similar practice of citation; she describes how Eula Biss, for example, “quotes her sister with as much gravity as she quotes a philosopher” (Prickett and Nelson). Here, Nelson underlines the feminist charge of placing someone from one’s own life—a sister, a mother, a lover—in the same authoritative position as someone from the history of philosophy—Plato, Derrida, Foucault.

One of the most memorable and oft-cited lines from the book is Nelson’s account of the “many-gendered mothers of my heart” (Nelson, *Argonauts* 57). Nelson borrows this line from poet Dana Ward to describe the many people who have influenced her writing and her life (two spheres which cannot be so easily parsed when it comes to autotheory as a feminist mode of thinking, writing, or otherwise inscribing) and who encourage a more reparative way of being in the world with others. She writes: “And many-gendered mothers of the heart say: *Just because you have enemies does not mean you have to be paranoid*” (Nelson, *Argonauts* 122). The description of mothers as “many-gendered” makes space for a queering of motherhood and a decoupling of the mother from cisgender woman or femininity, moves which are integral to Nelson’s larger project of theorizing the possibilities of queer motherhood and non-binary family-making in *The Argonauts*. This motif of the “many-gendered mothers of the heart” makes personal and affective the citational practice that structures *The Argonauts* as an autotheoretical text. By aligning herself with her various influences—influences which are rendered personal through Nelson’s interpellation of them as a kind of “mother”—Nelson underlines the integrality

of intertextual identification and intimacy to the politics, aesthetics, sociality, and affects of autotheory as a queer feminist practice.

Other arguments that Nelson advances around philosophy and motherhood, such as the incisive statement that “In its rage at maternal finitude, the child turns to an all-powerful patriarch—God—who, by definition, cannot let anyone down” (*Argonauts* 5), are not so much her own invention as her re-articulation of arguments previously made by others. In this instance, it is the argument Kaja Silverman makes in *Flesh of My Flesh*, and Nelson references Silverman accordingly (95). This is a tension within feminist autotheory: a decentered and multiply citational mode of writing supplants the singular (male) author as genius or inventor in which patriarchy has historically been so invested. Notably, this decentered view of the writer or artist is by no means a solely feminist one—it was Barthes who popularized this view with his “The Death of the Author,” one of the theoretical essay-cum-manifestoes recognized as inaugurating the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism in twentieth century theory. Despite criticisms from some queer readerships, particularly around Nelson’s inclusion of her transgender partner as an integral part of the text, the mainstream and feminist reception of *The Argonauts* has been overwhelmingly positive. While Nelson has gained a great deal of attention for conceiving this nascent form of writing that is called “autotheory” in *The Argonauts*, as I discuss in the Introduction, “autotheory” has a much longer history within and across feminist thought, and Nelson herself says, playfully self-deprecatorily, that she “flat out stole this term [autotheory] from Paul Preciado’s amazing *Testo Junkie*” (McCrary and Nelson). The embodied power of *The Argonauts* lies in Nelson processing existing theoretical ideas and modes of thinking and writing through her own particular experience in the world as queer, as a stepmother and a biological

mother, as a lover of Harry, and as a sober woman in recovery (61). Rather than shrouding the citational nature of her own ideas, or pretending that the theoretical concepts presented throughout *The Argonauts* are her own (and hers only), Nelson lays bare her device, making use of the mise-en-page or the visual layout of the page alongside the formal structure of the entire text, she literally makes transparent the citational nature of the text. In this way, a feminist politics of citationality, and the inter-subjectivity of references, characterizes the very constitution of Nelson's autotheoretical writing.

The relationality of Nelson's text extends from this performative citationality—or the use of citation as a mode of acknowledging the sources of references of an idea or a term—to a social-cultural politics of intersubjectivity, where the self exists “*for another or by virtue of another*” (Nelson, *Argonauts* 60). Riffing on Butler, whose name sits in the margin next to this statement and whose words are acknowledged as such through Nelson's use of italicization, Nelson articulates a vision of experimental writing practice that “dramatizes the ways in which we are *for another or by virtue of another*; not in a single instance, but from the start and always” (60). With this passage, Nelson—after Butler—emphasizes how both the writers/artists/theorists and the texts themselves exist as fundamentally intersubjective: they exist because of the others with which they are in community. Nelson's desire for queer belonging echoes the desires of other queer feminist artists who performatively engage citationality as part of their autotheoretical practice, such as in the practices of Mitchell and Logue who I take up later in this chapter. In both cases, queer belonging is fostered and sustained through re-productive acts that differ from the heteronormative scripts of reproductive futurity (though in *The Argonauts*, Nelson strives to find a middle ground beyond homo-radicalism and heteronormative

reproductive futurity). These queer theory and feminist theory texts appear either alongside, or in absence of, Edelman's child of futurity, as discourses that express the kinds of affects, desires, and ontologies of queer feminist life that artists and writers like Nelson or Mitchell seek to make space for in a philosophical and theoretical lineage that has historically excluded them.

In an interview about her work, Nelson explains that "I need to talk back, or talk with, theorists and philosophers in ordinary language, to dramatize how much their ideas matter to me in my everyday life" (Hudson and Nelson). Her utterance is the most succinct definition of autotheory that I have yet to come across. As a performative mode of feminist practice, autotheory invokes other theorists and philosophers within the vernacular of one's lived experience in order to "talk back, or talk with" these broader philosophical ideas—ideas which, as feminism has revealed (since at least its second wave), are as personal as they are political. As Nelson elucidates here, autotheory is a way to "dramatize" (Hudson and Nelson), perform, embody, instantiate, or iterate the significance of another theorist's ideas through the prism of the given writer's lived experience. Nelson credits Myles's notion of "vernacular scholarship" in allowing her to describe these writing practices that combine the conversational and the academic in exploratory ways (Hudson and Nelson).

The role of "the other" is emphasized in Nelson's description of her mode of working—a mode myself and others describe as autotheoretical; even as the "autos" or self is foregrounded in its name, autotheory necessitates the voices of others in its fabric. Similarly, Moten and Harney—speaking specifically in relation to the historically disenfranchised space of "the Undercommons" that Black radical thought reclaims—describe the importance of a practice that involves "a mode of thinking with others" (11). Nelson has read the texts (of feminist theory,

queer theory, other theory) and spent years since her time as a graduate student reflecting on the ideas and looking at them from different angles. Now, the autotheoretical mode allows her to reflect on philosophical and theoretical problems—ones that are as personal to her as they are political, ethical, aesthetic, and theoretical—in *relation*, both to Harry and to writers and theorists from queer and feminist history.

When the autotheorist places these different texts side by side, they open and begin to function according to what Dutch artist, curator, and cultural theorist Mieke Bal calls the “facilitation” at the heart of the practice of making contemporary art. Speaking specifically of what Bal calls “autotheory” in relation to migratory aesthetics—“a concept I have developed over the past years, and recently given shape to in an exhibition co-curated with Miguel Angel Hernandez Navarro” (“Double” 150)—she states that “The making of art, in other words, is not an instance, an example to illustrate an academic point, nor an elevated form of cultural expression. Instead...it is a form of *facilitation*, so that things can happen in intercultural contact that would not easily occur otherwise” (“Autotheory” 138-139). To be sure, Bal’s definition of autotheory provides supplemental evidence for the term’s indebtedness to the other—the self’s “encounters with otherness.” Bal explains, “Autotheory. Here I introduce the reflexive modality which allows me to reconsider my own theoretical convictions in view of encounters with otherness to which I am myself a party” (134).

In 2018 I was a member of a three-part panel at the ACLA convention in Los Angeles in which Alex Brostoff thoughtfully described the sociality of autotheory in a paper entitled, “Toward an Autotheory of Intertextual Kinship.” Brostoff articulated how “autotheory” is “a misnomer” (Brostoff). As I’ve discussed in this chapter, the term “autotheory”—with its

investments in the “autos” or “I”— seems to present certain limits. In works like *The Argonauts*, Nelson underscores the ways in which her writing self operates in an undeniable proximity to many others, whether these are others with whom she is intimately involved as a lover, or as a reader. What I have been calling intertextual intimacy and intertextual identification, and what Brostoff calls intertextual kinship, might be theorized as trans-textual kinship relations that take place within, across, and *beside* (returning to that Sedgwickian term of proximity, closeness, space) humans and texts.

In my own project, I have taken this term “autotheory” as a prompting: I ask, what do we make of this term “autotheory,” and what are its histories, contexts, and conditions of possibility? The term emerges at the end of the twentieth century and again in the twenty-first: one answer might be that autotheory is enmeshed in the neoliberal imperatives of our late capitalist context. Rather than resisting this “auto” descriptor, I’ve turned to feminist histories of conceptual art, body art, and self-imaging as a post-1960s context through which to think through autotheory as a mode of practice that feminist artists and writers have engaged, perhaps as much for its “expediency” (Householder 12) as for its resonance in facilitating practices that integrate the intellectual and the embodied. To be sure, even as autotheory involves self-reflection as an integral practice of knowing, such auto-oriented practices often coexist with collective modes of organizing—from the consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s to the collaborative writing processes of Nicole Brossard and fellow writers in *Theory, A Sunday*.

Perhaps it is that theory and philosophy require solitary reading and writing practices, at least historically, where the person reading a text of theory or philosophy must turn their full attention to it—likely in a quiet place safe from interruption— in order to understand it and

process it through the solo acts of reading and writing. Take the image of Piper in *Food*, for example, as a case in point: the self-images of the artist that remain at the end of her monastic performance—a rigorous engagement with Kant’s *Critique*—stand as solemn testament to the isolation involved in reading philosophy. Feminist art and writing histories, as mentioned above, have served as one space to resist the neoliberal, capitalist, Eurocentric, patriarchal drives toward individualism; *The Argonauts* signals a (re)turn to more collective modes of autotheorizing (a paradox I hold space for over the course of this chapter), even as Nelson concedes her ambivalent desire toward retaining that revered status as singular “author” in control of the text and its citations.

Autotheoretical Honesty: Intertextual Intimacy & Identification

Although *The Argonauts* announces its proximity to the work of Barthes in its title and its form, Nelson’s greatest affinity is with the work of Sedgwick. In its embryonic stages, *The Argonauts* began as three interrelated texts: a talk that Nelson gave on the work of Sedgwick, a review Nelson wrote on Sedgwick’s posthumously published *The Weather in Proust* (2011), and an exhibition essay that she wrote on the American cross-medial artist A.L. Steiner’s 2012 exhibition *Puppies and Babies* (McCrary and Nelson). Adding another intertextual layer, I first read *The Argonauts* in 2015, the year it was published, which was also the same year Nelson’s partner Harry Dodge had a solo exhibition at Wallspace in New York entitled *The Cybernetic Fold* (2015), which takes its name from a 1995 essay by Sedgwick entitled “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins.” With two decades dividing Sedgwick’s essay and Dodge’s art show, it is clear that the ideas Sedgwick was engaging in her theorizing—what we

now widely know as queer affect theory or queer feminist affect theory—are still abuzz. Written with her collaborator and former student Adam Frank, the essay opens with, “Here are a few things theory knows today”:

Or, to phrase it more fairly, here are a few broad assumptions that shape the heuristic habits and positing procedures of theory today (theory not in the primary theoretical texts, but in the routinizing critical projects of ‘applied theory’; theory as a broad project that now spans the humanities and extends into history and anthropology; theory after Foucault and Greenblatt, after Freud and Lacan, after Levi-Strauss, after Derrida, after feminism) when it offers any account of human beings or cultures. (Sedgwick and Frank, “Cybernetic” 496)

What follows is a coy summation of the characteristics of contemporary theory (after post-structuralism), in its manifestation as a form of “applied theory” that has, as Sedgwick and Frank suggest, become quite prescriptive. To practice good theory, for example, one knows that in order to understand representation, language/discourse should be elevated above all else (93), and that one must be fiercely anti-essentialist by sufficiently distancing themselves from any recourse to biology (93). Sedgwick and Frank then describe their theoretical alignments in the article, introducing Tomkins as an American psychologist and theorist from the 1960s whose work on affect guides their theorizing of shame. Well aware of the taboos that such alignments—with their perceived lack of loyalty to the post-structuralist prescriptions aligned above—might pose, Sedgwick and Frank position themselves as outsiders or as “queer” *theorists*—as theorists who are, in fact, continuing to *queer* theory in unexpected ways and through unanticipated avenues: “You don’t have to be long out of theory kindergarten to make mincemeat of, let’s say, a psychology that depends on the separate existence of eight (only sometimes it’s nine) distinct affects hardwired into the human biological system” (94). Leaving aside Sedgwick’s and Frank’s reflections on theory, affect, and scientism, it is clear that the writers are positioning themselves

as outsiders to what is properly “theoretical” (even as the article is published in a reputable, peer-reviewed journal on theory and criticism: *Critical Inquiry*).

Writing a few years after “Shame,” Sedgwick’s theoretical engagement with mental and physical illness takes on a new affective valence in her 1999 biographical study, *A Dialogue on Love*, where Sedgwick writes through her experience of depression after undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. She frames the text around her psychotherapy sessions with her male therapist; it is her inter-subjective mode of relating to, and conversing with, her therapist that forms the premise of this “dialogue on love.” As Katy Hawkins puts it, *A Dialogue on Love* engages an “experimentation with form” as a way to “facilitate(s) new ways of understanding bodily crisis”: “Sedgwick’s approach to metastatic breast cancer develops the theoretical concepts from across her oeuvre” (251). The fact that Sedgwick has written her own “dialogue on love” is also worth considering as I think through the ways in which *The Argonauts* is an iteration of *A Lover’s Discourse*. At the heart of Sedgwick’s contribution to the expanding field of contemporary theory is her openly and honestly practicing theory in ways that seek to transgress convention, even as her own privileged positioning as a literary scholar trained within the halls of the Ivy League might complicate her claims to outsider status. As we consider questions of access and legitimacy around autotheory as a feminist approach to scholarship, it is noteworthy that Sedgwick had first to prove herself academically through more conventional literary scholarship on nineteenth century writers like Henry James, before she was able to theorize issues related to gay lives (*Epistemology of the Closet*, *Between Men*) and, later, to theorize queerness in weird modes of writing that bridge the self-reflexively autobiographical, the lyrical, the theoretical, the psychoanalytic, and the performative.

Just as Sedgwick challenges prevailing understandings of what are acceptable ways of doing theory, so too does she challenge prevailing understandings of what are acceptable ways of identifying—even from within LGBTQ spaces. Identifying as a fat woman and as a gay man, and immersing herself in a lived practice of theorizing and feeling queerness, while being in a long-term marriage with a cisgender man, Sedgwick destabilizes our understanding of the relationships between queerness, homosexual desire, and identification. She proposes a new definition of “queer,” defining it as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (*Tendencies* 8). Sedgwick’s overtly (or overly?) capacious definition—one which creates some distance between queerness and sexual orientation—will come to shape definitions of queerness in queer theory and popular culture in a way that is, to this day, contested. Is everything queer? Can (or should) everything be (capable of being) queer—or queered? It is a similar line of questioning that “performance” has faced. Schechner’s theoretical approach of viewing something “as” performance, rather than having something that essentially “is” performance, might be another way of approaching Sedgwick’s theoretical use of queer in her writings. Sedgwick’s willful traversing across these identifications—a fat woman, a gay man—could be seen as reverberating with the politicized aims of trans folks, or recent discourses in the latter part of the 2010s that call for an end to gender altogether.¹³

¹³ Movements like “Gender Is Over” critique gender binaries through merchandising campaigns. Gender is Over is “A New York based organization that supports the fight for gender self-determination and body sovereignty through community building, retail sales, events and charitable giveaways” (If You Want It).

At the same time, Sedgwick's identifying— if taken literally— does not compute with trans discourses,¹⁴ though it might with related discourses of gender-fluidity and genderqueerness. Sedgwick was theorizing queerness from an ambiguous, even performative, gender identity at a time when trans writers and theorists, while very much a part of gay life and while actively making work, did not have the same visibility (in popular culture or academia¹⁵) as they do now; less binary gender identifications and sexual orientations, including non-binary, pansexual, genderfluid, and genderqueer, were not a part of the conversation in 1980s and 1990s queer theory in the way that they are in the late 2010s, and one wonders how Sedgwick's language might change if she were alive and writing today.

When it comes to subjectivity and becoming, is there such thing as identificatory limits? How do we parse the distinction between identifying as and identifying with, specifically in regards to queer feminist politics? Perhaps less contentious than the fluidity of identifications and desires advanced by Sedgwick's autotheoretical work, is Nelson's identification of pregnancy as queer: a move which she makes through the use of "trans" as a kind of citational conceit. This conceptualization follows from Butler's Derridean de-coupling of desire and identification in favour of a more binary-blurring and performative conception of gender. As a mode of writing through the self-as-relational, autotheory seems particularly well-equipped to flesh out the nuances of such complicated identifications, even as it also presents problems

¹⁴ Is she a woman or a man? If the latter, does she want to transition? If they transition, will they choose to do so with the use of hormones or surgery? What are her pronouns?

¹⁵ *Transgender Studies Quarterly* began in 2014 as a peer-reviewed journal published through Duke UP that focuses on interdisciplinary scholarship on issues related to gender, sexuality, sex, identity, and the body that have not been sufficiently addressed by feminist or queer scholarship and theory. In "The Flourishing of Transgender Studies," written in the inaugural issue of the *TSQ*, Regina Kunzel names 2014 as a time in history when "transgender studies can boast several conferences, a number of edited collections and thematic journal issues, courses in some college curricula, and ... an academic journal with a premier university press" (285). Nearly a decade prior, Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle co-edited *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006).

related to identification, relationality, and the implications of an other. To be sure, autotheory is one place where writers and theorists can suspend existing conceptions of what are appropriate identifications—even within more progressive and/or transgressive spaces, such as queer politics—with the autotheorists writing from a first-person positioning and disclosing identifications (and identifications-desires) that obfuscate what is appropriate for or to them.¹⁶

Sedgwick's identifications have not been warmly welcomed by either her own or the current queer context,¹⁷ a matter on which Nelson ruminates on within the intertextual and autotheoretical fabric of *The Argonauts*. To be sure it is a scenario close to Nelson's own given her own experience of pregnancy as a cisgender woman with a more radical conception of queerness than is, perhaps, afforded to her within larger queer feminist discourses of trans-ness and other more marginalized positions. Nelson turns to Sedgwick's work and its receptions to engage the problematics of what "queer" means in the contemporary. She does so by contextualizing her inquiry from within her queer marriage to Harry, their family-making in Prop 8-era California, and by moving smoothly between references—Ahmed, Sontag, Bersani, Chödrön, arriving finally at Sedgwick. It is Sedgwick's definition of "queer," as "want[ing] it both ways" that most resonates with Nelson, enabling her to distance queerness from sexual orientation while also not losing its grounded-ness in sexual orientation (*Argonauts* 29). "There

¹⁶ Although I do not deal specifically with race in this chapter, I plan to take up this issue of autotheoretical identifications as it pertains to the relationships between gender, sexuality, and race in a subsequent body of research; specifically, I plan to take up the trend of racialized queer male writers's and artists' autotheoretical identifications with white women, focusing specifically on the works of Hilton Als, Walter Scott, and 2frik. Als's complicated playing with the lines dividing race, gender, theory, and identification in *White Girls* and *The Women*, for example, provides further material for considering the kinds of theoretical and performative projects that contemporary writers and artists are engaging through practices of autotheory.

¹⁷ There are, of course, exceptions. Writing in *Second Skins: The body narratives of transsexuality*, trans theorist Jay Prosser considers what he calls transsexual autobiographies—which we might now refer to as transgender autobiographies, though the evolution of the discourse from "transsexual" to "transgender" is itself its own complicated history. Writing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick into this project, Prosser maintains that Sedgwick "has revealed her personal transgendered investment lying at and as the great heart of her queer project" (23).

is much to be learned from wanting something both ways,” Nelson writes in one of the text’s many moments of relishing in ambivalence. Throughout the text, Nelson reminds us that the work of theory is to flesh out the liminal spaces, to resist generalizations, and to sit with ambivalence. Paradoxically, there is also a palpable desire to get at the “truth” as part of her epistemological-ethical project of autotheoretical queer theorizing. Nelson cites Sedgwick’s statement that ““what it takes—all it takes—to make the description ‘queer’ a true one is the impulsion *to use it in the first person*”” (*Argonauts* 29), following this with a description of Sedgwick’s first person identifications in her own “real life”:

Sedgwick, who was long married to a man with whom she had, by her own description, mostly postshower, vanilla sex, knew about the possibilities of this first-person use of the term perhaps better than anyone else. She took heat for it, just as she took heat for identifying with gay man (not to mention *as* a gay man), and for giving lesbians not much more than an occasional nod. (30)

Part of a larger philosophical project, Nelson uses the practice of autotheory to seek insight into the age old question of truth: what is truth, how do we access truth, what makes something truthful, and so on. The discourses of honesty and, perhaps even more fraught, sincerity present complications to philosophical and epistemological questions of truth. Nelson follows these observations on Sedgwick’s “queer” identifications with the conclusion that, “Such were Sedgwick’s identifications and interests; she was nothing if not honest” (30). Nelson invokes pathos for Sedgwick and a soft allegiance with what Sedgwick was doing, intimating that Sedgwick’s lived practice or way of being was more sincerely queer “than the poles of masculinity and femininity could ever allow” (30). Writing alongside Sedgwick and other ghosts of queer theory’s past, Nelson extends Sedgwick’s project of troubling binary oppositions around

gender, sexuality, and identity while also upholding her insistence on honesty and sincerity, Nelson too desires a space for “honesty” and “truth,” even as these terms are themselves impossible, looming as a horizon one moves toward but might never touch.

Even as decade(s) divide their work, Nelson’s *The Argonauts* is subject to similar criticisms endured by Sedgwick and other queer theorists writing in experimental ways, like Paul B. Preciado. Following Sedgwick, Preciado—whom Nelson repeatedly cites throughout *The Argonauts*—handles issues of gender and identity in similarly performative and, it seems to follow, contended ways in their 2008 book *Testo Junkie*. Described as “the most revolutionary queer text to hit bookstores since Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*” (Bianco), Preciado’s *Testo Junkie* is an auto-ethnographic dive into twenty-first century biopolitics through the perspective of a subject eschewing the gender binary of male/female for something more technologically and materially performative. Preciado was the first to describe their work in terms of “autotheory,” following only from Stacey Young who used the term in 1997 to describe works that “combine autobiography with theoretical reflection”—specifically, works by feminists who were inordinately marginalized within dominant feminist and/or women’s movements, like women of colour and lesbian women (Young 69). As a literary form, autotheory can look like a memoir with footnotes, a hybrid academic essay-meets-performative-life writing exercise. For Nelson and Preciado, lived experience—that which they have witnessed from the bounds of their own body-minds—becomes a way of responding to philosophical questions such as “How did sex and sexuality become the main objects of political and economic activity?” (Preciado, *Testo* 25) or is pregnancy normative or queer? (Nelson, *Argonauts* 13). In this way, the self—positioned in a context of numerous utterances and texts from history—

becomes a site of evidencing. The autotheorist invokes evidence from their own lives to develop a thesis and to respond to critical questions. When contextualized within a larger practice of theoretical evidencing and reflection, one's experience can become material for affirming a hypothesis: for example, that the pregnant body is queer (Nelson, *Argonauts* 13).

Just as Nelson positions her book as existing *for* Harry, so too does Preciado position their book *Testo Junkie*—a key influence on the autotheoretical experimentations of *The Argonauts*—as being for a specific, and absent, reader: “You’re the only one who could read this book” (19) Preciado writes to the recently bereaved Guillaume Dustan, a gay French writer who died of an unintentional drug overdose in 2005. Nelson’s performative use of citations in *The Argonauts* fosters intimacy at the level of form; extending this to the themes of her text, Nelson frames the practice of sharing theory (as well as other texts, like literature and poems) as an intimate, meaningful act between two queer lovers. On both levels, queer intertextuality engenders space for intersubjective and reparative relations. And yet, the loved or beloved other occupies an ambivalent space in both *The Argonauts* and *A Lover’s Discourse*. The dialogic is invoked in both texts: as writers and theorists, both Barthes and Nelson are concerned with issues pertaining to relationships; both approach these issues autotheoretically, through topics of language, philosophy, and (to different extents and effects) queerness; both invoke a space of polyvocality through citation; and yet, both take on the singular author position rather than, say, writing the text as a collaboration (as in the case of FAG) or a sustained conversation between two “equals” (as in the case of Kathy Acker’s and McKenzie Wark’s transcribed e-mails *I’m Very Into You: Correspondences 1995-1996*). As I discuss shortly, Nelson is self-reflexive about her own anxieties around shared authorship (47), and the ethical and political problems of her

resistance—especially when she is writing about her lover/partner, who, as a transgender person, is in a position that is charged for recent discourses in feminist and queer theory and scholarship.

The Argonauts opens with an intimate scene of sharing theory: Nelson and Dodge debate Wittgenstein's idea that language can contain the inexpressible (3). While Nelson the writer begins by seeing language as sufficient, Harry the visual artist believes "that words are *not* good enough" (4), and with this a conflict is established that will continue through to the end of the text. Through intimate contact, Nelson's theoretical stance shifts—and *The Argonauts* becomes a site for her to work through her now troubled understanding of language and the inexpressible. On the most obvious level, language is limited in its use of gender pronouns: "Harry is neither male nor female" (14), and is therefore always already limited in/by language. Embodying the practice of autotheory, fragments or pieces of text become the means by which Nelson expresses (and, by the logic of performativity, constitutes) her love for Harry, as well as the means by which she generates new theory in her work. Following Wittgenstein, the second passage that Nelson shares with Harry is *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (5).

The Argonauts is a trans narrative but from the perspective of someone who loves a trans person—a cisgender woman in an intimate relationship with a trans man. A textual homage to Barthes, Nelson has chosen to write the book as a devotional text of love to Harry Dodge. Through her selection of citations, the text becomes a space of queer feminist voices. And yet one problem in *The Argonauts*, which has garnered criticism, is that for all the attention placed on Harry, he remains strangely silent in the text. Nelson takes her approach from Barthes, who describes his approach in the *A Lover's Discourse* as "the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak" (3). Nelson is

aware of the problems that come with writing about another known and named person. An active and established artist himself, Harry does not speak for himself except for when he seems to refuse his consent—or at the very least, withhold enthusiastic consent (*Argonauts* 46-47). One of the most complicated, unresolved passages in *The Argonauts* is when Nelson relates hers and Harry's exchange after she shares a draft of the book with Harry to read (46-47). The issue of consent is one that Nelson acknowledges then quickly dismisses in favour of a philosophy of writing practice that emphasizes "free expression" of the speaking "I" above the feelings of the other (47). Following Sedgwick, Nelson places honesty (whatever honesty means in a philosophical sense, rooted as it is in the speaking self who believes herself to be honest) above other drives, acknowledging the complications of discomfort and other difficult feelings while nevertheless proceeding with one's project.

Within this passage, Nelson shuttles between an acknowledgment of the "politically on point" or perhaps "best feminist practices" way of going about things in the twenty-first century context of feminism with the corresponding framework of intersectionality. At its most cynical, this framework can threaten to become a kind of hierarchy of oppression that gives voice only to those who are the most oppressed and silences those who are perceived to have more privilege) and a concession of her own desires. When Harry tells her "he feels unbeheld—unheld even" (*Argonauts* 46), rather than dutifully changing her course, Nelson is honest about how she bristles against Harry's words, even though she *should* be receptive. "I try to listen, try to focus on his generosity in letting me write about him at all" (46), Nelson writes, yet she concedes how this "generosity" is not generous enough for her: "How can a book be both a free expression and a negotiation?" (46). Nelson recalls when her and Harry used to speak about writing a book

together: “it was to be titled *Proximity*. Its ethos would derive from *Dialogues II*, co-authored by Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet” (47). For Nelson, these social and ethical issues are inextricable from philosophical issues related to writing. She admits that, as a writer, she has not figured out what it would look like to write in a way that adequately holds both the self and the other (47); conceivably, the performatively citational structure of her autotheoretical text is her purposive attempt to do so.

For all the utopic feminist potentiality of collaboration in theory, Nelson admits that the very thought of such authorial “merging” causes her “too much anxiety” to move forward with the idea (47). She is honest about the resistance she feels to “los[ing] sight of my own me” (47), and returns instead to autotheory as a practice grounded as much in her own experience as in the experiences of theorists, poets, and lovers, whom she cites. Not unlike Piper’s ritualistic turn to self-imaging when faced with the anxieties of losing oneself brought on by reading Kant, Nelson’s anxieties stem in part from the gap between good feminist practice and her drive toward something messier and more honest. “I’m not saying this is good pedagogy,” Nelson states after unpacking the affects of knowing that “I can talk as much as I want to” in her role as a Professor: “I’m saying that its pleasures are deep” (48). Is feminist autotheory a space where the pleasures of theorizing meet the pleasures of candor? With Nelson’s admission, it seems like autotheory is where the pleasures of practicing theory meet the pleasures of telling one’s story. How do the disclosing of truths, and the pursuit of “truth,” relate to the practice of theorizing, especially when it comes to feminist and queer feminist practices?

These questions around authorship and theorization are explored in other queer feminist autotheoretical texts, including Bechdel’s most recent graphic novel *Are You My Mother?: A*

Comic Drama (2012). In it, Bechdel¹⁸ hones in on her relationship with her mother in light of philosophical and theoretical questions around queerness, writing, psychoanalysis, canonicity, and time. Central to these lines of thought and a key problem Bechdel returns to is the conflict of writing truthfully about a loved one in one's writing—writing that will be published and widely read. Bechdel's book has been described as graphic memoir, a form that Bechdel's previous work *Fun Home* fit; before writing book-length graphic memoirs, Bechdel was known for her autobiographically-inspired comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1983-). *Are You My Mother?* could be described as autotheoretical, given its integration of autobiography alongside layered narratives of citations: the citations are of writers, theorists, and artists throughout history with whom Bechdel identifies. In an autotheoretical manner, with a form structured through intertextual identification and an ensuing parallel narrative structure, Bechdel positions her own narrative of her relationship with her mom alongside narratives that she finds generative points of connection with from throughout history: this includes stories of Winnicott, Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, with some of the stories pressing up against Bechdel's own life (her rejection letter from Rich, for example, becomes a motivating event in the story).

Identifying with Woolf's proclaimed "obsession" with her parents (Bechdel, *Mother* 152), for example, Bechdel places Woolf's process of writing *To The Lighthouse* beside her own process of writing the book *Are You My Mother*. Bechdel extracts similarities and theorizes them as she considers broader philosophical questions around autobiography and feminist writing practice. Just as Nelson and Harry are divided on issues of language and writing—a matter with

¹⁸ Bechdel presents a relevant example of another queer feminist writer/artist working autotheoretically, who has also confronted what to do when the philosophical challenges of working autobiographically and incorporating those with whom one is involved whether romantically, sexually, platonically, or as family.

which Nelson opens *The Argonauts* (4)—so too are Bechdel and her mother divided on the proper place of the autobiographical “self” in writing (Bechdel, *Mother* 178). Bechdel’s mother, like literary critic Helen Vendler whom she cites, is of the view that “Some things are private” (178) and that “The self has no place in good writing” (200). Bechdel, on the other hand, says that sometimes you have to be more personal and specific in order to be universal.

She hones in on these “private” matters in her graphic novels—first, the story of her father’s queerness and eventual suicide in *Fun Home*, and now the story of her relationship with her mother, processing them through an autotheoretical practice that, like Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, engages citation to foster inter-subjective relationships between lives and texts. In an attempt at moral responsibility, even as Bechdel demonstrates how she is going against her mother’s wishes in writing about her, Bechdel includes in the book the protracted process of her unpacking these issues during private sessions with her psychotherapist. Through parallelism of narratives, characters, concepts, and artworks, Nelson’s and Bechdel’s autotheoretical texts place their “personal” experience within a greater discursive, social, and political context. Grappling with these questions in similarly autotheoretical ways, Bechdel and Nelson bring a candour to their work, even as their work is performative and constructed. They do so by including in the text itself the responses of their loved ones about whom they are writing, demonstrating that they are at least aware of the issues that a practice of writing autotheoretically presents to their lives.

Honesty and truth are slippery terms. Like sincerity, it is difficult to talk about honesty when it comes to performative and post-conceptual aesthetic practices. One way to do so is to consider honesty as its own rhetoric—one that the writer or artist performs to different effects. Speaking in reference to “personal criticism”—a marginal practice that feminist academics

dabbled in alongside more legitimized modes of doing scholarship in the 1980s through the early 1990s—Miller states:

By the risks of its writing, personal criticism embodies a pact, like the "autobiographical pact" binding writer to reader in the fabrication of self-truth, that what is at stake matters also to others: somewhere in the self-fiction of the personal voice is a belief that the writing is worth the risk. In this sense, by turning its authorial voice into spectacle, personal writing theorizes the stakes of its own performance: a personal materialism. (*Personal* 22)

Resembling autotheory in its impulses and effects, Miller's personal criticism is predicated on the formation of a relationship between writer and reader that, "like the 'autobiographical pact'" we find in genres like life writing and memoir, performatively constitutes a "self-truth" that "matters also to others" (22). Like a good postmodernist, Miller understands that any kind of subjective writing practice is performative: that the writing "I" constitutes itself through the act of writing. And yet, there is this generative tension between "the fabrication of self-truth" on the one hand, and "the self-fiction of the personal voice" (22) on the other, that we find both in personal criticism and in more recent autotheoretical texts. Something that autotheory might be better positioned to do than genres like memoir is the reflexive act of "turning its authorial voice into spectacle" and, in turn "theoriz[ing] the stakes of its own performance" (22). Considered in this light, Nelson's disclosures of her faulty thoughts and limitations might not be to rouse pathos or preemptively protect herself from criticism so much as to establish the performative "personal materialism" (22) that Miller speaks of here. Nelson theorizes the stakes of her own disclosures (considered within the larger contexts in which she writes) through the act of disclosing.

The use of transparency or, to put it another way, disclosure in feminist autotheoretical work varies greatly between writers. For example, although nearly two decades separate Kraus's

I Love Dick from Nelson's *The Argonauts*, both books have received a great deal of attention from a twenty-first century millennial readership. In the previous chapter I theorized the feminist politics of disclosure in Kraus's *I Love Dick*, and the ways in which Kraus's disclosing of the bad behaviour of men is a prophetic anticipation of feminist "whisper networks" and, now, the ultra-public #MeToo movement (Heller). In both texts, a female narrator addresses a beloved, and the beloved or "object of desire" to whom the text is addressed is a named and known public figure. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson writes to Harry Dodge, the artist and her real-life partner, addressing Dodge as "you" in the text's opening pages (1). While Nelson's narrative is grounded in her "actual" experience of being in a romantic, committed, and consensual relationship with Harry, Kraus engages in a performative obsession, interpellating Dick as the driving conceit of her written text and, now, Jill Soloway's on-screen adaptation for *Amazon*, without his consent. Kraus's encounter with Dick is a heterosexual one which could be read as a queering of heterosexuality through its hyperbolic—even campy—parody, while Nelson's is a self-reflexively queer relationship with a genderfluid partner who is "neither male nor female" (Nelson, *Argonauts* 14). In both texts, the theoretical context of Butler's performativity shapes an approach to heterosexuality that is critical, with the writers approaching heterosexuality as a performative construct. As readers, we understand that the beloved other that Nelson invokes in *The Argonauts* is grounded in a "reality" outside of the text, whereas the "Dick" that Kraus invokes is grounded less in "reality" and more in a hyperbolic performance of the real, a "real" that touches on delusion—or is it metaphor?

Nelson's practice of autotheory differs from the autotheory of fourth-wave feminist artists who use social media platforms like Instagram to inscribe themselves and their politics and their

art. Nelson distances her own practice from social media and other post-internet platforms, going so far as to state, “Instantaneous, non-calibrated, digital self-revelation is one of my greatest nightmares” (*Argonauts* 61). She explains how her decision to disengage from social media as a mode of autotheoretical expression—where the internet continues to serve as a space for the longstanding feminist “personal made public” (60)—comes from her anxieties around the “temptations and pressures” that come from having oneself “hoist(ed) ... onto the stage of Facebook” (61). Instead, Nelson continues to write herself and theorize in the pages of a book, where there is a different kind of temporality—a slowness, perhaps—that gives way to more thoughtfulness and consideration.

What is the rhetoric of honesty that Nelson is using? To what uses is this rhetoric being put in *The Argonauts*? Even as both *The Argonauts* and *I Love Dick* engage in what could be called a feminist politic of disclosure, disclosure for Nelson is less about outing the bad behaviour of others and more about disclosing her own limitations, problematics, complicities and imperfections. By positioning her work as being driven by a kind of Sedgwickian honesty, Nelson’s disclosures are more about revealing the slippages and gaps in contemporary practices of living, working, loving, writing, and theorizing as a feminist and as queer. By refusing to perform the perfectly correct feminism—such as we find in other autotheoretical texts, like Erin Wunker’s *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy*—Nelson makes space for the kinds of capaciousness and non-binary thinking that Sedgwick strove for in her work.

It is no question that this will open Nelson up to criticism, just as it has for Sedgwick. Paranoid readings of *The Argonauts* are not difficult to do: I can just as quickly critique the problematics of Nelson’s trans-appropriations as I can the problematics of her appropriations

(and preemptive defences) of giving her white baby an Indigenous name at the book's close (135), contextualizing my readings in a dutifully intersectional feminist analysis. I think much of the point of Nelson's text is to make space for the reparative as another way of reading, writing, conversing, thinking, and theorizing. And yet, I'm cognizant of how Nelson's rhetoric of honesty is a way of performing herself as someone who is relatable and self-aware as she constitutes her own politicized discourse of love for Harry. Nelson's rhetorical performance of honesty becomes a preemptive shield, discreetly defending the writer from more predictable feminist criticisms, including questions related to intersectionality and appropriation. Nelson does this through establishing a trustworthy narrator who is upfront about her own limitations; it is a version of the "nobody is perfect" defence that circulates within larger political and pop cultural debates.

Alongside the problematics of honesty and disclosure is the tension between autobiography and fictionalization, which I took up in Chapter 2 in relation to Kraus's proclamation that fictionalization is a kind of disingenuous mechanism that renders the more "truthfully" autobiographical as being aesthetically, politically, and ethically more desirable. Nicole Brossard's *Picture Theory* (1982), which emerged out of Brossard's experimental writing practices in 1970s Quebec, can be read as an autotheoretical antecedent to Nelson's *The Argonauts*; similarly opening her text with a Wittgensteinian citation—here, in the form of the book's title. Brossard plays with genre and form to write through queer (specifically lesbian) relationships. And yet, what might be autobiographically inspired is put through the prism of fictionalization, and this distinction between shrouding the autobiographical in or as the fictional is a notable distinction between Brossard's experimental writing in the 1970s-80s and Nelson's experimental writing in the 2010s. Might the move toward more explicit bridgings of theory and

autobiography as experimental and aesthetically relevant (in contrast to solely academic) work be something that the twenty-first century, and the American context, are both conducive to? I mention Brossard here as a reminder of the important, longstanding feminist practices of autotheoretical writing that precede recent texts like *The Argonauts* and *Testo Junkie*.

One of the texts that Nelson shares with Harry in the text's opening pages is "a fragment of a poem by Michael Ondaatje," (*Argonauts* 6) where the poem, though unnamed in this book, is Ondaatje's "The Cinnamon Peeler." On her choice of passage, which begins "Kissing the stomach/kissing your scarred/skin boat. History/is what you've travelled on/and take with you" (6), Nelson explains "I didn't send the fragment because I had in any way achieved its serenity. I sent it with the aspiration that one day I might—that one day my jealousy might recede, and I would be able to behold the names and images of others inked onto your skin without disjunct or distaste" (6). Here, Nelson introduces a tension between who she is and who she hopes to be, positioning the practice of citation as one of aspiration as much as a description of past or present circumstances. Striving to be better, works like *The Argonauts* and Sheila Heti's 2010 *How Should a Person Be?* engage ethical questions through the transcription of real-life anecdotes and conversations that the writer witnessed, overheard, participated in, or read; Heti's book, better described as auto-fictional than autotheoretical, asks this question of "How should a person be?" to reflect on ways of being in the world: in this way, these works return us to philosophy's roots—as a practice of reflecting on how to live well.

Nelson makes an effort at bringing a lived ethics to the space of theory (and vice versa), using the forms of a reparative autotheoretical practice to do so; one of the ways she does this is through disclosing her weaknesses and the desire to grow and become more emotionally mature

in her relationship. Committed to this project of releasing herself from jealousy's grip, Nelson processes issues of jealousy—a problem that is both philosophical (what is the nature of jealousy?) and personal (Nelson is troubled by her experiences of jealousy in her relationship with Harry)—Nelson turns to texts (lives and works) from history to gain perspective and insight on the topic. Given the conceit of *The Argonauts* as one focused on couples—drawing its form from Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* and framing the narrative as Nelson writing to, through, or for Harry—it is not surprising that the intertexts Nelson turns to for insight are couples from history, specifically literary and theory couples: Stein and Toklas, George and Mary Oppen, Deleuze and Parnet. This is part of a practice that I call intertextual identification¹⁹ that is characteristic of much autotheoretical feminist work. In autotheory, identification in reading practices becomes a way of making connections between one's own experiences and the experiences of others in order to process, theorize, and engender new insights into particular issues and phenomena. Nelson finds strange solace in identifying with the works of literary and artistic couples from history, turning to anecdotal knowledge of jealousy in Toklas's and Stein's relationship as part of her autotheoretical practice of theorizing her own experience of jealousy; the strategy of intertextual identification is as much an affective drive as it is a critically generative way of reading and writing autotheoretically.

One of the questions that arises here is: Does being honest about one's own limitations and theoretical shortcomings preemptively defend you from criticism? Within the context of feminist theory and practice, is this kind of self-effacing honesty rhetorically or philosophically

¹⁹ I introduced the notion of intertextual identification in relation to Chris Kraus's work in Chapter 2, where I read Kraus's tendency to draw parallels between her own experience and the experiences of others—both from her own life and from the history of literature, art, theory, and criticism (included as citations and, often, as anecdotes included beside her own lived anecdotes)—as a core part of her argumentation.

effective or subversive, or does it re-enforce what is stereotypically expected of women? As *The Argonauts* engages, ethical and political questions related to feminist disclosures and the act of writing with, to, for, or about an other are thorny, whether the author's or artist's approach is one of performative antagonism (Kraus v. Dick) or of a sincerity (which is also performative). Similar to the distinction Nelson draws between who she is and who she hopes to become through the practice of thinking and writing autotheoretically, ideals of relationality, intersubjectivity, and intimacy exist in the text as kinds of ideals that Nelson strives toward. Nelson admits her own deep-seated resistance to sharing authorship (*Argonauts* 47), even as she populates her text with the voices of others. But what about those practices where the loved one does speak? Or those practices where the authorship is shared between collaborators?

Autotheory as Queer Feminist Collaboration

While *The Argonauts* engages the anxieties and ambivalences of shared authorship through a practice of autotheory, there are other recent works of queer feminist autotheory that embrace collaboration. To reflect on this, I turn to the work of Canadian visual artists Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue, who maintain active individual and collaborative artist practices in addition to living together as lovers/spouses and working together as the feminist art collective FAG. Considering the ways that the artists perform citationality as a queer feminist practice from within an autotheoretical and collaborative working relationship, I turn to two recent exhibitions: first, the 2014 exhibition as FAG entitled *We Can't Compete*, and then their 2015 exhibition as Mitchell and Logue entitled *I'm Not Myself At All*.

One of the most apt uses of queer and feminist theory as a performative material in an exhibition was in *We Can't Compete* at the University of Lethbridge art gallery in Alberta. The exhibition included two of FAG's crocheted banners, a video, and mixed-media sculptural works as part of a larger installation. The focal point of the installation is at a corner of the gallery where stacks of colourful binders and books of theory²⁰ sit on top of two large speakers, which play songs on a loop by the band Abstract Random. This sculpture is site-specific: the artists sourced the materials from around the University of Lethbridge's campus: the books from a Psychology Department book sale, and the academic texts and catalogues on feminist and queer art were from the University's library holdings (Mitchell and Logue, *Compete* 75). Emerging from the base of this mixed-media, found object sculpture are floor-length strips of red tape, like vibration lines or sun rays beaming out from these theory-binder-speakers. Visually, the tape lines draw the viewer's attention to this corner sculpture as the source of the installation's energy: its metaphorical heat source. By configuring theory as the heart of the installation, a metaphor tied as much to affect as it is to circulation, the artists' underscore its importance to sustaining their practice.

This sculpture introduces a conceit that reverberates through Mitchell's and Logue's art: the foregrounding of theory as an art object, material, or medium within an art work, whether it is the literal text included in the exhibition (as it is in *We Can't Compete*), or mimetic reproductions of the texts (as drawings and as sculptures) as we find in *I'm Not Myself At All*. Curated by Sarah E.K. Smith, *I'm Not Myself At All* is an exhibition by Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue staged at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, Ontario in 2015. It marks

²⁰ There are books of feminist theory, queer theory, and art theory related to issues in contemporary art.

Logue and Mitchell's first collaborative exhibition as artists. Each has exhibited extensively as solo artists, and they have collaborated as feminist art collectors, curators, teachers, and community organizers under the umbrella of the Feminist Art Gallery, or FAG: a multi-sited space which they run out of their home in the west end of Toronto. In her exhibition essay "Bringing Queer Theory into Queer Practice," curator Smith argues that this collaborative exhibition is a good example of queer theory being brought into queer practice, both at the level of the artwork and at the level of the artists' lived domestic realities as partners, collaborators, and cat mothers: "These self-referential works, intimately connected to the artists' lives, forge a connection between domestic queer realities and feminist and queer discourse (both historic and contemporary)—ultimately bringing queer theory into queer practice" (Smith, "Queer" 30). Smith's description of Mitchell's and Logue's works as "reflect(ing) critically on the artists' lived experience" (30) brings to mind an autotheoretical approach to contemporary art-making; in addition to the artists critically taking up the politics, aesthetics, and theoretics of their own lives, they explicitly engage with and cite works of theory—most often feminist and queer theory, but also some art theory—as core materials in the show.

With Mitchell and Logue's installation, the theory book as a found object takes on a queer resonance. The artists mimetically reproduce books of theory as a structuring motif that brings the different media and themes together. Through hand-made processes of mimetic engendering, the artists elevate the feminist and queer theory text to the status of an idol, transforming it into a maximalist object that functions both as part of the larger art installation and as its own work of sculpture. Creating strategic alliances between 1970s lesbian feminism and post-2000s queer theory, the artists' choices of texts to include in their artworks are grounded

in their contemporary queer feminist politics. Theirs is a strategy which seeks to honour and preserve the contributions of second-wave lesbian feminisms while being aware of the limitations of such texts—for example, issues of racial diversity and trans-inclusion—and the benefits of staging inter-generational conversations in theory. Here, it is José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) and Monique Wittig's *The Straight Mind* (1992) that the artists reproduce at a larger-than-life scale in the gallery space. Cvetkovich describes the artists' juxtapositions as “manifest(ing) the sensibility of Mitchell's Deep Lez manifesto . . . which calls for new combinations of 1970s lesbian feminism and contemporary third wave, trans, and queer activisms” (Cvetkovich, *Forbidden* 604). Perhaps riffing on the bemusing play of Sedgwick's gender identification, Mitchell and Logue draw Muñoz's portrait as an elegy to him in their video, with the dates of Muñoz's birth and death marking a project of mourning; smiling, Muñoz holds up a small placard that reads “NOBODY KNOWS I'M A LESBIAN.” Whether this is a comment on ally-ship, a posthumous granting of Muñoz an honorary lesbian status, or another kind of hidden “truth” about the writer remains gaily ambiguous.

To be sure, where the autotheoretical valence of *I'm Not Myself At All* becomes the most apparent is in the artist's mimetic reproduction of theory texts, which serve as structuring motifs, indexical reference points, and symbolic-material art objects within the playfully intertextual fabric of the exhibition. The artists extend a feminist practice of intertextual transparency and citationality that we find in autotheoretical works like Nelson's *The Argonauts* to a cheeky endpoint: hailed within Mitchell's maximalist sculpture and immersive installation work, theoretical and literary texts—cited in Mitchell's and Logue's work as key, formative references

for their own lived practices as artists, feminists, and scholars—become literal material components of the artwork. In contemporary art after Duchamp, it is not uncommon to incorporate found objects into an artwork, or to frame a found object as a work of art.

Mimetically produced, the theory texts are referenced—with indexical reference to the title, author, and cover art—but are not available themselves for reading in the gallery space. The viewers are invited to view the source texts that have been so formative for these artists whose works, autotheoretical as they are, are grounded in the artists' lives. Layering the citation as an indexical gesture on top of the traditions of conceptualism in contemporary art, where conceptualism can be described as “the aestheticization of indexes” (Vaughan), Mitchell and Logue’s meta world is less elusive or “high brow” than it is playfully kitsch and imaginatively mundane. We can see the traces of the artist’s hand that created this reproduction of theory books whose influence on their work the artists foreground *as* artwork. Rather than placing the books themselves into the gallery space, the artists hand make mimetic versions of the books that are joyfully enlarged, standing with a vulnerable strength as papier-mâché objects. The queer mimesis of their work engenders a space that is joyful and otherworldly: it is like you are Alice stepping through the looking glass, but instead of Mad Hatters you find towering feminist queer theory books made from gluten-free papier-mâché. In the exhibition, the artists’ performance for video (*Her’s Is Still a Dank Cave*), which features the artists as performers, is bookended by the macro, mimed Muñoz and the Wittig texts, with the theory texts quite literally framing or bookending the video that plays on the screen.

Juxtaposing theoretical reflections as text on the screen with the performing bodies of the artists, the video *Her’s Is Still a Dank Cave* is as performative as it is autotheoretical. The artists

juxtapose lines from Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* with images from the artists' lives and art; dressed in "flesh-coloured" nylon body suits, the artists lie in a cozy heap among other nylon-bodies, those of the constructed "womyn" that the artists have created from textiles and other haptic materials. Famous quotations from feminist theory are iterated to playful effect on the screen: "One is not born, but becomes a tabby," reads the kitschy text on the video, where the collaborators's and partners's house-cat features as a key character and queerly non-anthropocentric site of vision in the video.²¹ The other objects in the room include a papier-mâché ball of yarn—another mimetic object, made larger than life and alluding to the partners' cat and Mitchell's long-standing textile practice—and a gigantic papier-mâché pink highlighter.

Mitchell and Logue configure the act of reading theory as performative, intimate, and collaborative. In a documentation photograph from the performance²² iteration of *Her's Is Still a Dank*, Mitchell and Logue appear in front of the green screen, with the floor under them lined with material in a similar chroma key green: an immersive space is created, within which the artists' can playfully perform for the camera. Logue stands, holding a gigantic pink "highlighter," while Mitchell reclines on her side on a piece of enlarged letter-sized paper, one hand resting her head up and the other hand pointing down to a line to be highlighted. Standing 152" high and made of gluten-free papier-mâché, the highlighter that Logue holds is humorously large, pink, and phallic, something that the artist must wield to achieve a purpose. The artists transform the solo act of reading and discerning meaning from a theory text into an act that is best done with

²¹ In her exhibition essay, Love theorizes Mitchell's and Logue's use of a low to the ground, view from the floor perspective in their video *Her's Is Still A Dank Cave: Crawling Towards a Queer Horizon*: "The queer future as Logue and Mitchell picture it is low: low to the ground, low key, low culture, low down. You can't fly into this queer future: you have to crawl" ("Low" 41).

²² Parts of the video were sourced from the live performance that the artists did as part of their residency at the AGO.

two. With a sense of humour about feminist discourse and its discontents, Mitchell dons a white tee-shirt that reads “I’m With Problematic,” with the screen-printed sign of a pointing hand mimicking Mitchell’s own pointing hand below. The artists work together in front of the green screen, on which written texts from feminist theory are blown up in Mitchell’s characteristically maximalist style; Logue positions the mock highlighter to touch the place on the “page” (the green screen) where Mitchell is pointing, and proceeds to underline. As Logue moves the massive highlighter, carefully balancing it with her body, the text on the “page” begins to be highlighted in yellow; using performance for the camera, the artists embody the scene of reading theory as something intimate and shared, something laborious that requires support.

On the other side of the exhibition, we find the site-specific drawing *Recommended Reading* (2010), a mimetic reproduction of the artists’ personal library featuring meticulous drawings of book spines that have been photocopied into wallpaper. The work functions as queer feminist canon formation, with titles of representative texts from second-wave, third-wave, and lesbian feminisms, as well as some representation of trans and bisexual feminisms, lining the walls. The title *Recommended Reading* uses the rhetoric of a course syllabus to invite viewers to take note of the titles and read the books at their leisure: it is not a necessary rule, as “required reading” would suggest, but rather more informal suggestions for texts that the artists believe you’ll benefit from having read. This is not the first time that Mitchell has mimetically reproduced book shelves through the practice of drawing by hand; she was commissioned to draw a shelf specifically of Sedgwick books for the cover of the 2011 issue of the peer-reviewed queer studies journal *GLQ*, an issue which includes a co-authored essay between Cvetkovich and Mitchell about Mitchell’s 2010 installation *A Girl’s Journey into the Well of Forbidden*

Knowledge at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Cvetkovich, *Forbidden* 606). In her installation for the AGO, Mitchell re-created a version of the reading room of the Lesbian Herstory Archives by covering the walls with trompe l’oeil wallpaper that displays a lesbian feminist library. Once again, although the physical books themselves are not present, the mimetic reproduction of their spines acknowledges that the visual look and feel of books can be as much a part of their magic as the worlds inside the covers announced by their titles (Cvetkovich, *Forbidden* 603). In this iteration, Mitchell performs the act of reading theory as collaborative and intimate through the use of sculpture: what Cvetkovich refers to as “Mitchell’s Lady Sasquatches” (603)—mimetic figures of cisgender women, or female-appearing bodies with vaginas.

The use of vaginal imagery, or what curator Smith describes as “central core imagery” (“Queer” 28-29)—taking the term from second-wave feminist artists Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago—has been a continual point of contention between Mitchell and larger queer feminist communities in Canada and abroad. Smith defends the artists' decision to portray their own genitalia—which, as cisgender lesbian women, is represented by the vagina, vulva, and clitoris—in ways that span the more explicitly representational (as with the lady sasquatches, and the nylon-bodied figures that lie with Mitchell and Logue in their *Dank Cave* video and the *A Cluster of Us* performance (2015)) and abstract (as with the needlework on plastic piece *Warm Splayed Illumination Sunrise* (2015)): “In an era when bodies continue to be sites for the inscription of identity, Logue and Mitchell do not shy away from engaging with the power of this strategy—visually or in their tongue-in-cheek references to the dank cave—despite the tensions it brings up” (29). And yet, the artists' use of vaginal imagery as personal content in their work is, of course, received in a political context in which—given issues of trans-exclusion in feminist

and lesbian feminist communities historically—such imagery is considered by some to be exclusionary. Indeed, while Smith shies away from naming what these tensions are in her essay, Love makes it explicit: one of the problems in how Mitchell’s and Logue’s work has been received relates to the critiques of trans-exclusion that lesbian feminists like Mitchell continue to come up against. Love makes reference to how Mitchell’s *Killjoy’s Kastle* lesbian feminist haunted house, a large-scale installation that has been staged in Toronto and Los Angeles, came under fire for its use of castration imagery and other visuals seen as either exclusionary or triggering for transgender and non-binary visitors (Love, “Low” 40-41).

The work of feminism is very rarely without struggle, and Mitchell and Logue’s exhibition is one of frictive intimacy and imperfection. It is difficult to take in a contemporary queer feminist artwork without considering those issues that are particularly charged for queer feminisms today, including the presence and agency of transgender, genderqueer, and non-binary folks; the artists’ decision to foreground vaginal imagery opens them up to some predictable criticisms. Mitchell and Logue maintain a focus on inter-generational feminisms in their practice, preserving the legacy of those feminisms which might today be seen as out of date given issues of diversity and inclusivity. The meta-narrative that continues in feminism today is one which assumes a teleological evolution from less “woke” to more “woke” (intersectional) feminism—whether this is necessarily accurate is another, much more complicated question. Yet the artists’ preservation of historical feminist texts is not without its ambivalence; Love writes of how Logue and Mitchell stage the second wave as a kind of “historical hangover” (40-41), even as the artists include many of the second-wave works in *Recommended Reading*.

Though Sedgwick is not cited as explicitly in Mitchell and Logue's work as she is in *The Argonauts*, her contributions to queer feminist thinking around the relationship between pleasure and knowledge—specifically when it comes to theorizing—haunts their installation. Responding to *I'm Not Myself At All*, Heather Love raises questions about the body of work that could be asked of autotheory as contemporary feminist practice more generally, pointing ultimately to the inextricability of “what you love and what you know” (43):

One of the key questions that *Her's Is Still a Dank Cave* asks is how we can tell the difference between what you love and what you know. If practice presents an alternative to ‘traditional quantitative and qualitative scholarly research methods,’ it always raises the question of what kind of knowledge intimacy can yield. How do we know when we are engaged in practice-based research and when we are just living? Is extracting meaning from everyday life the richest relation we can have to it? (43-44)

These are texts that mean something to these artists—texts that mean something theoretically but also affectively, socially, politically, ethically, and autobiographically. These are texts that the artists recommend others read, watch, engage with, based on how influential they were on the artists themselves; the practice of reading and citing these texts is, Mitchell and Logue emphasize, as much “practice-based research” as it is “just living” (Love and Smith 46).

As a source of knowledge, consciousness-raising, and political-aesthetic-ethical becoming, Mitchell and Logue stage the theory text as the site where their different roles in the world—educator/Professor, artist, community activist, art curator, art collector, writer, lesbian, cat mom, feminist, neighbour—come together. It is not simply a fetishizing of theory—though, in a winking way, it is that too (blown up in size, the texts assert their dominance with the lightness of hand-brushed paint and papier-mâché)—but a foregrounding of the importance of

feminist and queer theory to the practice of living and working as queer feminist artists, for whom the ongoing labour of bridging theory and practice is imperative. In her emphasis on the need to extend beyond critique, hooks's call is one that resembles Sedgwick's call for a move toward the reparative in reading practices—especially for those who are “paranoid-tending” and for those who love theory (Sedgwick, *Touching* 150). In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks explains how theory might be reclaimed as “necessary practice” for feminists—especially for women of colour and Black feminists involved in “revolutionary black liberation struggles” (69):

Within revolutionary feminist movements, within revolutionary black liberation struggles, we must continually claim theory as necessary practice within a holistic framework of liberatory activism. We must do more than call attention to ways theory is misused. We must do more than critique the conservative and at times reactionary uses some academic women make of feminist theory. We must actively work to call attention to the importance of creating a theory that can advance renewed feminist movements, particularly highlighting that theory which seeks to further feminist opposition to sexism, and sexist oppression. Doing this, we necessarily celebrate and value theory that can be and is shared in oral as well as written narrative. (69-70)

Adjacent to her artistic practice, Mitchell teaches at York University, where she teaches in the Department of Women and Gender Studies. Her courses such as “Feeling Queerly About Feminist Art” take inspiration from hooks's theory, emphasizing the imperative of intersectionality in approaching political and aesthetic issues, and incorporating field trips, studio visits with artists, and theoretical writing as ways of understanding contemporary feminist and queer art practices. Just as Mitchell's and Logue's collaborations as FAG destabilize the conventions of present-day capitalism, so too do Mitchell's practices in the university classroom shake up the conventions of academic graduate seminars, which often foster competition over support: for example, in her graduate course on Queer Affect, Mitchell brings a crock pot to class

and each week a student, or small group of students, is responsible for cooking food in the crock pot and nourishing their peers in this physical-communal way.

Focusing on the work of FAG, Maiko Tanaka cites Katie King's work on "critical feminist bibliographic practices" to differentiate what FAG is doing with citations in their participatory performances from what the patriarchal Western models of citation dictate: "Following King, a critical feminist bibliographic practice asks what and for whom are we invested in when we cite, what do we consider having value, and what kinds of research can be produced?" (Tanaka 47). A feminist approach to citation can be understood as one that extends the citation as an institutional and legalistic device (one that we use to avoid plagiarism, for example) and as a means of recognition (the author or the theorist, whose work is valued by the given system). In the context of contemporary feminist practices, the citation becomes a means of tracing both the source of an idea—theoretical and conceptual lineages—and relational/kinship and affective lineages. In Tanaka's view, FAG's practice exemplifies this kind of citation practice, where citation is a means of "making visible the lineages and legacies of inspiration and support that make up a feminist art community" (47). This is not unlike what Nelson is doing with her citational practice of naming names in the visible margins of the page in *The Argonauts*, where she mimetically transforms the structure and conceit of Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* with the legacies of feminist and queer feminist theory and practices alongside more standard canonical thinkers, such as Wittgenstein.

That the person citing an idea or a text has an affective, lived, embodied, and particular relation to that text is an idea that feminist theory and scholarship is well accustomed to. Jeanne Randolph, the Canadian artist, psychoanalyst, and critic, proposed the term "ficto-criticism" to

describe her approach to writing art criticism and other kinds of critical response in a context of tight-knit community where one might not have the kinds of “critical distance” or unbiased views of the artist’s work that a critic is thought to have. Writing in the context of the Queen West scene in 1980s Toronto, Randolph practiced ficto-criticism as a way of making transparent her connections to the artists whose work she was writing about—be they lovers, friends, friends of lovers—and transmuting this point in performative ways.

The custom of naming one’s friends and peers—other artists, poets, or public intellectuals—can be seen across the history of twentieth century experimental work, including that of the New York School poets in the 1950s and the Fluxus artists in the 1960s. In the written works of Frank O’Hara and John Cage, for example, we find the names of people the artists were associating with at the time—many of whom are now well-known as key figures in twentieth century art and literature. What might seem like name-dropping now was actually the documentation of community; these names were not names to be dropped so much as figures to be recorded as part of a given art scene and burgeoning community within which poets like O’Hara—whose *Lunch Poems* exemplify the growing tendency among the avant-garde to elevate the mundane as art, and who worked as a visual arts curator at the MoMA in New York alongside his practice as a poet—were moving in. Cage’s “Where Are We Eating? And What Are We Eating? (38 Variations on a Theme by Alison Knowles)” is another example of an experimental poem as documentation of a community, with performance artists and dancers like Yoko Ono, Alison Knowles, and Cage’s partner Merce Cunningham named within the larger conceit of, quite literally, what Cage and the Cunningham dance group were eating during their American tour. Cage cites artists and writers like Thoreau (Cage 88) alongside his own bodily reflections

on the state of his health and the effects of the different diets—such as the macrobiotic diet suggested to him by Shizuko Yamamoto—on his body.

Feminist citation practices, Tanaka argues, can also have the capacity to provide “nourishment” for those who have experienced marginalization or displacement by the dominating systems of thought, like women of colour or Indigenous people (49). To illustrate, Tanaka provides an anecdote of her experience writing letters to her friend, a fellow woman of colour, where the letters are rife with citations to literary and theory heavy-hitters like Claudia Rankine; these letters, she argues, make space for hers and her friends’s own anecdotal experiences and theoretical reflections to be configured as legitimate sources to be referenced and shared. “In an academic context, the purpose of citation is to acknowledge the sources and ideas often attributed to authority figures and seminal texts,” Tanaka explains, “In the context of our letters, citation expands this practice in multiple directions outside of the academy. In our letters, we acknowledge the source of our prose and situate its significance. But in my letters, I also acknowledge the reader—my friend—which in turn opens up the potential to situate the reader’s own experiences as also being significant” (47). Tanaka extends Barthes’s argument from “The Death of the Author” which names the reader as a co-producer of a text’s meaning. For Tanaka and Barthes, the reader’s or audience’s lived experience is significant to the ongoing, multi-directional process of citation practices that come to constitute meaning in culture.

The question of whose voice constitutes a legitimate “source” to be cited is one that bears consideration through an intersectional feminist perspective. As discussed above, this question emerges in *The Argonauts* when Nelson cites her lover, the visual artist Harry alongside other queer and queer feminist thinkers. It also undergirds Zoe Todd’s discussion of the place of

Indigenous scholarship within Canadian intellectual institutions, wherein she cites her own reflections as an emerging Métis scholar alongside Ahmed's writings on feminist citation:

We, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and artists alike, tend to cite non-Indigenous thinkers before Indigenous ones because the currency of words within the academy demands it. This is something that Sara Ahmed critiques in her work on the politics of citation as a 'citational relational' that privileges mostly the voices of white, male actors, and which she describes 'as a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies.' Thinking *with* Ahmed's work, I argue that in dealing with Indigenous ontologies, citation is also a *resuscitation* of specific ways of framing legal orders and cosmologies themselves. As an Indigenous feminist, I seek through my work to revive and enliven the thinkers and worlds that honour and acknowledge the lives, laws and language of Indigenous peoples as distinct and concrete intellectual traditions in Canada. (17)

Todd highlights the issue of valuation, referring to "the currency" of citations within academic institutions. Like Sedgwick's spatial positioning of "beside," Todd places herself as "Thinking *with* Ahmed's work," citing Ahmed's work while asserting her own commitment as an Indigenous feminist to enlivening those sources and texts—"lives, laws, and language" (Todd 17)—that the colonizing culture has sought to deaden. For Indigenous feminism, then, a feminist approach to citation is one grounded as much in "resuscitation" as it is in kinship, community-building, and nourishment for individuals and collectives.

On December 30, 2015, Bhanu Kapil tweets "'Citation is feminist memory.'—Sara Ahmed." Citing a fellow feminist writer and woman of colour in a tweet about feminist citation, Kapil demonstrates how practices of citing theory have extended to online social media platforms as a mode of contemporary feminist networking and disseminating ideas. By stating that "citation is feminist memory," Ahmed (and, iteratively, Kapil) suggests that there is a shared archive, a kind of textual collective unconscious for feminists that takes shape as citation. Ahmed

configures the citation as integral to the preservation of feminist history (or “herstory”)—a diaphanous history dependent on these de-centralized, collective, ongoing processes of citing utterances, ideas, and texts. Reviewing Soloway’s *Amazon Video* adaptation of *I Love Dick*, McKenzie Wark writes that “The no-future sensibility of punk is now the general condition, which is also one of no-past” (Wark, “Dick”); the works of Nelson, Mitchell, and Logue seem to actively resist both tendencies: turning to the past (through citation) becomes a means of theorizing and envisioning a future through queer feminist world-making.

Moving against the tides of neoliberalism, which continually places us in competition with each other (whether we are scholars, writers, academics, artists, curators, and so on), FAG proclaims another way of being in the world: “WE CAN’T COMPETE. WE WON’T COMPETE,” read two large, colourful, hand-crocheted banners hanging in the R. Samuel McLaughlin Gallery of the Art Gallery of Ontario. I came across the works during FAG’s artist residency with the AGO in 2015, though the four protest banners have been hanging there for a few years after a brief intervention at the Tate Modern in London and the 2014 installation at the University of Lethbridge gallery. While the first two banners pronounce the artists’ refusal of competition—first as a constative, then as a performative utterance (binding them, like a promise)—the last two pronounce a more paradoxical kind of endurance: “WE CAN’T KEEP UP. WE WON’T KEEP DOWN.” Upholding a queer feminist politic of failure, such as that articulated by Halberstam, FAG performs the work of feminist refusal as queer protest—one that is as cozy and kitsch as it is steadfast in its message.

While FAG’s work foregrounds citationality as nourishment and community building, so too does Black feminist artist and filmmaker Cauleen Smith’s work foreground citationality as a

collective practice of community building: but Smith's is a community predicated on armour and defence. In her *Human_3.0 Reading List* (2015), Smith draws out the covers of theory books using graphite or dark graphite and acrylic on graph paper. Working within the context of the Black Lives Matter movement in America, Smith maintains that Black people are "engaged in combat without the proper armor": but in place of weapons or defence gear, Smith advocates study and conversation:

And so I declare once more: Black people are engaged in combat without the proper armor. In addition to gas masks and kevlar jackets, and smart phone video, we require inoculations that repel the seductions of corporate servitude. I offer a this as an action:

STUDY. Deep and active study.

Supplemented with CONVERSATION engaged in with the intention of producing RESISTANCE. (Smith, *Reading*)

Available as digital versions/scans online, Smith's drawings are framed with her *Human_3.0 Reading List - The Manifesto*, which articulates the impulse behind the project. Smith emphasizes the importance of reading books (of theory and literature) as consciousness-raising and mobilization for Black folks in America: "Smith observes with great interest and enthusiasm, the emergence of new leadership around ending state-sanctioned violence against black people. The rhetoric of this movement exists within a lineage of activism which has been informed by the lucid contributions of artists like James Baldwin and Nina Simone, to name just a couple" (Smith and Stewart). Smith emphasizes that this list is not intended to "make activists," but to "cultivate black consciousness which then inevitably defines and shapes and guides the

actions and decisions we make as we shape and build our world” (Smith and Stewart): this distinction underlines how an autotheoretical practice is grounded in the politics of everyday life.

Not unlike Nelson and FAG, Smith believes in the possibility of a better future, and her work stems from the intersectional feminist necessity of world-making: a world-making project grounded firmly and urgently in the concerns that Black women, men, and transgender folks are facing in America today. As many queer and feminist artists, theorists, writers, and scholars after Sedgwick have come to realize, the reparative is very much invested in a politics and aesthetics of queer possibility.²³ Purporting to refuse either afro-pessimism or afro-futurism, Smith affirms the value of reading theory as something that has the capacity to change things for the better, grounding these affirmations in her own experience:

Naw, this ain’t no afro-pessimism shit. This reading list is for the Doers-Who-Think; not the academics who think there’s no point. This shit is for the afro-nihilist. Because the only reason to destroy a world is if we share the fundamental belief that a better world is possible. (Smith, *Reading*)

Smith’s approach to reading lists and citations is to draw the books out by hand: a very similar practice to what we see with Mitchell and Logue. While Mitchell and Logue tend to draw the spines of the books and, more rarely, the book covers (as we saw with the enlarged Muñoz and Wittig sculptures in *I’m Not Myself At All*), Smith draws out the covers of the books, complete with the cover art, the book’s title, the author, and other paratextual information contained on the cover. Smith’s illustrated reading list—consisting of the collection of mimetic cover drawings—includes works by Toni Morrison, Darko Suvin, Sylvia Wynter, Cedric J. Robinson, Moraga and

²³ To quote Sedgwick: “The dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality, after all, in which yesterday can’t be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that’s characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness . . . But isn’t it a feature of queer possibility—only a contingent feature, but a real one, and one that in turn strengthens the force of contingency itself—that our generational relations don’t always proceed in this lockstep?” (*Touching* 147).

Anzaldúa, Lorde, Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons, Gerda Lerner, Haraway, hooks, Fanon, Paula Giddings, Elizabeth Alexander, Lawrence W. Levine, Hafiz, DuBois, Samuel R. Delaney, Davis, Baldwin, Moten, Butler, and Muñoz. Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* stands as a point of connection between Smith's, Mitchell and Logue's and Nelson's practice, with his *Cruising Utopia* featuring as a key citation in the three different practices.

Smith emphasizes that her "abridged list" is just a starting point—"an offering of study"—for later contributions and sharing, encouraging those who come across her work—whether online, or in person at a cafe or book co-op in Chicago²⁴—to read and draw out their own. Importantly, this is a reading list that was first shared with Smith—during her years of study with such scholars and writers as Dr. Angela Davis²⁵—which she now shares with others in the hopes that people can access theory in other avenues besides Universities ("Our Universities cannot exist without enslaving students through debt," Smith writes in her manifesto, citing Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons*):

These 14²⁶ books are just the start, all that I had time to draw. These are some of the books that literally changed my life, saved my life and sustain my life, but also, (fair warning) make it difficult for me to go along, get along, look the other way, and gets mines. These behaviors neatly summarize the Neoliberal Code of Conduct, to which I say: Screw you. . . I share theses books in the hopes that through study and conversation exchange occurs and the inoculation sticks. Resistance is not futile. RESISTANCE IS ALL WE HAVE. (Smith, *Reading*)

²⁴ In collaboration with Lorelie Stewart at Gallery 400 in Chicago, Smith turned her drawings into postcards which she distributed freely to cafes and alternative book stores around Chicago (Smith and Stewart).

²⁵ "The books are an accumulation from years of study beginning as a student at San Francisco State (Black Culture and Black Consciousness by Lawrence Levine) to joining the All African Peoples' Revolutionary Party (W.E.B. Dubois, *The World and Africa* and Franz Fanon), to the classroom of Dr. Angela Davis where her deliberate presentation of the central role black women have had in shaping the very fabric of the United States (Paula Giddings' *When and Where I Enter*, and *Black Women in White America* edited by Gerda Lerner), forever informs my understanding of valued labor versus unearned entitlements" (Smith and Stewart).

²⁶ There were fourteen books completed at the time Cauleen Smith wrote this entry, though there are now twenty-three books drawn by her that are featured on her artist website (Smith, "Human_3.0").

There is an affect to drawing something out by hand. A form of haptic reproduction, copying something by drawing it has a different kind of affective charge than reproducing it with an iPhone photograph. Smith's and FAG's drawing of book covers of theory is performative and iterative: rather than have an uncanny effect due to very closely resembling the original, it is clear that these are drawings with differences from the "actual" text. Drawing these book covers takes time: Smith mentions the logistical parameters of life under neoliberalism when she explains that the books on the list are only those which she had the "time" to draw (Smith, *Reading*). Tactile and ritualistic, the practice of mimetically drawing out theory books makes them—academic as they might be—more approachable. By citing favourite theorists—whether in the margins, as Nelson does, or through hand-drawings, as FAG and Smith do—the artists and writers pay homage to their influences in ways that are affective and accessible.

For all these exciting feminist world-making practices, there is work left to do. In *I'm Not Myself At All*, Logue and Mitchell concede that "we may never touch queerness" (32-33), echoing Muñoz's sentiment that "Queerness is not here yet . . . we are not yet queer" (49). That queerness—and more specifically, queer feminism—is a horizon that we will continue to crawl towards, without the expectation that it can be attained, is the theme that pervades the exhibition. With animated books flying over bowls of hummus and celery sticks, to the artists holding a gigantic pink highlighter against a magnified computer screen, the autotheoretical video *Her's Is A Dank Cave: Crawling Towards a Queer Horizon* straddles the satirical and the sincere. Observing the sense of humour of Mitchell and Logue's video, Love states:

This odd mixture of movement and stasis is a characteristic of utopia as imagined by Muñoz and as realized by Logue and Mitchell. A passage from *Cruising Utopia* scrolls in reverse *Star Wars* style across the screen: "Queer is not yet here

yet./Queerness is ideality./Put another way,/ we are not yet queer./We may never touch queerness,/but we can feel it as the warm illumination/of a horizon imbued with potentiality.” (49)

Love’s critical positioning of *I’m Not Myself At All* resonates strongly with the theme of queer feminist futurity—grounded as much in family-making and queer domesticities as in theory—advanced by Nelson in *The Argonauts*. As Love describes Logue and Mitchell’s work as “a reckoning with the death of radical feminism and its haunting of the present” (49), Nelson seeks the dissolution of the very term “radical” in the name of a queer feminist future that is not so bound up in binaries. Nelson, as a queer woman, mother, and writer/theorist, seeks a queer feminist future that exists in the liminal space between the so-called radical queers and assimilationist homos; to quote Nelson, in one of the most succinct theoretical insights of *The Argonauts*, “Reproductive futurism needs no more disciples. But basking in the punk allure of ‘no future’ won’t suffice, either” (76). While Edelman’s *No Future* is not mentioned by Mitchell and Logue, it is repeatedly gestured to in their mention of queer futurity—as well as in the fact that the artists themselves do not have children, but engage in other kinds of queer mentorship through their practices as artists, educators, and activists. By emphasizing queerness as a horizon, as something which “is not here yet,” Mitchell and Logue’s work resembles the budding status of feminist queerness in Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, with both works being published/exhibited the same year (2015). In both, queerness remains something that has not yet arrived: it is a horizon-line, ever-receding. By placing Nelson’s work next to the works of visual artists engaging in similar practices of autotheory, with similar strategies of performative citationality, I highlight the ways in which *The Argonauts* is part of a larger community of feminist and queer

feminist writers, artists, and thinkers who are turning to autotheory as a mode that more capaciously embodies and integrates their own bodies, subjectivities, affects, and desires into the larger discourses and frameworks of theory and philosophy.

Beyond “Radical” and “Normative”

In *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory’s Defiant Subjects*, Mari Ruti summarizes the rift in queer theory today as one of “Edelmanian paranoia” versus “Sedgwickian reparation” (23). Ruti describes the rift between the anti-social turn in queer theory and the queer feminist affect tradition embodied by Sedgwick as a distinction between what Sedgwick, drawing from Klein, calls paranoid reading and reparative reading practices. Nelson’s *The Argonauts* can be read as a twenty-first century queer feminist response to the “antisocial turn” that runs through queer theory from the 1980s to the present. The antisocial turn, as articulated in texts like Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?” and Edelman’s *No Future*, theorizes a radical queer negativity that espouses, to varying degrees, the willful disintegration of the self and a refusal of the drive for reproductive futurity: or, the heteronormative imperative to procreate, an integral part of the ideology that Butler describes as “compulsory heterosexuality” (*Trouble* 35).

Those who write in an autotheoretical, feminist mode are often no stranger to failure. As a contemporary mode, autotheory exists at a time of pervasive precarity. The past few years have been particularly conducive to critical writing on failure from queer and feminist perspectives: Roxane Gay’s *Bad Feminist* (2014), for example, assuages feminist guilt by celebrating the contradictions of contemporary feminist life, while Ivan E. Coyote and Rae Spoon’s *Gender*

*Failure*²⁷ (2014) provides autobiographical vignettes in which the trans and gender non-conforming artists fail to succeed at performing socially prescribed gender roles correctly. Halberstam positions failure as a queer stance with political potential. Halberstam's is a form of "antisocial feminism" or "shadow feminism" that is anti-Oedipal, anti-humanist, and grounded in queer, postcolonial, and black feminisms (*Failure* 125-126). In describing their "shadow feminism" as antisocial, Halberstam aligns their feminism with the anti-social queer theory of Bersani and Edelman (*Failure* 110), who argue for a queer negativity that promotes a Lacanian self-shattering and a refusal of the drive toward futurity; indeed, the anti-social turn in queer theory has aligned itself with failure from the start, finding its subversive potential in its refusal to succeed in the eyes of the heteronormative patriarchal system that upholds reproductive futurity and the sanctity of the ego. And yet Halberstam's queer theory of failure revises key elements of the anti-social turn, seeking out "generative models of failure that do not posit two equally bleak alternatives," namely, "futurity and positivity in opposition to nihilism and negation" (Halberstam, *Failure* 120). Sharing Halberstam's desire to flesh out the liminal space between negativity and positivity, Nelson attempts to flesh out the space between so-called transgressive/radical queerness and hetero-/homo-normativity. "Reproductive futurism needs no more disciples. But basking in the punk allure of 'no future' won't suffice, either," Nelson writes, after citing Sedgwick, Edelman, Mary Lambert, Catherine Opie, and Fraiman on the preceding pages (*Argonauts* 76). Nelson questions the feasibility of a normative/transgressive binary, staking her own claims to making space for newly queer—perhaps non-binary in the most ample sense—family-making practices and an understanding of maternal erotics that exceeds Freud.

²⁷ Coyote and Spoon are likely drawing from Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, which states in the Introduction that "gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals" (4).

The conceit of transformation at the heart of *The Argonauts* is founded in Nelson's juxtaposition of the pregnant body and the transgender body in a way that positions them both as embodied sites of transformation. Within the narrative structure of *The Argonauts*, a text which foregrounds processes of becoming even in its Barthesian title, the transformations that Nelson's own pregnant body undergoes fold in to the transformations that she perceives Harry's body undergoing while he takes testosterone injections and undergoes top surgery. Nelson queers the pregnant body by placing the narrative of her pregnancy beside the narrative of Harry's FtM gender transformation. In doing so, Nelson presents a queer narrative of two bodies transforming in close proximity to each other: turning to autotheoretical strategies of intertextual intimacy and identification, the quintessentially "queer" narrative of Harry's transformation on T is juxtaposed with the supposedly "normative" narrative of Maggie's pregnant body; as Nelson writes, "Our bodies grew stranger, to ourselves, to each other" (*Argonauts* 86). By placing her own experience of being pregnant beside her partner Harry's experience of gender transitioning, Nelson attempts to queer the boundary between the normative and the radical, the homo-normative and the more transgressively "queer." Nelson takes certain assumptions within queer discourse and deconstructs them through her autotheoretical text: for example, the assumption that the transgender body represents a more queer transgression while the cisgender pregnant female body represents normativity and the heteronormative drives toward reproductive futurity.

Along with this queering of the pregnant body comes a queering of the anti-social turn in queer theory. Nelson's writing brings a feminist approach to the language and frameworks of a gay male-authored canon of queer theory and its politics of refusal that emerges from both the new precarity politics of the left (*The Argonauts*) and masculine avant-garde traditions of

extremism and violence in performance (*The Art of Cruelty*). In this way, we can read Nelson's writings as deconstructing dominant discourses in purportedly experimental and progressive spaces through a queer feminist perspective—one shaped indelibly by the autotheoretical practices of both Barthes and Sedgwick. And yet, the view that there is something quintessentially more queer haunts the text, even as Nelson—following Sedgwick's lead—seeks to get outside of binary thinking. Indeed, on some level this text reads as a defence of Nelson's own queerness, first in spite of, and later (through her autotheoretical reasoning, drawing on feminist theorist Jane Gallop's anecdotal theory and gender studies scholar Fraiman's notion of “sodomitical maternity” (69)), because of her status as a cisgender queer pregnant woman who rejects both homophobic heteronormativity and the anti-social calls for queer negativity. Theorizing the state of pregnancy through a kind of post-phenomenological, autotheoretical mode, Nelson asks: “How can an experience so profoundly strange and wild and transformative also symbolize or enact the ultimate conformity? Or is this just another disqualification of anything tied too closely to the female animal from the privileged term (in this case, nonconformity, or radicality)?” (*Argonauts* 14). She goes on to add, “What about the fact that Harry is neither male nor female?” (14) referring to her genderqueer partner, and thereby queering the male/female binary that feminist theory has long indexed. *The Argonauts* reads as a defence of the feminine and a defence of the trans, both ways of being in the world which have been, and continue to be, devalued in critical theory, queer theory, and—in the case of trans subjectivities—feminist theory.

Through her autotheoretical writing, Nelson seeks to get at something between the “no future” queer theory written by gay men and the historically feminine meta-narratives around

care-taking and family-making. One way she does this is through her elaboration of the notion of “sodomitical maternity,” defined by Fraiman in *Cool Men and the Second Sex* as “the mother with a sexuality that is in excess of the procreative capacity” (Doerr and Nelson). In the section of *Cool Men* entitled “In Search of the Mother's Anus,” Fraiman critiques the ways in which “the mother's desiring body” continues to be “quite casually written out of the sexual imaginary” by male queer theorists like Edelman. Fraiman’s theorizing of “sodomitical maternity” opens up the maternal body, associated as it is with reproduction and historically at odds with “queerness,” to excessive and non-procreative sexuality (Fraiman 134). This theory serves as one of many points of identification that Nelson then takes up through her own lived experience as a stepmom and as a soon-to-be biological mother herself. “Thus, Fraiman aims to return the mother’s pleasure to the scene, and to foreground her access—‘even as a mother’—to ‘non-normative, non-procreative sexuality, to sexuality in excess of the dutifully instrumental’,” Nelson writes, “The woman with such access and excess is the sodomitical mother” (*Argonauts* 69). Nelson takes issue with implicit or explicit patriarchal biases that configure the maternal body or ‘the mother’ as mutually exclusive from that which is intellectually rigorous: the implicit assumption that Nelson perceives around her is that the mother’s body “contaminates” philosophical or theoretical work (19). Queering this view through an autotheoretical practice, she speaks from her position as a mother (a stepmother to Harry’s son, as well as a pregnant mother-to-be) who cites theory and philosophy at ease and who also proclaims her own ‘excessive’ desires for queer sexual pleasure; this is most apparent in Nelson’s invocation of “ass-fucking” (85).

“I am not interested in a hermeneutics, or an erotics, or a metaphysics, of my anus,” Maggie Nelson’s character Maggie Nelson tells us: “I am interested in ass-fucking” (85). Nelson

extends Fraiman's notion of "sodomitical maternity" to the particularities of her own life, working through the possibilities of a queer maternal erotics—a lived practice—that foregrounds both the anus and "queerness" broadly speaking. Following her discussion of the clitoris as a sweeping site of eight thousand nerves—a fact that has been taken up by feminist performance artists and scholars like Shannon Bell, who takes the scientific discoveries around clitoral tissue and extends it to her conception of a female phallus that actively ejaculates (Bell, *Fast* 76)—Nelson states "I am interested in the fact that the human anus is one of the most innervated parts of the body" (*Argonauts* 85). Nelson cites a conversation she listens to in her car radio between Mary Roach and NPR's Terry Gross who explains "And the reason is that it needs to be able to discriminate, by feel, between solid, liquid, and gas and be able to selectively release one or maybe all of those" (85). *The Argonauts* calls for this practice of queer feminist "ass-fucking," though it marks more a jumping off point of references and directions for further inquiry than it does a fleshing out of what this might look like or mean. As a kind of queer feminist mimesis, Nelson's autotheoretical writing through of "sodomitical maternity" is an iteration of gay male theory and practice through the prism of queer feminism—a move that echoes Nelson's iterative citation practice that takes Barthes's form and transforms it in light of twenty-first century queer feminist thought.

Historically codified as a gay male practice, anal sex is configured as fundamentally non-normative and transgressive; it became synonymous with "sodomy," even as sodomy historically applied to other non-reproductive sex acts like oral. While this is changing, the connection between anal erotics and gay men continues to haunt sexual discourses and practices: from the straight man's resistance to acts like pegging and rimming for fear it might turn him gay, to the

post-AIDS association of the anus with disease. Bersani takes this up when he theorizes the rectum as a site of problematics around how male homosexuality was represented and understood in the late 1980s; he takes an approach to sexuality that is different from the Freudian model, supplanting Freud's "repression" with what Bersani calls "aversion."²⁸ In Bersani's view, when it comes to sex there is benign aversion and malignant aversion: AIDS is the most powerful and contemporaneous example of malignant aversion.²⁹ Bersani argues that, when it comes to the representation of gay men, promiscuity itself is posited as "the sign of infection"; the first epigraph to his essay is a quote from Professor Opendra Narayan of the Johns Hopkins Medical School, who caustically refers to anal sex as the primary site of the aforementioned promiscuity amongst gay men.³⁰ This context haunts Nelson's invocation of "ass-fucking," and reverberates both with the latent queerness of Barthes and with Sedgwick's explicit identification as a gay man and the motif of mourning losses from AIDS plays in the constitution of queer feminist affect theory in her writings from the 1990s onward.

To provide further evidence for Fraiman's theory of the "sodomitical mother," Nelson turns to an anecdote from an experience she had as a graduate student in 1998, when she attended a seminar featuring American feminist theorist and scholar Jane Gallop and American art critic and historian Rosalind Krauss. In the seminar, "Gallop would be presenting new work, to which Krauss would respond" (*Argonauts* 39). Nelson describes the seminar through her

²⁸ Bersani outlines his purpose of the essay as follows: "Rather, I have been trying to account for the murderous representations of homosexuals unleashed and 'legitimized' by AIDS, and in so doing I have been struck by what might be called the aversion-displacements characteristic of both those representations and the gay responses to them" (221).

²⁹ "Malignant aversion has recently had an extraordinary opportunity both to express (and to expose) itself, and, tragically, to demonstrate its power. I'm thinking of course of responses to AIDS—more specifically, of how a public health crisis has been treated like an unprecedented sexual threat" (Bersani 198).

³⁰ The epigraph reads: "These people have sex twenty to thirty times a night. . . . A man comes along and goes from anus to anus and in a single night will act as a mosquito transferring infected cells on his penis" (Bersani 197).

experience of it years prior, critiquing Krauss's perceived lack of generosity in responding to the particularities of Gallop's work. Interestingly for my discussion, the work that Gallop shared sounds a lot like feminist autotheory, and Krauss's critiques of it sound a lot like the critiques of feminist practices that engage "the self" in explicit ways. Lorentzen's description of what Nelson is doing in *The Argonauts* (Lorentzen) resembles Gallop's description of her "anecdotalizing" method of theorizing: a practice which she began in the 1990s and continues through to the 2000s with her publication *Anecdotal Theory* in 2002; as Gallop explains, "During the nineties I experimented with writing in which I would recount an anecdote and then attempt to 'read' that account for the theoretical insights it afforded" (*Anecdotal* 2). This approach, of starting with an anecdote from their own life and then critically "reading" that anecdote with theoretical questions in mind is, as we've been discussing, at the core of feminist autotheoretical practices, including texts like *The Argonauts*, Doyle's *Hold It Against Me*, and Rankine's *Citizen*.

The work that Gallop presented at the seminar Nelson was attending was a new body of artwork in which she used her own body as a maternal/artist body to theorize photography from the phenomenological perspective of the female subject being photographed; in this case, the photographer was Gallop's husband who is, as Nelson notes in a meta-theoretical nod to Kraus, "appropriately named Dick" (*Argonauts* 39). One of Gallop's photographs that Nelson describes features Gallop in the bathtub with her infant male son (39). In this way, Gallop as an artist and a scholar seems to be engaging autotheory as a mode of thinking through philosophical, aesthetic questions related to photography from the specific, embodied perspective of a mother, and Nelson's response to Gallop is one of generosity and identification: Nelson both acknowledges the messy abjection of Gallop's work—"She was hanging her shit out to dry: a start" (40) and its

theoretical legitimacy in relation to revered male theorists like Barthes—“She was taking on Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, and the way in which even in Barthes—delectable Barthes!—the mother remains the (photographed) object; the son, the (writing) subject” (40).

While Nelson’s reading of Gallop’s work in that moment is reparative and understanding of its autotheoretical impetus, Nelson notes how Krauss’s reading was not so generous. Summarizing Krauss’s argument, made publicly in front of Gallop and the audience, Nelson states that “But the tacit undercurrent of her argument, as I felt it, was that Gallop’s maternity had rotted her mind—besotted it with the narcissism that makes one think that an utterly ordinary experience shared by countless others is somehow unique, or uniquely interesting” (*Argonauts* 41). In Nelson’s view, Krauss reads Gallop’s work as too embodied, personal, maternal, and narcissistic to be considered critical, aesthetically interesting, or philosophically valid to a modernist art historian and theoretical “heavyweight” like Krauss (41). Nelson’s recollection of the seminar becomes, in the context of *The Argonauts*, a performative scene in which Krauss stands as the offensive “pugilist” (41) who eviscerates Gallop’s work, while Gallop stands as the victim whose practice remains misunderstood by those not attuned to a feminist politics and aesthetics of autotheory. As Nelson represents her, Krauss embodies complicity with patriarchy: her sentiments are more aligned with the phallogentric fathers of art and theory than with her feminist “sisters” who foreground their bodies in states like pregnancy in autotheoretical ways.

If we can take this scene as a microcosm of the thematic thrust of *The Argonauts* as a whole, Nelson’s text can be read as providing a defence of Gallop’s feminist practice as theoretical, critical, and worthy of such attention. By writing her own work in what she describes as a “postpartum haze” (*Argonauts* 16), Nelson confronts this problem of precluding the

maternal from the intellectual. Nelson cheekily refers to “the spectacle of that wild oxymoron, *the pregnant woman who thinks*. Which is really just a pumped-up version of that more general oxymoron, *a woman who thinks*” (91). Nelson gets at an imperative in feminist autotheory: an elucidation of the capacity for one to be both a body and a mind; to be grounded self-reflexively in one’s personal lived experiences and in critically rigorous work; and to generate work that encompasses both. Embedded in Nelson’s work is a defence of the feminine (as historically understood) as well as a defence of the trans and non-binary: both of which have been, and continue to be, denigrated in socio-political and theoretical contexts; the move toward gender fluidity is notable, particularly Nelson’s discussion of how one’s gender is contextual, a matter which she grounds in the autobiographical-relational context of Harry’s gender identity (15).

For all Nelson’s professed desire to move beyond binaries, echoing the reparative moves of Sedgwick, this scene in *The Argonauts* remains more complicated than a reparative feminist traversal of binaries and boundaries. It is true that Gallop has theorized the problem of the theoretical irreconcilability of the mother as a philosopher in her work; in *Thinking Through the Body*, Gallop discusses Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, observing that, for de Sade, “Female 'philosophers' prefer anal intercourse, are experts on contraception and abortion, practice infanticide; in Sade's books, a philosopher never becomes a mother” (*Body* 3). And yet, while the autotheoretical project of affirming a maternal-theoretical mode of being seems straightforward enough, some of Gallop’s other theoretical aims are more fraught. As a Professor, Gallop turned to feminist theories of the personal alongside her experiences as a student coming of age in 1971 to provide justification for her having ongoing sexual relationships with her own students. Gallop explains, “Feminists who write about teaching have

stressed the importance of the personal, both as content and as technique,” going on to argue for the blurring of boundaries between sexual/intellectual and professional/personal as something that is liberatory rather than predatory or problematic (or unlawful) (*Harassment* 62). In *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (1997), written the same year as Kraus’s *I Love Dick*, Gallop uses her anecdotal method of theorizing to problematize a case of sexual harassment that was brought against her by her students; she writes self-reflexively, with the rhetorical force that honesty brings to a third-wave feminist project. In this case, Gallop makes use of the rhetoric of honesty as a way of thoroughly explaining her own context and reasoning for her decisions: whether it succeeds in helping her case—discursively, legally—is another question.

It is interesting to compare Sedgwick’s work on the pedagogical, the sexual, and the theoretical in *Touching Feeling* (2002) with Gallop’s *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*—both autotheoretical approaches to a similar subject that take the blurring of boundaries to different degrees. Up to this point, I have proposed that the integrating of one’s life with one’s theory, or of one’s philosophy with one’s lived decisions, is a feminist act encouraged by autotheory as a mode of practice, and I have taken this as a positive thing. Of course, this becomes more complicated when we consider that someone’s theory or philosophy of living might go against what we consider ethical or desirable. For Gallop, *Feminist Accused* outlines how she was living out her understanding of 1970s feminist philosophy which radically blurs the lines dividing the pedagogical, the amorous, and the sexual; while a feminist readership might readily embrace this in theory, it becomes a different question when we look at what this means in practice. For Gallop, this means having sex with everyone from her dissertation committee as a graduate student in the 1970s to her own undergraduate and graduate students in the 1980s

through the 1990s. As the cases brought against her in the 1990s show, Gallop's proclaimed feminist philosophy comes up against sexual harassment policies called for by third-wave feminists and instituted by the University; here, Gallop's enacting of theory into practice threatens existing policies of proper professional conduct—policies advocated for by feminists.

Nevertheless, Gallop stands firm in her views and theorizes these questions through her method of anecdotal theory; aware of her "sensationalized" and seemingly paradoxical positioning as a feminist scholar who has been accused of sexual harassment, Gallop explains that "Although the position has been personally quite uncomfortable, professionally I can see it as a rare vantage point, an opportunity to produce knowledge" (*Harassment* 7). There is epistemological value to theorizing these kinds of conflicts and ruptures through autotheory, a practice attuned to lived experience as "an opportunity to produce knowledge" and theorize that which one might not yet understand (7). As we see here, boundary-blurring is not always a desirable move for feminist politics, and Gallop's text reminds us (despite her intents to the contrary) that sometimes boundaries are there to protect us. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson could be referring to Gallop when she says "I'm not saying this is good pedagogy. I am saying that its pleasures are deep" (48), though we know she is referring more directly to Sedgwick, who lovingly haunts the text as one of its "many-gendered mothers" (57).

There remains a tension in *The Argonauts* between narcissism and the authorial "I," as well as between the "I" and "the other," despite Nelson's invocations of communion. Even as her autobiographical text is interwoven with a multitude of citations, Nelson's philosophical, political, and aesthetic arguments are lined up with her own personal investments: in the case of the Gallop-v-Krauss situation, for example, it is the reparative, purportedly misunderstood,

pregnant feminist (Gallop) rather than the older, angrier, “pugilist” feminist (Krauss), who is in the right. Nelson identifies with Gallop and, it follows, empathizes with her position. The reparative practice of opening up space for different ways of practicing theory—including Gallop’s self-imaging practice, where her experience as a mother is foregrounded—and resisting binary thinking can also become a practice of defending one’s own way of thinking at the expense of thinking with, and through, the “other.” As a citational strategy within autotheory, intertextual identification presents certain limitations to theorizing otherness by continuing to re-entrench the self as the locus of experience and, it follows, knowledge.

At its worst, *The Argonauts* reads as an extended defence of the writer’s own way of being in the world, perpetually re-centering the self even as Nelson theorizes relationality in an autotheoretical way. When we consider Nelson’s rhetorical moves in *The Argonauts* in light of neoliberal imperatives of individualism, competition, and success, things become more complicated—particularly when we consider the role that Harry plays as a transgender subject. FAG’s embracing of collaborative models of authorship, and their proclamations of refusal to compete, stand as a mode of resistance to neoliberal imperatives, even as the artists must work within the very institutions and structures that neoliberalism informs. A cynical reading might take FAG’s refusals to compete as itself another strategy of self-branding in a feminist context that purports to be anti-neoliberalism and anti-individualism, though my reading is less doubtful.

In texts like *The Argonauts*, the self is a kind of multiplicity—a performative “tissue of citations” (Barthes, “Death” 4) constituted in and through a text that is also a performative “tissue of citations,” revealed as such through various kinds of citational practices. And yet, it is still a self—now one that is refortified through its self-reflexive theorizing of itself in light of the

lives and works of others throughout history, and which exists, circulates, and inscribes itself within a larger context of neoliberalism and its incentivizing of individualism, self-branding, competition, and success. Intertextual identification, then, poses certain risks to practices of feminist theory and philosophy that strive for communion, even as it describes its aims as honest—itself another performative and rhetorical strategy. As Bechdel’s psychotherapist says to her during one of their sessions, “Being attached to your work, your mind, the way you would be to another person—that cuts you off from the world,” to which the character Alison Bechdel responds, “Wait, I gotta write this down!” (*Mother* 152). Then, in an autotheoretical manner, Bechdel as the author writes in a text bubble below this scene, “The irony of the fact that I’m writing a book about all this is not lost on me. Yet I don’t seem to have a choice” (152).

Practicing Transformation: Queer Feminism as Becoming

In *The Argonauts*, Nelson engages in a practice of autotheory, bringing together different lineages of queer theory, including the proto-autotheoretical post-structuralism of Barthes, the queer feminist affect theory of Sedgwick, the anti-social queer theory of Bersani and Edelman, and Fraiman’s theory of the “sodomitical mother,” alongside a dense intertextual fabric of citations, anecdotes, and personal experience to theorize what “queerness” means in America in the twenty-first century. Nelson writes through her desire for a queer feminist future that exists somewhere between the no-future radical queers and the so-called assimilationist, family-making homosexuals. Cohering around a conceit of transformation, *The Argonauts* iteratively reflects on transformation at various levels in the text, including Nelson’s performative practice of queer feminist canon formation and her professed desire for being better, both as a queer feminist

human in a queer family and as a queer feminist writer and thinker. Shaped by the writings of Barthes and Sedgwick, *The Argonauts* extends earlier drives of reparative reading and textual pleasure to trans-inclusive queer feminist ends; and yet, even as Nelson amorously writes toward autotheoretical honesty, the text gives way to various problems related to feminist autotheory and the limits of relationality, intimacy, communion, and understanding in life and in art.

Turning to other contemporary queer feminist practices that align themselves with a performative and citational mode of authorship provides insight into the problematics of intertextuality, citationality, and community in autotheoretical work: Mitchell's and Logue's collaborative work with the Feminist Art Gallery, for example, stands as an example of how autotheory might engage the other in more ethical ways. And yet, just as Nelson's method of intertextual identification and intertextual intimacy remains limited in its capacity to transform queer feminist theory into intersectional practice that is actively trans-inclusive, so too do Mitchell and Logue concede, citing their much-loved theorist and ally Muñoz, that "queerness is not yet here" (Love and Smith 49). In these works, the writers and artists engage autotheory as a space for the pleasures of processing lived experiences to unite with the pleasures of reading and theorizing. The distinction between who we are and what we can become emerges as a generative tension, opening up possibilities for autotheory as a practice of living.

CONCLUSION

Autotheory and its Discontents

Ethics is the aesthetics of the few-ture.

- Laurie Anderson, “2 Songs for Tape Bow Violin”

Autotheory and Dissent

It’s the fall of 2016 and I am attending a talk by artist and writer Hannah Black at Art Toronto, a commercial art fair of international galleries exhibiting modern and contemporary art held downtown in the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Hailing from London UK, Black has been brought in by a group of contemporary art sponsors—*C Magazine*, Art Metropole, Art Toronto, and Edition Toronto—to give a talk alongside the launch of her book *Dark Pool Party*. Black is a writer and conceptual artist whose work falls within the purview of what is being called “autotheory,” a term that has been gaining traction across contemporary feminist practices since 2015. Black is described as incorporating “feminist, Marxist and black radical theory, autobiographical fragments, pop music, hope and hopelessness” (Art Toronto) into her work: a quintessential blending of theory, autobiography, pop culture, and affect that we find in the autotheoretical writings of Kraus, Rankine, Tupitsyn, Als, and others. Before I head upstairs for her talk, I stop by one of the tables in the Edition Toronto area downstairs—the free (by donation) part of Art Toronto focused on artist publications and artist multiples—to grab a copy of *Dark Pool Party*. It is a hot commodity at this year’s fair: I manage to snag the last one.

Even though I arrive at the talk twenty minutes early, all of the seats are taken. I scan the crowd; the attendees are well-groomed art patrons and their guests. I’m happy to stand, and as I

find a place near the back of the room I find myself in the company of other graduate students, artists, writers, curators, critics (groomed too, but in less obvious ways). As we near the talk's starting time, more people congregate in the standing room at the back. The crowd begins to buzz. There's a palpable excitement as we wait for Black to arrive, and I'm reminded of the time I went to hear Butler talk in Vancouver and the lineup sprawled two blocks down Granville Street. "Who's playing?" a passerby stopped to ask me and I grinned. The theorist as rock star.

Black comes on to the stage and begins her talk. She looks to be around my age. Behind her is a PowerPoint slide with an image of an astrology chart. "This is Canada's birth chart," she says, and the audience laughs. I smile with curiosity. Hannah Black is not the only artist working autotheoretically who has incorporated astrology into her work: Ariana Reines has also turned to astrology in recent years as an epistemological mode and a medium for conceptual art, performance, and writing. Astrology is one example of how feminist autotheory becomes a space to incorporate discourses and modes of thought that are alternative to more conventional academic ones: as a new age practice, it might be seen as irrational or fluffy in comparison to, say, empiricism. Reines left PhD studies in New York City to pursue astrology full-time: for the past three years, she has done extensive Astrology sessions through Skype, using her website lazyeyehaver.com to advertise the different sessions with names like the "Marguerite Hardass," a 3.5 hour session for \$295 USD. While this blurring of the high culture of Marguerite Duras's literature and the low culture of astrology and swearing in slang is quintessentially postmodern, it also takes on a specifically autotheoretical flavour, with references to women writers throughout history (who themselves arguably wrote in a proto-autotheoretical mode) playfully commingling with the conceptual performance art practice of giving astrology readings as an

experimental feminist writer over Skype; I'm also reminded, as I'm impelled to insert my credit card information, of the neoliberal, capitalist context within which autotheory as a feminist practice circulates.

With "Canada's birth chart" still behind her, Hannah Black begins to talk about the politics of capitalism, class, and immigration. With ease, she moves through references to Fred Moten, Freud, Dionne Brand, and Badiou's "event." A young woman of colour based in both London and Berlin, she seems better equipped to speak to the UK's context than to North America's, though the parallels between Brexit and Trump's imminent win are palpable and she makes attempts to speak about Canada and its own problems as well. She speaks fast, her pace accelerating across intertexts and topics; her juxtapositions—astrology and nationalism—are evocatively opaque. As a millennial standing at the back with other millennials, I'm both drawn to the rapidity of her references and unable to hear everything that she is saying. It's OK, though, I think: this talk isn't necessarily for me, but I'll take from it what I can.

I'm taking it in, bearing witness to Black's performative lecture, this post-conceptual art form that other feminists like Andrea Fraser have long aligned with practices of institutional critique. After about ten minutes of Black speaking, I watch as an older, white gentleman—probably in his eighties, maybe even older—stands up slowly and, a bit hunched over, walks to the podium where Black is standing. He holds out a small piece of paper and Black takes it, confused. Once she reads it, she looks over at the man with an enraged horror.

"No. Fuck you! No." Black says to the man. She says it with certainty. The room shifts and I can feel the blood rushing to my feet, my heart starting to race. This is a familiar sensation (feminism so often feels like a discursive-political war-zone). Black is shaking her head, rattled.

“He just handed me a card that says *slow down*,” Black tells the audience. I know that things are going to get ugly. “No. This is how I talk.” She is resolute, unwilling to even consider accommodating his request. She laughs to herself, shaking her head. “Now I’ve totally lost my focus. I can’t,” Black says. It looks like she might just leave the stage, and the talk might be over. It is then that the room divides into two camps: those who clap and those who leave. There is a smattering of applause that builds. Black shakes it off a bit and continues with her talk. As she speaks, a file of people, mainly white, of various ages, begin to exit. Their bodies press past me, trying to leave as fast as they can. A woman a bit older than me, who looks like she might be a collector—well-dressed, polished—shakes her head in disbelief. She mouths to her friend beside her, “CLAPPING?” They share a look that says, “This is horrifying and horrible.” They can barely believe what is happening.

Suddenly, I hear someone beside me observe that the man in the front row who made the request is wearing a hearing aid. Is it an accessibility issue or a race issue, because there clearly is not room for both in this talk—as a white man with a hearing aid, his privileges, a generalized intersectionality would have it, outweigh his struggles or accommodation requests. I’m witnessing a kind of battle of intersectionality. I’m not clapping and I’m not leaving: I’m just standing still at the back with my eyes and ears wide open. As someone who is part of contemporary feminist art communities, I am attuned to the nuances of power, privilege, taking up space—I know, for example, that as a white-passing person it isn’t a good idea to make my own needs known when it is a Black artist talking. If I publicly express that I’m offended or otherwise uncomfortable, my own affective experience will likely be deemed “white tears” and disregarded accordingly—or, worse, scorned. It is this kind of public scorning that the old white

man with the hearing aid was experiencing, after making the mistake of interrupting Black and making certain demands of her: “SLOW DOWN.”

The following spring, Black will come to be known as the artist who “tore the art world apart” (Eckardt) after she published an open letter on Tumblr admonishing the curators of the Whitney and proclaiming: “The painting must go” (Black, “OPEN”). The letter was written in response to a painting in the Whitney biennial by the white artist Dana Schutz entitled *Open Casket*, which featured “an abstracted version of the famed photograph of Emmett Till’s open-casket funeral” (Greenberger). Black was not alone in her dissent: African American artist Parker Bright staged a protest in front of the work, wearing a shirt that read “Black Death Spectacle” on the back, and Black’s open letter was signed by a list of over forty artists, critics, and curators who stood in solidarity with Black’s message, including Juliana Huxtable, Mostafa Heddaya, and Carolyn Lazard. Addressed to “the curators and staff of the Whitney biennial,” Black’s letter called for the removal of *Open Casket* from display at the Whitney as well as “the urgent recommendation that the painting be destroyed and not entered into any market or museum” (Black, “OPEN”). Black’s letter went viral, garnering responses from “thousands of people arguing about it almost in real time” (Smith, “Infuriates”), and it led to various think-pieces including “Who Can Represent Black Pain? Hannah Black’s Letter to the Whitney Biennial” by Cornell University’s Director of the Visual Studies Program Andrew Moisey and *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith’s “Should Art That Infuriates Be Removed?”

In the wake of Black’s open letter, the think-piece that engendered the most heated conversations was the article that artist, curator, and writer Coco Fusco wrote, entitled “Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go: On Dana Schutz’s Image of Emmett Till.” Fusco’s

essay, positioned in fierce opposition to Black's letter, became deeply embroiled in tensions related to contemporary feminism and intersectionality. The tension between Fusco and Black is a recent example of a politically charged contemporary art debate taking place publicly—one that has been engaged with primarily through the internet and social media—in which two women of colour stand for two opposing sides of a debate. Notably, both women have a history of working autotheoretically, and both position themselves and their political stance on the issue through autotheoretical writing practices. Fusco, best known for performance pieces like *Couple in a Cage: Two Amerindians Visit the West* (1992-1993), which she made in collaboration with Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, has an extensive and established practice as an artist, writer, and curator, as well as an intellectual and a theorist. She engages issues related to race and ethnicity, representation and the body, and intercultural performance and cross-cultural issues in the arts, focusing most specifically on art in America and Cuba.

Fusco opens her piece with the statement, “The presence of blackness in a Whitney Biennial invariably stirs controversy—it’s deemed to be unfit or not enough, or too much” (Fusco, “Censorship”). In contrast to Black’s call for the removal and destruction of the work, which has been described as a call for censorship, Fusco takes the position that censorship is never the answer: “I find it alarming and entirely wrongheaded to call for the censorship and destruction of an artwork, no matter what its content is or who made it” (Fusco, “Censorship”). While not stated up front, Fusco’s positionality emerges over the course of her discussion: she states that her mother is a Cuban immigrant and that she has spent the past thirty years “raising awareness of the politics of racial representation,” as we find in artworks like *Couple in a Cage* or in Fusco’s book *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*.

Significantly though, at the heart of Fusco's argument is a de-coupling of one's identity and what one can or should be able to engage with in their art practice: she maintains that, "The authority to speak for or about black culture is not guaranteed by skin color or lineage, and it can be undermined by untruths," noting both the history of white artists making anti-racist art and the history of black artists who "accrued social capital and commercial gain from their treatment of black suffering" (Fusco, "Censorship"). Fusco calls Black's letter uninformed, calling out the self-righteousness of the letter and fact-checking various claims made by Black and her co-signatories ("Censorship"). She critiques Black while emphasizing how she herself is familiar with the kind of situation brought on by Black's open letter:

As an artist, curator, and teacher, I welcome strong reactions to artworks and have learned to expect them when challenging issues, forms, and substance are put before viewers. On many occasions I have had to contend with self-righteous people—of all of ethnic backgrounds—who have declared with conviction that this or that can't be art or shouldn't be seen. There is a deeply puritanical and anti-intellectual strain in American culture that expresses itself by putting moral judgment before aesthetic understanding. To take note of that is not equitable with defending whiteness, as critic Aruna D'Souza has suggested—it's a defense of civil liberties and an appeal for civility. (Fusco, "Censorship")

As seen here, Fusco aligns Black's approach with a particularly "anti-intellectual strain" in America today, one which prioritizes a self-proclaimed "moral judgment" over issues of "aesthetic understanding"; in this way, Fusco aligns her stance as much with her lived experience as a racialized woman artist, curator, and educator with existing art theory, philosophy, and criticism ("Censorship"). The question of whether autotheory as a mode of aesthetic practice ought also to be a decisively moral or ethical imperative emerges here; if autotheory, as a mode of aesthetic experimentation, is also a feminist mode, do imperatives of intersectionality lead to

the kinds of issues that Fusco perceives in Black's open letter, where young feminists willingly place "moral judgment" before "aesthetic understanding"? In other words, if autotheory is to be understood as a feminist practice in the context of contemporary art, do moral or political drives toward intersectionality take precedence over aesthetic drives toward experimentation, risk, performativity, and play? Can the two be so easily parsed? Fusco does not like Schutz's painting either, but she defends the freedom of expression that allows the painting to exist in the world.

Fusco's art critical and pedagogical stance on welcoming "strong reactions to artworks"—including artworks that she does not like (or that do not align with her own political views)—is not unlike Jennifer Doyle's approach in *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. Writing autotheoretically, Doyle takes the phenomenological state of having strong affective responses to specific works of contemporary art as the catalyst for theorizing the role that emotion plays in art criticism and art historical writing. Doyle focuses on the discourse of "difficulty" and the subjective factors that lead to a work being considered challenging or "difficult" in the first place; she also theorizes the use of emotion as a medium in contemporary art and the problems presented when an artist incorporates their own lived experience into their artwork. Discussing artists' use of lived experience in their work, a mode of contemporary art practice that characterizes all of the artists that she includes in her book (Doyle, *Difficulty* 146), Doyle emphasizes how "experience here is not an unquestioned zone of personal truth to which one retreats but a site of becoming, of subject formation—it is an ongoing process that produces the conditions of possibility for recognition, understanding, and difference" (146). This is deeply relevant to understanding the politics and aesthetics of autotheory as feminist practice: an autotheoretical mode of working might encourage the use of lived experience in an

artist's, theorist's, or critic's work, but this does not mean that the inclusion of such lived experience makes the work exempt from being critiqued.

As a practice that performatively invokes lived experience, subjectivity, and embodiment with philosophical rigour, theoretical references, and other modes of citation, autotheory constitutes lived experience as a kind of discourse and artistic material. As Doyle notes above, however, the fact that it is lived experience does not mean it should be elevated above other forms of discourse and material; rather, it, too, should be open to criticism, conversation, and further theorization. Kraus gestures to this in *I Love Dick*, when she asks—speaking as the performatively distanced character “Chris Kraus”—“Why do people still not get it when we handle vulnerability like philosophy, at some remove?” (208). Kraus acknowledges that, when lived experience is handled in the work of women artists, it risks being trivialized or handled with kid gloves by (male) critics rather than being approached *as* discursive, as philosophical—as theory. This is an issue that Kraus, like Doyle and other feminists working autotheoretically, is concerned with across her larger practice. In fact, Kraus makes a similar point in *Video Green*, her collection of autotheoretical art writing and criticism, when she argues that the use of lived experience as “primary material” in a female artist’s work is considered “deeply disturbing, and even more so if she [the artist] views her own experience at some remove” (63), by male critics and audiences. Kraus points to how the act of approaching lived experience with critical distance is rife with gender-based bias around the connection between women and “the personal,” as well as larger issues related to the incorporation of lived experience in a female artist’s work.

Also significant in the above passage from Doyle’s *Hold It Against Me* is how Doyle delineates experience as a “site of becoming” rather than an “unquestioned zone of personal truth

to which one retreats” (146). Part of the fruitful potential of artists (and critics) using their own experience as material in their work is that lived experience becomes a “site of becoming, of subject formation” (Doyle, *Difficulty* 106), and in this way is open to transformation. This complicates any straightforward recourse to one’s self-identification or positioning as predetermined and static, and it underscores how, in autotheory as an aesthetic practice, lived experience (like one’s own subject positioning, identity, autos, or “I”) can be questioned. Doyle’s conception of autotheory and the “I” is one that resists fixity and favours a more spacious sense of becoming—a common quality, it seems, in autotheoretical writing by queer feminist theorists like those taken up in Chapter 3, and in the art historical writing of other feminists like Jones and Griselda Pollock, which I return to shortly.

Writing as an art historian, art critic, queer theorist, and Professor of English at UC Riverside, Doyle probes what she sees as the uncritical limits of art criticism, writing of “the difficulty that many of us have with some forms of contemporary art and the centrality of emotion to that kind of difficulty” (*Difficulty* 4). Turning to the discourse of controversy, for example, is one way in which art critics find a sense of control over their own uncritical limits:

Critics have limits. Our faculties break down when an artwork reminds us of something so painful, or makes us so mad, or is something we like so much we struggle to write about it ... We can be willful and stubborn, blind to the dwindling relevance of those artists we love and indifferent to the emergence of new practices we don’t understand. We all have limits that look pretty uncritical from most angles, and we rarely know these limits until we encounter them.
(Jones, *Difficulty* 1)

I wonder if Black’s encounter with Schutz’s painting in the Whitney falls under what Doyle describes here—that is, whether Black is encountering her own limits as an art critic. Does the

matter become more complicated if Black, working autotheoretically as an artist and a writer, identifies as a critic and as an activist? Black's argument in the open letter is, "In brief," that "[Schutz's] painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time" ("OPEN"). Rejecting the idea that a white artist can or should have any rights to representing "Black pain," even if it is to "present white shame," Black maintains that "this shame is not correctly represented" ("OPEN"). Using language of "correctness" and "appropriation," Black's letter is at home in recent millennial feminist discourse, discourse which is sometimes referred to offhand as "Tumblr feminism"—that Black's open letter was published and circulated on *Tumblr* is worth noting here; when it comes to politically charged issues related to language, discourse, and representation, internet-based activist feminism has been critiqued for privileging what has been (somewhat disparagingly) called "political correctness," "purity policing," and "virtue signalling" over more philosophically nuanced, critically distanced, non-binary consideration of grey areas.

In her discussion of the problem of using identity politics as a justification to dismiss specific artworks—particularly art made by artists of colour, queer artists, and women artists—Doyle warns us of "the literal-minded critic, who projects that literalism onto the artist and her work, as is also sometimes the case with the reception of the most challenging feminist and queer work" (*Difficulty* 106). It is "the literal-minded critic," Doyle explains, who "actively disavow[s]" the more nuanced difficulty of the artist's work by refusing to read it with an awareness to complexities of representation (106). Things get even more complicated—perhaps

in a way that Doyle hasn't anticipated—when this “liberal-minded critic” is herself a racialized woman artist. Fusco's response to Black complicates things for a leftist readership, as there are two divergent responses to issues of black representation by women artists of colour: one from, Black, who Fusco describes as “a black-identified biracial artist who hails from England and resides in Berlin,” and the other from, Fusco, a Cuban-American artist. This seems to be a subtle jab on Fusco's part, describing Black as “black-identified,” rather than the elevated and unified subject positioning of “Black” that Black uses throughout her Open Letter. Further, Fusco underscores the fact that Black is not grounded in the specific context of America, having been born in the UK and choosing to be based in Berlin, and, it would seem, she might therefore not be the best positioned for responding to the specificities of American culture, at least not in such an “uninformed” way (Fusco, “Censorship”). The rhetoric of Black's open letter was grounded in a binary distinction between “Black people” and “white person(s)” or “the white gaze” (Black, “OPEN”) and Fusco's letter responds to Black's attempt at speaking for an entire Afrodiasporic community.

Fusco speaks as a woman of colour critiquing the words and actions of another woman of colour, well aware of the risks she runs in speaking out against Black—the point that her critiques might lead to her being seen as an apologist for racist discourses—even as the racialized subject position from which she speaks cannot be denounced on the basis of privilege. Indeed, it is because Fusco is a woman of colour with such a strong history as a racialized feminist artist and intellectual that she is able to publicly criticize Black and be met with some semblance of openness in reception (I say this even as I am anecdotally aware of how anyone in my own Facebook network who shared Fusco's article was swiftly shamed for doing so).

Perhaps most contentiously, but also in line with Fusco's decision to frame her response to Black's letter in terms "censorship," Fusco argues that "Hannah Black and company are placing themselves on the wrong side of history, together with Phalangists who burned books, authoritarian regimes that censor culture and imprison artists, and religious fundamentalists who ban artworks in the name of their god" (Fusco, "Censorship"); she ties Black's letter to a longer history of political censorship. The polarized rift between Fusco and Black serves as a reminder of the high cultural, political, and social stakes of representation and censorship, and the charge that such issues take on when frameworks of feminism and intersectionality come into play. Where do feminists stand on issues of censorship? Which is the more suitably feminist and intersectional response to the Whitney biennial: Coco Fusco's or Hannah Black's?

The Fusco-vs-Black conflict exemplifies some of the tensions that autotheory as a practice presents for contemporary feminist thought. If two women of colour are writing autotheoretically, but are making arguments that either contradict or critique each other, whose word is more valid or accurate? Whose word is more true? And, finally, to whose do we listen? Must we in the digital agora take sides, or can we find ways to resist the binary logics of social media platforms like Facebook that reduce complicated issues to sides and heighten the increasing polarization of political thinking (and feeling) today? Do we have to choose between two respected artists, both of whom have strong feminist art and intellectual credentials? Is intersectional feminism the final manifestation of feminism, or are there discontents within intersectional feminism to which autotheory attests? On the one hand, there continue to be tensions between subjectivity and objectivity in autotheory: autotheory's privileging of subjectivity over attempted objectivity, even as it makes ethical claims about what is good and

bad, might make it more difficult to navigate dissenting views—especially when those dissenting views come from subject positionings that are seen as fairly ‘equal’ in their marginalization (I say this with an awareness of the thorny, even impossible, politics of attempting to quantify one’s marginalization, oppression, and privilege in comparison to someone else’s). On the other hand, as I’ve shown in my discussions of Piper, Kraus, and Nelson, autotheory as a post-1960s mode of feminist practice involves shuttling between the subjectivity of the artist or theorist—and their own embodiment, affect, desires, inclinations—and a larger sociocultural, political-aesthetic context of philosophical, theoretical, and literary ideas and reference points that the autotheorist, then, brings together to engender new insights, epistemologies, and ways to be in the world.

Contemporary art is all about context: maybe intersectionality is contextual too? For example, what if the white man who handed Black the note has less class privilege than Black, or is also transgender and disabled? Does this change things? I’m being glib here, while also trying to make a point (however clumsily) about the tensions introduced by a politics of intersectionality, and how potentially reductive thinking around intersectional feminism can become. What began as a necessary insistence that previously marginalized, repressed, or outright excluded voices in feminist conversations—including the voices of Black women, Indigenous women, and women of colour, and transgender women—has evolved, in some cases, to the hierarchizing of oppression in a way that that accords privileges (such as the privilege to speak) based exclusively on identification. It is arguably because Fusco is a woman of colour with such a strong history as a feminist artist and thinker that she is able to publicly criticize Black and be met with some seriousness of reception. Black is not without her own privilege and cultural capital, moving freely between the UK and Berlin for international book tours and artist

talks. Is her saying “Fuck you” to an old white man wearing a hearing aid a legitimate, or necessary, act of Black feminist refusal, in the context of her giving an artist’s talk at a commercial art fair? Is it an act of violence? Might it be both?

I’m reminded of a talking circle that David Garneau facilitated at the Oboro centre for contemporary art in Montréal this past fall (2017), where a similarly heated situation would boil over near the end of the session. Hailing from Regina/Treaty 4, artist, curator, and writer Garneau was holding a talking circle called *A Talking Circle about Indigenous Contemporary Art* as part of his residency project *Everyone is an Artist: Art After Criticism*. Later that weekend, he would also give a public talk entitled *The Indian in the Cupboard: Indigenous Contemporary Art in White Rooms*.

He opens the circle with a brief talk, defining what he sees as the distinction between “appropriate and inappropriate appropriations” (Garneau, “Indigenous”). For example, non-Aboriginal people can be invited into the most sacred ceremonies, like the Sun Dance, “so long as they are performing correctly,” Garneau explains, with the discourse of “correct-ness” continuing here (“Indigenous”). He speaks of the importance of “non-colonial action,” and how curation ought not to merely be about inclusion, but rather about dialogue between artworks and artists. Much of Garneau’s work, as a practicing artist, as a curator, and as a Professor of visual art in Saskatchewan, emphasizes the recognition of contemporary Indigenous artists as *contemporary* artists, and he encourages emerging curators like me to engage critically with Indigenous artists’ practices, even though I am not Indigenous. As Garneau speaks, he begins to make points that could be misinterpreted by folks who are unaware of the context of Garneau’s life and work, or the fact that he was deliberately using words like “Indigenous” and “Black” as

discursive signifiers rather than essential identities. “I’m raising these provocations in the hopes of getting a dialogue going,” Garneau explains. Distinguishing between “Aboriginal or Indian” and “Indigenous,” he states, “Indigenous as it has become is ... a free-floating set of signifiers and texts” (“Indigenous”).

Then, opening up the circle, Garneau asks each of us to introduce ourselves by responding to the question: what land, place, territory are you most in relationship with? “For an Indigenous person,” Garneau goes on to explain, “it is inconceivable to not have a relationship with the land.” In Garneau’s view, it is one’s relationship to the land that gives rise to one’s identity: just because you have Aboriginal blood does not mean that you are a good steward of the land. He calls on each of us to be good stewards of the land, and to work toward “mutual transformation” in our relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. As we move around the circle, we hear stories from people of various backgrounds and practices. There is a curator from Quebec who speaks about his relationship to the land, making the claim that, as a Francophone in Quebec he is part of the “colonized colonizers.” I flinch a bit when he says this, but the circle continues, and David engages intently and kindly with each person in the circle. This isn’t to say that David does not provide criticism, or that he agrees with what everyone is saying: when an artist from Austria speaks of how he freely appropriates Indigenous symbolism in his own artwork, without attention to context, David returns to his conversation around “appropriate versus inappropriate appropriations,” and how late capitalist postmodern play is much different than having deep investment and authentic relation with a culture.

When it is my turn, I introduce myself as Lauren Gabrielle Fournier and name Regina/Treaty 4 Territory as the land I have the most connection to, having been born and raised there

and having lived there until I was twenty-one. I do not know much about my ancestral background: after learning of ties between my paternal French and Scottish side and the Red River region in Manitoba, and observing my paternal grandpa's dark skin, I thought that there might be some Métis tie, though I have no real evidence of this—I'm likely a mix of colonizer (French) and settler-colonizer (Scottish, Turkish, Ukrainian, Bohemian, Czech). I've had trouble pinpointing the names or birth places of my great grandparents, and the intergenerational trauma pervading the Fournier side makes it affectively and logistically difficult to trace those lines, but in any case, it is the land in Saskatchewan that I feel most connected to; perhaps this is why I understand what Garneau is saying, where he is coming from, and what kinds of frameworks he is drawing from, having studied Fine Arts in Regina and having learned (at that formative age) from contemporary Indigenous artists and art historians like him. And now, like so many others, my relationship to the land is one less of being grounded in a single specific territory and more being an itinerant subject of globalization, freely moving between cities for graduate school, traveling for research and curatorial projects. This mutable relationship to land is part of the production of what Garneau calls the "free-floating set of signifiers" that come to ossify as one's identity; he emphasizes that, as artists (and, relatedly, as academics), we can take this "free-floating set of signifiers" as a site of freedom and experimentation—of "living authentically" and ethically in relation to each other ("Indigenous").

After nearly an hour and a half of moving around the circle, we get to a young Black man. He introduces himself as a performance artist from the United States, who has been in Montréal for the past month facilitating a performance art intensive and workshopping a project. He begins by naming the fact that he is the only Black person in the room. He quickly moves

into a rapid calling out of all of the things he has found totally “inappropriate” and “appalling” about the talking circle. My heart begins to race. He calls out the Francophones in the room for daring to identify themselves as “colonized.” He describes Garneau’s appeal to engagement with one’s local Indigenous Elders as horrifying, likening it to a call to “go and ask an Indian” for permission to appropriate. Then, grounding himself once again in his positioning as a Black man, he says that he believes the biggest issue right now is anti-Black racism, that anti-Black racism permeates everything in culture, and that it was not at all addressed in this talk.

When the man finishes, the room is vibrating. I feel totally shaken up, as if this person has gone against some kind of tacit agreement of openness and trust that the talking circle was predicated on. I’m also trying to tune in to what this artist is saying, and to how his experience of the circle is so starkly different from mine. The circle turns to David. He is sitting, facing the Black artist with openness. “Geez, why didn’t we start with you?!” Garneau asks, laughing a bit, in an acknowledgment that there might not be enough time left to sufficiently take all of that up. He does not get defensive, and he opens himself up to the person in front of him. David attempted to respond to the points that the artist had raised, attempting to clarify his approach. I’m not sure whether the Black artist was able to see where Garneau was coming from, or whether Garneau was able to see where the Black artist was coming from, but what was clear was that any discussion that touched on race and oppression was, like an intersectional feminist discussion, bound to get heated.

Garneau’s attempt to more rigorously theorize Indigeneity in the contemporary, and to unpack dominant (neo-colonial) discourses of Indigeneity, were understood by the Black performance artist as literal, even violent, statements. This (mis-)understanding points to a much

larger trend in contemporary discourse today, where language—even literary language—is read as purely literal. This seems to me to be one of the most urgent conflicts in feminist discourse, and broader discourse, today—one to which a practice like autotheory might be attuned to responding, but which remains, as we find in the case of Hannah Black, contentious. If everything is taken literally, without room for devices like metaphor, allegory, or satire, what does this mean for creative, theoretical, and speculative practices like art, literature, and philosophy? What about the pedagogical or rhetorical strategy of, as Garneau put it, raising provocations in order to engender conversations—conversations which, while difficult, are politically necessary or socially urgent? What are the most ethically, politically, and aesthetically productive ways to navigate the tensions between the conceptual and the literal? How might autotheory, as a historically feminist, conceptual, and performative mode, present a mode of theorizing and philosophizing more ethical ways of being in the world that are open to different viewpoints, discourses, and perspectives? How might literature and art, with their use of allegory and other non-literal modes of representation and expression, serve as an alternative to an encroaching literalism in culture? On the other hand, the Black performance artist's response to Garneau's talk was an embodied *understanding* of an exclusion in the space of the talking circle: an exclusion of any mention of Blackness. This revelation has led Garneau to begin collaborating with Black artists and scholars, and Garneau has since been propelled to center both Indigenous and Black subjectivities in his projects, a move resonant with larger shifts in feminist and intersectional spaces that recognize the ways in which Black and Indigenous peoples have been inordinately oppressed both globally and in the specific location of North America/Turtle Island.

For Garneau, his Métis identity is discursive and contentious, both historically and today: “Métis-ness is very much a contemporary construction and is contentious” (Garneau, “Indigenous”). Thus, Garneau’s drive for theorizing Indigeneity in this way is itself autotheoretical, grounded in his lived experience, his ongoing relationship to different territories—especially Regina/Treaty 4 Territory, where he lives and teaches—and the political and philosophical questions he continues to engage with in his visual art, art writing, and curation. He does not claim Indigenous identity as a way of accumulating some kind of oppressed cachet, but emphasizes instead how his positionality as Métis requires him to continually trouble his own colonial power. The larger questions that he asks are politically radical, insisting that we question the so-called Indigenization of Canada’s arts, cultural, and academic institutions: “At what point are we agents of the State, and at what point are we sovereign?” Garneau asks; “What is the subject that this Indigenization produces?” (“Indigenous”). What’s more, Garneau’s investigation into what these terms mean is not some high-intellectual, detached attempt at provocation for provocation’s sake, or some hazy appeal against political correctness: it is grounded in a radical Indigenous approach to theory, one that advocates Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination alongside kinship as an ethical mode of relating with each other across Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity lines. His painting *Not to Confuse Politeness with Agreement* features an Aboriginal man in traditional headdress and clothing facing a smiling RCMP officer. A thought bubble emerges from the Aboriginal man’s head, with a red circle in it; from the head of the RCMP officer emerges another thought bubble, featuring a blue square. The painting represents the history of communications between Aboriginal people and the colonial powers in Canada as one of fundamental mis-communication: trying to fit a square peg in a round hole, or seeing a

circle where another person sees a square. Politeness and, perhaps, political correctness will not solve the problems that fundamental divides in discourse and understanding engender: but open, honest, complicated, and “mutually transformative” (Garneau, “Indigenous”) conversation might.

As ideological divides become increasingly entrenched, and discourse increasingly polarized, it is even more difficult to have nuanced conversations about charged topics. For intersectional feminism, this proves particularly grave given that so many of its subjects or objects of concern are charged topics, including issues related to gender, colonialism, and race. From my experience, facilitating a feminist reading group can feel like you are entering a discursive-affective battleground: you must be equipped with the right language, discourse, affect, and attentiveness to nuances of power and privilege. This is especially true as a white feminist. Perhaps this is the pendulum swinging: as outright racism rears its ugly head, it provokes even more forceful activist responses (for example, a Black Lives Matter protest that brings Toronto’s 2016 Pride Parade to a halt, or the refusal of a bi-racial feminist artist to accommodate an older white man). When it comes to autotheory as contemporary feminist practice, our task is to reconcile intersectionality with aesthetic experimentation and nuanced theoretical inquiry in ways that open up new possibilities for thinking, living, and being in the world—what does it look like to take theoretical and aesthetic risks, or to speak in ways that might not readily be understood? Is autotheory an ethical imperative, or should it be? How can we cultivate trust in our readers and audiences? If we blur the line between art and life, or between theory and one’s own positioning, and if we employ intersectionality as our guiding feminist framework, how do conversations with others become possible? When it comes to

contemporary feminist intersectionality and a trans-cultural trend toward working autotheoretically, who gets to speak, to whom, and in what ways?

Autotheory and Truth: The Feminist Ethics of Performing Disclosure

As my discussion over the course of this dissertation has shown, in autotheory, the speaking self or “I” should not to be read straightforwardly as a literal “I” confessing something. Rather, the “auto” becomes a material that the artist or writer works with both as an artistic medium and as material to be theorized. In Chapter 2, “Autotheory as Post Avant-garde Feminist Transgression: Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1997) as Mimetic Performance of Post-Structuralism/ as Phallic Mimesis,” I describe Kraus’s disclosures as performative and conceptually charged, even as I also note the real-world politics of her making statements about known and named men in ways that, if she cannot prove them to be true, could lead to charges of libel. With the high social, cultural, and political stakes of feminist disclosure today, embodied most succinctly in the #MeToo movement (and related hashtags, like #believewomen), questions of truthfulness and facticity surface with some urgency. This is one of the most charged problematics in autotheory as feminist practice today: the tension between using one’s lived experiences as artist’s material in one’s work, and disclosing these experiences in ways that have consequential, real-world effects for those implicated in the disclosures. The question of the truthfulness of an autotheorist’s claims is one worth underlining in light of contemporary politics around rape culture and sexual harassment and assault, outing bad behaviour, and naming names. This presents certain problems when it comes to considering autotheory as a feminist practice that emerges out of traditions of conceptual art, body art, and performance art practices: is the

material transmuted within the autotheoretical text distanced from “reality,” or is it legally “true”? Can it be neither? Can it be both?

Perhaps a little bit shocking¹ to the feminist communities that praised him and his Netflix series *Master of None* for its well-intended, albeit heavy-handed, feminist politics, Aziz Ansari was the most recent take-down in the #MeToo. Indeed, this happened only months after feminists online praised him for having created, directed, and starred in such a “woke” feminist show: the autobiographical, albeit loosely fictionalized (he and his real-life parents star in it, though their names are changed) *Master of None*. In today’s post-internet culture, by invoking feminism you are also aligning yourself with a politics of intersectionality—a politics that is loaded with moral and ethical presuppositions. By aligning himself explicitly with contemporary feminism and its causes—including fighting against rape culture and featuring more Black and POC women and queer folks on TV—Aziz has positioned himself as being that much more open to scrutiny when it comes to how he behaves in real life. The view here is that an identification with feminism—and, hopefully, some understanding of its core ideas and texts—will prompt a change in one’s behaviour. The theory, once again, must be bridged with practice: as hooks, like so many other feminist thinkers, emphasize. Was it fair for feminist audiences to assume that Aziz Ansari’s life was properly intersectional and feminist in all senses just because he wrote a feminist television show? Is the autotheoretical impetus toward blurring life and art a feminist ideal more than it is an accurate reflection of reality?

When I first began writing this dissertation in 2015, asking why we do not seem to consider the real-life actions of a philosopher, theorist, artist, or cultural critic in our reception or

¹ That said, some of the reaction against Ansari was the view that the feminism of his show was merely a discursive smokescreen for his (alleged) bad real-world behaviour.

understanding of their written work seemed to be a new, even slightly strange (or at the very least niche), one. Now, at the time of my finishing it in 2018, the real-life actions of an artist—take stand-up comedian Louis C.K. for example, or actor Kevin Spacey, both of whom are being punished professionally for the actions that they’ve been outed for doing—are taken as utterly consequential to how we are to understand their work. Feminist movements, mobilized online through social media before taking the mainstream by storm, are largely responsible for this shift in consciousness: with decades of feminist activism, writing, and advocacy leading up to this moment, we have moved from a culture of widely accepting and enabling bad behaviour (sexual harassment, assault, rape, other forms of sexual misconduct) to having, at least when made public, zero tolerance. The degree of this shift, observed over the last three years of my research, seems to me to be the pendulum shifting from one extreme to the other. What effect might or will *I Love Dick* have on how we receive Richard Schechner’s work? If I am to go on to teach an Introduction to Performance Studies course, will I include his work? It would be difficult not to, given the role he has played in producing Performance Studies as a discipline and a coherent interdisciplinary discourse. If I include it, do I also include Kraus’s autotheoretical writings on her experience studying performance with Schechner in the form of his “Aboriginal Dream Time Workshops”? Where does context come in to this? In sharing the anecdotes of Schechner’s sexual misconduct with students in *I Love Dick*, was it Kraus’s intention for us to subsequently write off Schechner as a pervy creep? Or is she doing something else—something more nuanced? Naming him surely has different rhetorical and political effects than would merely transmuting the story into an anonymized allegory, so we return again to the unique blurring of

life/art and the often fervent rejection of conventional beliefs around fictionalization that come with autotheory as a practice.

Not surprisingly, we find such damning disclosures in feminist writings earlier than Kraus's 1990s third-wave feminist tracts. Writing on Hesse's *Diaries* (2016), which contain entries written by the artist between the years 1936 and 1970, art critic Mitch Speed explains the ways that Hesse discloses details of mistreatment at the hands of her husband. Speed writes: "On at least one occasion, he [husband Tom Doyle] gives her crabs. Years earlier, reading Camus's *Exile and the Kingdom*, Hesse had sympathized with the book's women who are 'weary of their masks, bored by their relationships and ... yet bound by it.' In retrospect, this reflection reads like a self-directed warning" ("Hesse" 3). Not only do we find the same tendency toward intertextual identification in the autotheoretical writings of Kraus and Nelson in Hesse's work, but we also find the disclosure of truths about known and named men. Of course, the distinction between Hesse's writings and the works being published as autotheoretical in the contemporary are that these were her private diary entries, presumably not intended to have been read by an audience other than herself, and so concerns of fictionalization are not the same as when Kraus, writing autotheoretically, employs the diaristic as a self-reflexive conceit. Indeed, while Hesse's *Diaries* might not be autotheoretical in the sense of Nelson's and Kraus's writings, they bear traces of feminist themes that will be taken up in performative ways by those choosing to publish their autotheoretical work.

I took up the politics and aesthetics of fictionalization as they pertain to autotheory at length in Chapter 2, and it is worth underscoring the ways autotheory, given its perhaps more direct entanglements with the substance of life, presents certain problems when it comes to

fictionalization. Black engages this issue in *Dark Pool Party*, where larger philosophical questions about the epistemological and ontological distinctions between fiction and autobiography emerge from her lived anecdote reading Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and realizing, "one third of the way through," that it "was a novel" (45). What follows is Black's own reflection, through the form of this autotheoretical unpacking of an anecdote (which reads like a short story) the tensions between fiction and autobiography—between art and life. This section in *Dark Pool Party* is framed by an epigraph: Feinberg's statement that "The work is not an autobiography" (Black, *Dark* 45). What seems clear is that in autotheory as feminist practice, the artist or writer might experiment with the lines dividing autobiography, fiction, and theory or philosophy to varying degrees and effects; how the text positions itself in relation to a legally culpable "truth" becomes a particularly charged question when we consider the feminist conversations that have become mainstream in the second decade of the twenty-first century, such as #believewomen and #MeToo.

A question I continue to grapple with is whether autotheory is necessarily a moral or ethical positioning. In order to respond to this, we would need to consider each text in context. Compare Kraus's experimentation with disclosure and her performance of the "I" in her 1997 *I Love Dick* to Nelson's performance of the "I" in her 2015 *The Argonauts*: both texts resonate with a contemporary feminist readership, but they perform disclosure differently. The tension between the "self" as an authentic "I" disclosing what can be understood as truths—think of the legalities and other social implications around disclosure when it comes to sexual assault allegations and cases of rape—and the "self" as material to be experimented with, fictionalized, or performed. Of course, in light of this project's performative framework, and its indebtedness

to the performative turn (as well as what comes afterward), the “self” is always already performed. But the degree to which the “I” is a site of disclosures of lived truths and the site of fictionalization and aesthetic play varies. Autotheory as I read it is a more performative, post-confessional, and critical mode of experimentation than it is a straightforward “memoir” or “autobiography”: yet there is a spectrum of how the autotheorist approaches and mobilizes the “I” in their practice.

As a mode that enlivens the integration of the practice of living and the practice of theorizing or philosophizing, autotheory is well-positioned to be responsive to a real-world politics and ethics that expands out beyond the limits of the written or artistic text. By the logic of Kraus’s *I Love Dick*—where her feminist disclosures serve as a prophetic analog mirroring of the #MeToo movement twenty years later—the lived behaviours of theorists, cultural critics, and scholars matter: our reception of Schechner’s Performance Studies scholarship might be affected, for example, by knowledge of his sexually exploitative behaviour towards students. Or maybe it is inconsequential—but either way, these are moral and political questions that a philosophical project should engage. At the same time, Sedgwick’s reparative reading further complicates things. On the one hand, the reparative makes space for the affective in a way that might fuel the fires of #MeToo and its grassroots feminist foundation; on the other hand, Sedgwick’s desire to reach a mode of thinking that is not binary-oppositional, like Nelson’s self-proclaimed refusal of generalizations (including the discourses of perversion that circulate around figures like Louis C.K. in the wake of his accusers’s accounts, as I’ll unpack below), remind us of how autotheory, like other philosophizing and theorizing practices, pursues knowledge in open-ended, nuanced,

and self-reflexive ways. As a mode of theorizing, autotheory presents a way to explore ethics, politics, and aesthetics without only or always choosing “one side.”

On November 17, 2017, I attended a talk that Maggie Nelson gave at the AGO, sponsored by the *Canadian Art Foundation*. Nelson was in conversation with Sheila Heti, a Toronto-based writer of a genre that has come to be called “auto-fiction,” and they were predominantly taking up Nelson’s *The Argonauts*: copies were available for purchase at the back of the room, though my sense of the room was that all three hundred or so of us had already read the book at least once. Nelson spoke with a deep intelligence and an ethical level-headedness that I actually found surprising for a feminist lecture: what I mean is that, she seemed to be prioritizing philosophical modes of thinking over specifically feminist, and/or intersectional, talking points, even as she engaged with feminist and queer feminist themes. After about an hour of conversation between Nelson and Heti, they opened up the room to questions. A docent walked around the space, passing a microphone to those who wanted to speak. First, my friend Margeaux, a local feminist writer and scholar, asked a question about who has access to writing autotheoretically, drawing from her own positioning as a PhD candidate to contextualize her question. Another woman opens up about her experience having recently given birth, asking Nelson—or perhaps just sharing, with the hope for mutual sharing—how she reconciled the affects of watching your child, who was once inside of you, grow up into a human being who exists apart from you.

After a few more questions that were well-attuned to the vibe of the room, a young woman stood up, her voice shaking, and began to quote a passage from Nelson’s *The Art of Cruelty*. It was a particularly difficult scene, in which Nelson describes the experience of a man (presumably a pedophile, though not labeled as such) who was caught by NBC’s reality

television show *To Catch a Predator* in the process of meeting up with a minor; “when they showed up to the man’s house,” the woman goes on to say, “he shot himself in the head.” The room got a bit colder, and my heart started to beat a little bit harder. She continues to speak with a faltering determination. “Have recent feminist movements gone too far?” the woman asks, alluding to #MeToo and the outing of men who rape and assault.

This feels like an ethically productive moment to me, one that is messy and complicated and nevertheless worthy of nuanced consideration and care—and what better place, than a feminist talk on autotheory? Young women around me turn to each other and whisper, scoffing softly, ridiculing the woman who is standing up and asking the question with their facial expressions and general sense of stark disapproval. The woman who asked the question has clearly gone against the consensus of the room; i.e., the ideological presuppositions undergirding the perspectives of young feminist graduate students like me, who voraciously consume books like *The Argonauts*, nodding emphatically as we read. I feel uncomfortable: and in a weird way, I feel refreshed that the woman is asking those questions that are morally thorny, discursively fraught—that she is exceeding the predictable talking-points of feminist talks like these.

I watch as Nelson responds. Like the woman who posed the question, Nelson makes no mention of specifics: she does not name what the woman seems to be alluding to (#MeToo, #believewomen, rape culture), but instead moves into a broader philosophical conversation about how she is not particularly interested in making generalizations. She goes on to explain how she uses strategies like equivocation in her writing, and that she writes in a way that involves looking at a question from multiple perspectives, shuttling between stances as she theorizes. This is part of her autotheoretical practice. She is wary of generalizations, she says, adding that she is also

wary, as a queer person, of discourses of perversion. I sit with this for a moment, taking it in. This claim could be easily taken down in a paranoid feminist reading that only hears someone being complicit with the patriarchy and enabling the behaviour of rapey men (indeed, as I discuss below, I would later read a Facebook post responding to this situation in just this way). And yet, in this room, Nelson decided to hold space for a different kind of feminist conversation—a different way of thinking through problems and speaking about urgent political issues and ideas relating to gender, sexuality, and violence. For Nelson the autotheorist, thinking through feminist problematics is something done philosophically—expanding out beyond universalizing statements and binary oppositions to a less predetermined, and perhaps a more reparative, way of thinking and being in the world. As Heti, Nelson’s conversant, posed open-endedly in 2010 with the title of her auto-fictional book, which drew from conversations Heti either witnessed or was a part of and which garnered her literary fame: *How Should a Person Be?* (Heti, *How*).

The day after the talk, a new friend of mine—a feminist artist and punk musician who recently moved to Toronto to do her MFA—wrote a post on Facebook. It began, “A big hearty ‘Fuck you!’ to the lady at the Maggie Nelson talk who seriously asked ‘what about the rapists?’, I’m paraphrasing but you get the idea. My most sincere condolences to anyone who has to spend time in the company of someone with so much internalized misogyny” (Anonymous). While I can see where she is coming from, I’m frustrated at how the internet contributes to de-contextualization, and how it is difficult, if not impossible, to comment with a counter-view without being swiftly disregarded as a woman with a similar level of “internalized misogyny” and rape-enabling. I’m reminded of how, in the age of post-internet feminisms, certain topics are so charged as to be rendered unintelligible: when it comes to rape, we are only allowed to say

“fuck rapists” and “believe women,” and are precluded from any discussion around, say, the ethics of feminist disclosure and outing of rapists in relation to the ontology of violence, or what a reparative reading of this woman’s question posed in the ‘safe space’ of the Maggie Nelson-Sheila Heti talk would sound like. I wonder if my artist friend listened to Nelson’s response—that she herself is wary of any generalizations—or if her own affective response to what she perceived the woman in the audience to be saying precluded her from actually listening at all.

Where do practices of listening enter autotheory as a feminist practice or way of being in the world? What about trusting each other? If autotheory is an ethical or moral imperative, could it be a space for radical empathy? What would it mean for feminist theory to extend its rhetorical investments in ‘the other’ to the most other-ed subject positionings, like the rapist? I ask this for the purpose of argument. The value of autotheory, I think, is that even something as charged as rape can be theorized from different perspectives: it can be considered through both the embodied and affective “auto” orientation of one’s lived experience as a rape survivor, for example, and through a different perspective as part of a broader practice of theorizing or philosophizing questions of, say, relationality and violence. In place of black and white thinking, we might instead sit with the grey areas, theorizing and experimenting and performing within them. As a survivor myself, I do not pose these questions frivolously, or out of some kind of “internalized misogyny,” but from the autotheorist’s desire to seek knowledge, understanding, and insight in those places that are the most thorny and liminal, and to transform the ways that we think and speak about issues so that the social structures and institutions we inhabit might also be transformed.

Neoliberal Feminism and the Practice of Self-Branding

Another problem that emerges when we consider questions of truth and efficacy in relation to autotheory is the degree to which neoliberalism and its imperatives of individualism, competitiveness, and success foster an environment of self-branding that bleeds out across the boundaries dividing art, theory, and life: from my discussion of autotheory as performance art and self-imaging practice in Chapter 1 to my discussion of autotheory as a performative mode of inscribing the self across experimental literary, art critical, and art historical practices in Chapters 2 and 3, it is clear that autotheoretical texts are performances of the self, even as they span the self-reflexively ironic and the presumed sincere. To be sure, honesty is itself a rhetorical performance of which one should be cognizant as one considers autotheory as a mode of feminist practice and as an emerging genre of literature and art writing that spans across disciplines—a genre that, on first view, resembles well-established genres like memoir and life writing (which are, like autotheory, enmeshed in self-branding). I took this up when I discussed the politics and aesthetics of performing disclosure in Kraus's *I Love Dick*, and Nelson's use of transparency as a rhetorical tool in *The Argonauts* at the level of both form (the citationality of the mise-en-page) and content (her disclosing of "truths" about herself in a way that might preemptively exonerate her from criticisms and provide her with a greater sense of relatability and empathy—a strategy found in Kraus's work as well). I will admit that, as I read these autotheoretical texts, I might lapse into my own cruel optimism about the possibility of autotheory as a site for earnest self-reflection in the name of seeking knowledge, insight, and truth into the human condition, even as I am also aware of these texts as performances of the self. It is possible that much of the appeal of autotheory in the post-internet present is the ways in which it allows for practices of theorizing

—or practices of processing theoretical and philosophical discourses and questions—to begin from one’s lived experience. Of course, the use of one’s personal experience risks conflating it with some kind of apolitical or incontrovertible truth, rather than as the discursive and very much performed text that it is.

As autotheoretical practices proliferate, we might consider how “theory” takes on different forms for different audiences and readerships, and the ways in which different canons of theory and philosophy are operative in different spaces. While I am personally invested in advocating for the valuation of theory and philosophy in culture, I am also attuned to the questions of access that come up particularly when it comes to theory and philosophy as specialized discourses. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 1 with Piper’s self-imaging practice serving as a way of processing and, in a sense, surviving the anxieties prompted by Kantian philosophy, autotheory might be thought of as alternative feminist reading practices—where reading is understood in a broader, even extra-textual, sense and expands out across media, modes, practices, forms, and relationships. As we consider the present and future of feminist aesthetics, it becomes imperative to consider also how and what autotheory performs discursively, politically, socially, and materially for feminism and for theory/philosophy as modes of thought and frameworks of practice. We should think through what autotheory performs for the writer or artist working within that mode, and the ways in which “theory” and related discourses are mobilized as a means of garnering social, political, cultural, institutional, and aesthetic capital from one’s lived experience or how one performs their identity or subject positioning. How does this complicate the capacity for autotheory to function as a means of critique? In light of the current context of neoliberalism and capitalism, where women, queers, POC, and other

historically marginalized groups represent large markets with consumerist agency, and in which theory as a learned discourse with niche appeal signifies its own cachet, how do we understand autotheory as a means of resistance, transgression, or dissent? How do we understand autotheory as a means to the ends of agency and becoming, particularly when we acknowledge the centrality of discourse to theory and philosophy as systems of knowledge and power?

Autotheory as Becoming: Feminism as Trauma and Possibility

From a certain feminist viewpoint (one which we find both in my friend's Facebook post and Black's response to the man in the audience during her talk), it is not only easy but actively encouraged to say "fuck you" to a certain way of being, whether it is the old white man telling you to speak slower or the young woman perceived to be empathizing with the experience of male perpetrators of violence. Black literally says "No, fuck you" to the white man and the power he symbolizes in the current context of twenty-first century intersectionality. As a parallel to this hyper-charged mode of feminism, we find the rise of figures like Jordan Peterson and his cadre of young male fans who go to discursive, social, and political "war" against feminists and all other "Social Justice Warriors" online and in real life, refusing to acknowledge such "postmodern" views as the intersectionality of oppression and insisting on their right to not have to be "politically correct." To be sure, feminism is a site of antagonism and conflict: its multiple histories are marked by a series of ruptures. I am not disregarding the anger that fuels certain forms of feminist activism, as this anger has surely been integral in transforming social structures. Is autotheory the same as activism? It is reasonable that autotheory, as a mode of philosophical practice, might do something different from activism—or that it might do activism

differently? Many of the women responding with anger are coming from a place of having experienced sexual violence, harassment, or assault, and perhaps without having processed the resultant trauma or gotten to a place where practices of radical empathy are conceivable. The value of autotheory, therefore, might lie in its capacity to bring together personal, lived experience with a vast array of texts from the histories of philosophy, theory, literature, and art to unpack experiences in fresh theoretical directions and engender new insight that resonates philosophically, politically, ethically, socially, aesthetically, and personally.

Affirming the autotheoretical integration of “academic theory” and “everyday theory,” or “academic theory” and the theory that emerges in and through one’s “everyday knowledge and experience,” Sedgwick writes:

But suppose one takes seriously the notion, like the one articulated by Tomkins but also like the other available ones, that everyday theory qualitatively affects everyday knowledge and experience; and suppose that one doesn’t want to draw much ontological distinction between academic theory and everyday theory; and suppose that one has a lot of concern for the quality of other people’s and one’s own practices of knowing and experiencing. In these cases, it would make sense—if one had the choice—not to cultivate the necessity of a systematic, self-accelerating split between what one is doing and the reasons one does it.
(*Touching* 144-145)

Here, Sedgwick performs a thought experiment that affirms both the integration of “academic theory” and “everyday theory,” and the valuing or “concern for” the “quality of other people’s ... practices of knowing and experiencing” (144-45), and in this way reminds us of her reparative drive toward thinking with (and feeling for) the other. As we have seen throughout this conclusion, the tension between the paranoid and the reparative as modes of reading remains heated even within the niche feminist sphere of autotheoretical practices. Another way to understand these tensions is to consider the tension between affirmation and critique, the place of

ressentiment in contemporary feminist modes, and how autotheory as a feminist practice factors in to this. As experimental writers who turn to autotheory as a way of understanding their experiences in relation to the experiences of others, and in relation to theory, philosophy, and art, both Kraus and Nelson move toward affirmation rather than dwelling in resentment; they are seeking to write “beyond good and evil,” affirming new forms while critiquing existing ones. In their own ways, and with their own tones, Piper, Kraus, and Nelson provide critique within an affirmative conceptual framework of performativity and play. A nuanced consideration of autotheory allows us to better understand the relationship between theory and critique.

The movement toward affirmation and reparative reading is also a strategic one; as Isabelle Stengers so aptly observes in “Experimenting with Refrains,” the tendency toward what she calls ““essentialist hunting”” has become a fairly easy, cut-and-dry, “inexhaustible source for academic publications and the production of ever more critical stances (is not ‘feminism’ itself essentialist? And so on)” (41). Indeed, I’ve noticed in graduate seminars that Masters students seem particularly adept at the paranoid mode of reading, which often takes the form not of deconstruction so much as “I don’t like this article because,” or “Here’s a misstep in the article, here’s another misstep, here’s a fault,” and so on. The reparative, in this view, might lead to not only more ethically capacious, but also more theoretically sophisticated and philosophically fruitful ways of reading texts—whether you are reading literary or artistic texts as a scholar, or whether you are reading anecdotes or experiences that you encounter in your daily life as part of the “everyday theory” that Sedgwick describes (*Touching Feeling* 144-145). It is clear that paranoid reading has become almost too easy, and while it might sometimes be part of one’s autotheoretical practice as a feminist to aggressively critique something that you perceive as an

injustice, you might also be encouraged to affirm something through an autotheoretical mode that integrates your affective experience of the world with the experiences of ‘others’ both in the present and from throughout history.

In “Is Feminism a Trauma, a Bad Memory, or a Virtual Future?,” contemporary art historian Griselda Pollock argues that, rather than being ‘over’, feminism is not yet here: “Falling into an intellectual depression in the face of the repeated declaration during the 1990s that feminism was over, dead, done with, or at best no longer interesting or relevant, I decided to argue the inverse. I suggested that, far from being ready for the dustbin of history, feminism had not yet arrived” (29). Pollock’s description of feminism as something that has “not yet arrived” recalls the reflections of José Esteban Muñoz on queerness, and Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue on queer feminism, as a potentiality that is still becoming. The same can be said, Pollock argues, of feminism broadly speaking; riffing on Gilles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz, Pollock states that “Not already known, feminism is becoming” (29). Turning her attention to Grosz’s notion of “theory as virtual,” where “virtual” connotes the Deleuzian sense of potentiality and an exceeding of the boundaries of our selves, Pollock reiterates Grosz’s point: “... ‘theory is never about us, about who we are. It affirms only what we can become, extracted as it is from the events that move us beyond ourselves’ (15)” (Pollock 30).

Similarly, autotheory as feminist practice emerges from real-life experience: this experience might then become iterated, processed, and performed to artistic and conceptual ends, or it might be a more ‘sincere’ attempt at transmuting some kind of actually lived truth value, but it is nevertheless grounded in the practice of living. At the same time, as part of a philosophical project, autotheory might be understood as gesturing toward possibilities for “what we can

become” (Pollock 30), and in this way, is grounded in a transformational feminist politic: a project of self-betterment, perhaps, or the transformation of larger social groupings, collectives, and systems—the latter of which would be more radical in its resistance to the imperatives of neoliberalism and capitalism. Indeed, Pollock turns next to “political subjectivity,” where the political is forged in the personal and “the substance of real lived lives” in a way that is aligned with feminism’s history and present: “Rather than posing theory as abstraction from the substance of real lived lives, stranding thought as the opposite of action, for instance, or activism, or politics, or making a difference in the real world, Grosz is reminding us of the politics of theory...” (30-31). By being grounded in “the substance of real lives lived,” autotheory proves to have political potentiality in Pollock’s and Grosz’s schemas.

As Pollock observes here, even as the discourse of “post-feminism” pervaded the 1990s, with Kraus writing *I Love Dick* at its zenith, it continues to take on new charge in the twenty-first century, with ongoing problematics and dissensus emerging as well. One space where feminism seems particularly vital is in the realm of feminist cultural production as it interfaces with theory, philosophy, criticism: the movement I have come to describe as autotheoretical. The works that I have read as “autotheory” in this dissertation evade disciplinary, formal, medial, and generic bounds. The progression of these chapters has shown a move from the self-imaging practices of feminist performance, body art, and conceptualism—entangled as they are in the gendered politics of “narcissism”—to the feminist practices of citationality and reparative reading as they interface with the ethics of relationality, intimacy, kinship, and the other. And yet, in both cases the auto/self or “I” continues to be the site to which the artist, writer, or critic returns in order to ground their theorizing. The notion of intertextual identification that I introduce in Chapter 2

encompasses this move: the writer, artist, or critic chooses citations that they identify with: they propose a hypothesis or theory garnered from their own lived experience and then, as part of the autotheoretical process of gathering evidence, cite artistic, literary, and philosophical intertexts. What results are autotheoretical works of art that oscillate between the auto/self/I and theory/philosophy/art/literature in ways that are in conversation (often explicitly) with social, political, cultural, ethical, and aesthetic concerns.

One of the particularly generative qualities of autotheory is the way in which it is fundamentally transdisciplinary: autotheory makes space for scholars to practice research-creation, for filmmakers to theorize, for art critics to write poetry, for memoirists to write philosophy. One of the conditions of the contemporary seems to be the requirement of this kind of transdisciplinary thinking on the part of scholars and artists. Only in the last few years has autotheory captured the attention of scholars across the disciplines of English Literature, Comparative literature, and, to a much less extent, Art History. This spring (2018), I presented a paper from my dissertation research as part of a three-day panel on “The Rise of Autotheory, Inside and Outside the Academy” at the American Comparative Literature Association’s annual meeting in Los Angeles. With presentations from established scholars and practitioners of autotheory like Barbara Browning and Erin Wunker, and emerging scholars like me and Lo Ferris, the focus of attention was on literary texts like *Testo Junkie*, *The Argonauts*, and a few texts that I have not considered in my own research—including trans-woman author and activist Janet Mock’s *Redefining Realness* and the poetry of Dionne Brand—with some gestures to performance (Browning) and documentary film (Ferris, Bal).

The fields of contemporary art and art history seem to be catching on: as I write this dissertation, I've been approached both by emerging art historians and practicing artists, including a painter who is currently completing her MFA at OCADU in Toronto, asking me to tell them more about this term "autotheory." "This is the term I have been looking for my whole life," the painter tells me in an Instagram DM. Her painting is, in my view, on the cutting-edge of a new wave of abstract expressionism; her use of colours is spellbinding. Her work is largely figurative, but I do not see any explicit engagement with discourses of theory and philosophy. In fact, she is one of the artists who have lamented to me that, since beginning an MFA, they've hardly had the time to paint. In this dissertation, my conception of autotheory has focused on works that engage theory and philosophy in explicit ways, which might exclude less conspicuous practices. Later that spring, the artist sends me a PDF of her MFA thesis, entitled "I Was Afraid I Wouldn't Be Able to Make Work: Sobriety and the Visual Artist." When I first opened the file on my iPhone, I misread it as, "I was afraid I wouldn't be able to make it to work," and in that moment I was reminded of how we bring our own baggage to what we encounter in the world and to the texts that we read. On the cover of the thesis, it explains that this is the "Supporting thesis for *Buildings I Feel Like*, an exhibition of paintings by Laura Dawe." I had no idea that Dawe was a sober artist, or an artist in recovery. I feel a greater sense of identification with her, and I have a different level of insight into her paintings, which are deceptively familiar in their representations and stirringly strange, sonorously so, in their colours.

Another tension that emerges as I theorize autotheory is the degree to which autotheory is necessarily a wrestling with, or a processing of, "theory," or if it might also be a mode of theorizing that takes place without the mediation or counter-practice of "theory" as a hegemonic

discourse in academia and contemporary art. If for a practice to be properly considered “autotheory” it must involve some engagement, implicitly or explicitly, with those “master discourse[s]” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 149) known as philosophy and “theory,” how might this immediately exclude certain practices or practitioners? When I consider the art, writing, criticism, curatorial projects, and editorial work of contemporary Indigenous artists, for example, including 2-Spirit artists and writers and Indigenous women artists and writers who align themselves with discourses of feminism, is it reasonable to use the same framework as I do when considering Chris Kraus’s work as autotheoretical? When it comes to scholarship on Indigenous work, I believe that my framework and mode of theorizing should be at the very least in conversation with, if not formally de-colonized, Indigenous modes of knowledge. This could also, I think, begin with me taking an autotheoretical approach, positioning myself in light of my own settler-colonial, potentially Métis, background as a white person living on the colonized Indigenous land known as Canada. What of those practices that choose to shirk the colonial texts altogether? What of those practices that take an approach different from mimetic and/or performative subversion? Along with the problem of devising a criteria for what constitutes “autotheory” comes the problem of devising a criteria for what constitutes a “feminist” work, a question which becomes prickly as soon we qualify feminism as simultaneously multiple (a site of pluralities) and as indebted to imperatives of intersectionality (a specific ideological presupposition).

Throughout this dissertation, I have taken the recently trending term “autotheory” as a provocation to theorize what this term signifies in the post-1960s contemporary context of feminist aesthetics and politics. I have been particularly interested in thinking through autotheory

as a feminist mode of engaging with and embodying the discourse of theory in ways that are performative and conceptual. Given the term's emergence in the post-structuralist age, in which discourse takes on a central role even as such sites of power and knowledge are being decentered, and where other turns in theory—including the performative turn, the affective turn, and the new materialist turn—seek out space that is somehow beyond or in excess of the discursive, it is perhaps not surprising that autotheory as feminist practice is heterogeneous and, very often, ambivalent in its approaches to theory. I have taken seriously the ways in which autotheory becomes a mode of practice for artists and writers attuned to the concerns of intersectional feminism to grapple with theory as a discourse that plays an integral role in contemporary art and related critical and experimental practices.

I have advanced autotheory as a way of historicizing, theorizing, and unpacking emergent feminist practices that span literature, conceptual art and performance, art writing and criticism, and other practices, including video art, sound, and astrological readings. Up to this point, my attention has been focused on theorizing autotheory as a performative way of engaging with, processing, and subversively responding to the “master discourse” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 149) of theory and philosophy, and the different kinds of experimentation that these practices make space for. I have considered the paradoxes within the very term autotheory, and the history of autotheory as a mode that spans self-imaging practices to collaborative attempts at writing with, to, or for an “other.” I theorized autotheory as an aesthetic practice that feminists might use to engage with theory, often focusing on mimesis and performativity as strategies of subversion. I have taken up the various political, aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical questions that arise when we consider the ways in which different feminist artists and writers engage with theory alongside

the body, subjectivity, affect, and lived experience. If we consider autotheory as a site of becoming and potentiality, a space for lived experience to become artistic material, and a space that brings together the autobiographical, the theoretical, and the fictional in ways that span the mimetic, the performative, and the more straightforwardly academic, we might also consider it as a practice that is still forming, as a movement bubbling up throughout the twentieth century of feminism and taking on new configurations in the second decade of the twenty-first.

Future directions for my research on autotheory as feminist practice include considering more expansive definitions of philosophy and theory, such as those that exist in Indigenous feminist and Two Spirit practices, and shifting my attention to a less Americentric focus to one that considers in more detail the trans-national reverberations of autotheory in the practices of writers, artists, and curators working elsewhere.² I am currently outlining a chapter on autotheory as it manifests in Indigenous feminist practices in the Canadian context, considering artist and philosopher Rebecca Belmore's 2018 exhibition "Facing the Monumental" at the Art Gallery of Ontario curated by Wanda Nanibush as a starting point. Turning to a more trans-national and multi-lingual view of autotheoretical practices might also provide more insight into the relevance of Marxist, neo-Marxist, and other class-based analyses to autotheory as a feminist mode of practice and thought, as well as the ways in which feminist autotheorists engage with class difference and issues related to labour, accessibility, and political economy alongside gender, sexuality and race. It struck me when my supervisor Marcus Boon rightly observed the startling

² The American-centrism of this project is something that I am aware of, and in my future research I would like to more extensively take up the works of writers, theorists, filmmakers, and artists such as Virginie Despentes and Sylvia Federici, especially when I turn my attention more to issues of class. And yet, there is something to consider in the relationship between autotheory as a term and the specific context of America. I say this even as I am aware that Preciado, who is from Spain and who wrote *Testo Junkie* in Spanish in 2008, was one of the earliest to engage this term in relation to their work.

lack of discussion of class in my dissertation: class is something that I am quite fixated on in my own life, especially when it comes to my experiences navigating academia as someone who is the first person in my family to even attend college or University, let alone pursue a degree or go to graduate school. Suffice it to say that it was compelling for me to sit with the irony that my own dissertation on feminist autotheory was one in which my own personal fixations— class and religion— were effectively repressed. This is something I am looking forward to remedying in my postdoctoral research. Federici's work, for example, is particularly relevant to my future project *Feminist Father Worship*, which involves autotheoretically processing my own lived perspective growing up in a working-class, Evangelical Christian context rife with intergenerational trauma in Treaty 4 territory, Saskatchewan, through work that is performative, citational, and self-reflexive about discourse. I am in the process of proposing this as a research-creation SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship with Dr. Helena Reckitt in the Department of Art and Goldsmiths University of London. As a practicing curator and artist, I am keen to move my academic research away from the Humanities and toward Visual Art, Curatorial Studies, and Studio Practice as I move into postdoctoral work. In recent projects, I bridge my curatorial and art practices with my research on autotheory, including staging a performance lecture and installation at Gallery TPW; writing experimental pieces of art writing for Dazibao and Untitled Art Society; and curating a video art screening program on *Autotheory* at Vtape. It has been a lot of fun. For *Feminist Father Worship*, I would like to write an autotheoretical text or bookwork that exists alongside an installation in an art gallery: as I currently imagine it, the installation will comprise a multi-channel video installation, sound work, sculpture, photo, and text.

Works Cited

- ACAD. "The Alberta College of Art + Design is Now a University." *ACAD*, 1 March 2018, www.acad.ca/news/alberta-college-art-design-now-university
- Acker, Kathy and McKenzie Wark. *I'm Very into You Correspondence 1995–1996*. Edited by Matias Viegner, Semiotext(e), 2015.
- Acker, Kathy. *Blood and Guts in High School*. Grove, 1994.
- - -. *Bodies of Work*. Serpent's Tail, 1997.
- Adams, Parveen and Elizabeth Cowie, editors. *The Woman in Question: m/f*. Verso, 1990.
- Adams, Parveen, et al. Introduction. *m/f: a feminist journal*. vol. 1, no. 1, 1978, pp. 5-7.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Anchor, 2014.
- "aesthetic, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/3237
- Ahmed, Sara. "Equality Credentials." Blog post. *feministkilljoys*. 10 June 2016. Web. 27 July 2016. www.feministkilljoys.com/2016/06/10/equality-credentials/
- - -. "Evidence." Blog post. *feministkilljoys*. 12 July 2016. Web. 27 July 2016. www.feministkilljoys.com/2016/07/12/evidence/
- - -. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke UP, 2017.
- - -. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke UP, 2006.
- - -. "Resignation." Blog post. *feministkilljoys*. 30 May 2016. Web. 22 July 2016. www.feministkilljoys.com/2016/05/30/resignation/
- - -. "Speaking Out." Blog post. *feministkilljoys*. 2 June 2016. Web. 27 July 2016. www.feministkilljoys.com/2016/06/02/speaking-out/
- - -. *Willful Subjects*. Duke UP, 2014.
- Alexander, Elizabeth. "'Coming out Blackened and Whole': Fragmentation and Reintegration in Audre Lorde's *Zami* and *The Cancer Journals*." *American Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 4, Winter 1994, pp. 695-715.

- Allan, Jonathan A. *Reading from Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus*. U of Regina P, 2016.
- Anderson, Laurie. *Big Science*. Warner Bros. Records, 1982.
- Anonymous. Facebook status. "A big hearty 'Fuck you!' to the lady at the Maggie Nelson talk who seriously asked 'what about the rapists?,' I'm paraphrasing but you get the idea. My most sincere condolences to anyone who has to spend time in the company of someone with so much internalized misogyny." 19 November 2017.
- Als, Hilton. "Immediate Family: Maggie Nelson's life in words." *The New Yorker*, 18 April 2016, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/04/18/maggie-nelsons-many-selves
- - -. *White Girls*. McSweeney's, 2014.
- - -. *The Women*. Macmillan, 1998.
- Althusser, Louis. "What Is Practice?" *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, translated and edited by G.M. Goshgarian, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 78-84.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria E. and Cherrie Moraga, editors. 1981. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. State U of New York P, 2015.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 1987. Aunt Lute, 2012.
- APRAF (Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation) Archivist. "Accessing archival materials of *Food for the Spirit*." E-mail. Received by Lauren Fournier, 17 August 2016.
- APRAF Exhibitions Assistant. "Accessing archival materials of *Food for the Spirit*." E-mail. Received by Lauren Fournier, 4 April 2017.
- APRAF. "The APRA Foundation Berlin Multi-Disciplinary Fellowship." Web. 10 April 2017.
- - -. "The Research Archive ." Web. 1 May 2017. www.adrianpiper.com/research.shtml
- Apter, Emily. "The Story of I: Luce Irigaray's Theoretical Masochism." *NWSA Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, Spring 1990, pp. 186-98.
- "ardor, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/10493
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. 1963. Penguin, 2006.

- Armitstead, Claire, et al. "Maggie Nelson and Chris Kraus on confessional writing." Podcast. *Guardian podcast*, 27 May 2016, www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2016/may/27/maggie-nelson-and-chris-kraus-on-confessional-writing-books-podcast
- Art Toronto. "PLATFORM Speaker Series." *Art TO Show Guide 2016*. Toronto, 2016.
- Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, Oxford UP, 1962.
- Azeri, Siyaves. "Transcendental Subject vs. Empirical Self: On Kant's Account of Subjectivity." *Filozofia*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2010, pp. 269-83.
- Baer, Martha, et al. "The V-Girls: A Conversation with October." *October*, vol. 51, Winter 1989, pp. 115-43.
- Bal, Mieke, et al. "A Range of Critical Perspectives: Art History and Its Theories." *Art Bulletin*, vol. 78, no. 1, 1996, pp. 6-25.
- Bal, Mieke. "Documenting What? Autotheory and Migratory Aesthetics." *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, edited by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, pp. 124-44.
- - -. "Migratory Aesthetics: Double Movement." *EXIT*, vol. 32, 2008, pp. 150-61.
- - -. *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. U of Toronto P, 2002.
- Barreca, Regina. Introduction. *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, edited by Regina Barreca. Gordon and Breach, 1988.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." 1967. *Image Music Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 142-49.
- - -. "The Death of the Author." 1967. *Ubu Web Papers*. Translated by Richard Howard. <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html>
- - -. "From Work to Text." *Image Music Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 155-65.
- - -. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. 1977. Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1978.

- - -. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. 1975. Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bataille, Georges. *Eroticism*. Penguin, 1957.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Why Theory?" *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*. Edited by Chris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(e), 2001, pp. 129-31.

Bechdel, Alison. *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama*. Houghton Mifflin, 2012.

- - -. Comic strip. *Dykes to Watch Out For*. 1983-2008. www.dykestowatchoutfor.com/dtwof

- - -. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Beckles, Madelyne. *Theory of the Young Girl*. 2017. Video. <http://www.vtape.org/video?vi=8931>

Bell, Shannon. *Fast Feminism: Speed Philosophy, Pornography, and Politics*. Autonomedia, 2010.

- - -. "Fragment of a Case of Posthysteria: D'or Owns the Jewel." *ESC*, vol. 40, no.1, March 2014, pp. 189-210.

- - -. Personal interview. Ross Building, York University, Toronto, 3 May 2016.

- - -. *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*. Indiana UP, 1994.

- - -. "Research 2004-13." *York University*, 2013, yorku.ca/shanbell/research.html

- - -. "Shooting Theory - An Accident of Fast Feminism, video and transcript of talk by Shannon Bell," in *Traversing Technologies*. Barnard Center for Research on Women, S&F Online, 2014, www.sfonline.barnard.edu/traversing-technologies/shannon-bell-shooting-theory/

- - -. *Whore Carnival*. Autonomedia, 1995.

Bellamy, Dodie and Kevin Killian, editors. *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative 1977-1997*. Nightboat, 2017.

Bellamy, Dodie. *Academonia*. Krupskaya, 2006.

- - -. *Cunt Norton*. Les Figues, 2013.

- - -. *When the Sick Rule the World*. Semiotext(e), 2015.

Bergson, Henri. "Laughter." *Comedy*. Edited by Wylie Sypher, JHU, 1956, pp. 59-190.

Berkowitz, Amy. *Tender Points*. Timeless Infinite Light, 2015.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011.

- - -. "On Being In Life Without Wanting the World (Living with Ellipsis)." Ioan Davies Annual Lecture, Scott Library, York University, Toronto, 15 October 2014.

Bersani, Leo. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October*, vol. 43, Winter 1987, pp. 192-222.

Bianco, Marcie. "Review of *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* by Beatriz Preciado." *Lambda Literary*, 25 September 2013, www.lambdaliterary.org/reviews/09/25/testo-junkie-sex-drugs-and-biopolitics-in-the-pharmacopornographic-era-by-beatriz-preciado/

Bianconi, Giampaolo. "Exploring Bludgeoned Subjectivity: Talking to Chris Kraus." *Rhizome*, 9 August 2012, rhizome.org/editorial/2012/aug/9/chris-kraus-interview/

Biss, Eula. *On Immunity: An Inoculation*. Graywolf, 2014.

Black, Hannah. *Dark Pool Party*. Edited by Martine Syms and Rószka Farkas, Arcadia Missa, 2016.

- - -. "Fractal Freedoms." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Inquiry*, Spring/Summer 2016, pp. 5-9.

- - -. "OPEN LETTER." Republished by *ArtNews*. 21 March 2017, www.artnews.com/2017/03/21/the-painting-must-go-hannah-black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work/

Blair, Elaine. "Chris Kraus, Female Antihero." *The New Yorker*. 21 November 2016. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/chris-kraus-female-antihero

Bloom, Lisa. "Contests for Meaning in Body Politics and Feminist Conceptual Art: Revisiting the 1970s through the work of Eleanor Antin." *Performing the Body, Performing the Text*, Edited by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, Routledge, 1999, pp. 153-69.

Boon, Marcus, et al. *Nothing: Three Inquiries into Buddhism*. U of Chicago P, 2015.

- Boon, Marcus. Lecture. *In Praise of Copying*. Harvard UP, 2010.
- - -. "Practice." Toronto, York University, 19 September 2016.
- Borkowski, Mary. "Interview with Kate Zambreno." *The New Inquiry*, 1 November 2012, www.thenewinquiry.com/interview-with-kate-zambreno/
- Bowles, John. "'Acting like a Man': Adrian Piper's Mythic Being and Black Feminism in the 1970s." *Signs*, vol. 32, no. 3, Spring 2007, pp. 621-47.
- - -. "Adrian Piper as African American Artist." *American Art*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 108-17.
- - -. *Adrian Piper: Race, Gender, and Embodiment*. Duke UP, 2011.
- Brophy, Kevin. "Perfect Eyeliner (part 2): How to Put Eyeliner on with a Knife." *YouTube*, 7 May 2015. www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqabelTT7rU
- Brossard, Nicole. *The Aerial Letter*. Women's, 1987.
- - -. *Picture Theory*. 1982. Translated Barbara Godard, Guernica, 2006.
- Brown, Wendy. *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*, Princeton UP, 2005.
- Brushwood Rose, Chloë and Maggie Nelson. "'An Endless Becoming': An Interview with Maggie Nelson on *The Argonauts*." *Nomorepotlucks*, vol. 44, 2016, www.nomorepotlucks.org/site/an-endless-becoming-an-interview-with-maggie-nelson-on-the-argonauts-chloe-brushwood-rose/
- Burke, Sarah. "Post-Confessional: The Aging Intimacies of Sophie Calle." *Momus*, 2 August 2017, momus.ca/aging-intimacies-sophie-calle/
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex.'* Routledge, 1993.
- - -. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Routledge, 1997.
- - -. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. Routledge, 1999.
- - -. "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse." *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Edited by Linda J. Nicholson, Routledge, 1990.
- - -. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, December 1988, pp. 519-31.

Cage, John. *Empty words: Writings '73-'78*. Wesleyan UP, 1981.

Canadian Art authors. "Canadian Art Encounters Series: Maggie Nelson in Conversation with Sheila Heti." *Canadian Art*. 12 September 2017, www.canadianart.ca/internationalseries/2017/09/12/canadian-art-encounters-series/

Cantú, Norma E. and Aída Hurtado. "Introduction to the Fourth Edition." Introduction. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Aunt Lute, 2012, pp. 3-13.

Carson, Anne. *Glass, Irony, and God*. Jonathan Cape, 1998.

Chave, Anna. "'I Object': Hannah Wilke's Feminism." *Art in America*, March 2009, pp. 104-09.

Chicks on Speed. *Girl Monster*, Chicks on Speed Records, 2006.

Chidgey, Red. "The Resisting Subject: Per-zines as life story data." *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 10, 2006, pp. 1-13.

"cipher | cypher, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/33155

Civil, Gabrielle. *Swallow the Fish: a memoir in performance art*. Civil Coping, 2017.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875-93.

Clueless. Directed by Amy Heckerling, performances by Alicia Silverstone, Stacey Dash, Brittany Murphy, and Paul Rudd, Paramount, 1995.

Cody, Gabrielle. "Sacred Bazoombas." Introduction. *Hardcore from the Heart: The Pleasures, Profits and Politics of Sex in Performance*, edited by Gabrielle Cody, Continuum, 2001.

Cotter, Holland. "Adrian Piper: The Thinking Canvas." *The New York Times*. 19 April 2018. www.nytimes.com/2018/04/19/arts/design/adrian-piper-review-moma.html

Coyote, Ivan E. and Rae Spoon. *Gender Failure*. Arsenal Pulp, 2014.

Creet, Julia, Dir.. Synopsis. *Data Mining the Deceased: Ancestry and the Business of Family*. Vtape, 2016, past-productions.apps01.yorku.ca/data-mining-the-deceased/synopsis/

Crimp, Douglas. "Fassbinder, Franz, Fox, Elvira, Erwin, Armin, and All the Others." *Queer*

- Looks*, edited by Martha Gever, et al., Routledge, 2017, pp. 257-74.
- Cromarty, Heather. "(NOT) GIRLS AND (MAD)WOMEN: Review of Tiqqun's *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young Girl* and Kate Zambreno's *Heroines*." *Lemon Hound*, 14 Feb. 2013. www.lemonhound.com/2013/02/14/not-girls-and-madwomen-tiqquns-preliminary-materials-for-a-theory-of-a-young-girl-and-kate-zambrenos-heroines/
- Culler, Jonathan. *Barthes*. Edited by Frank Kermode, Fontana, 1983.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings*, Duke UP, 2003.
- - -. *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Duke UP, 2012.
- Cvetkovich, Ann and Allyson Mitchell. "A Girl's Journey into the Well of Forbidden Knowledge." *GLQ*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, pp. 603-18.
- Davey, Moyra and Maggie Nelson. "Yours, Truly." *Art Forum*, 24 August 2017, www.artforum.com/slant/id=70590
- Davis, Ben. "Superscript 2015 Keynote: Post-Descriptive Criticism by Ben Davis," *Walker Art Centre*, 4 June 2015. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyPc2UUroAE
- Davis, Heather, editor. *Desire Change: Contemporary Feminist Art in Canada*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2017.
- Dawe, Laura. "I Was Afraid I Wouldn't Be Able to Make Work: Sobriety and the Visual Artist." MFA thesis, Interdisciplinary Masters of Art and Design, OCADU, 2018.
- Dawn, Amber. "Call for Poetry by Sex Workers." *Amber Dawn*. 29 May 2018. www.amberdawnwrites.com/call-for-poetry-by-sex-workers
- - -. *How Poetry Saved My Life: A Hustler's Memoir*. Arsenal Pulp, 2013.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Mandarins*. 1956. Translated by Leonard M. Friedman, Harper Perennial, 2005.
- - -. *The Second Sex*. 1949. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Random House Vintage, 2011.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven F. Rendall, U of California P, 1984.

- Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. 1981. Translated by Daniel W. Smith, Continuum, 2003.
- - -. *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. Translated by Martin Joughin, Columbia UP, 1995.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley et al., U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- - -. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi, U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- - -. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia UP, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. 1982. Edited by Christie McDonald, translated by Peggy Kamuf et al., Schocken, 1985.
- - -. *Writing and Difference*. 1967. Translated by Alan Bass, Routledge, 1978.
- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method*. 1637. Translated by Richard Kennington, Hackett, 2012.
- Despentes, Virginie. *King Kong Theory*. Translated by Stephanie Benson, Feminist, 2010.
- “Did You Read It?” *Portlandia*. IFC. Television. 2011.
- Di Leo, Jeffrey R. “Deleuze in the Age of Posttheory.” *symplokē*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1998, pp.174-79.
- Doerr, Jennifer and Maggie Nelson. “‘Making Space Around the Beloved.’ An Interview with Maggie Nelson.” *Brooklyn Quarterly*, 26 October 2015, <http://brooklynquarterly.org/making-space-around-the-beloved/>
- Dowling, Stephen. “The most important cardboard box ever?” *BBC News*. 5 January 2015. www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30530268
- Doyle, Jennifer. “The Effect of Intimacy: Tracey Emin’s Bad-Sex Aesthetics.” *Sexuality*, edited by Amelia Jones, Whitechapel, 2014, pp.152-56.
- - -. *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. Duke UP, 2013.
- - -. *Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire*. U of Minnesota P, 2006.

- Drobnick, Jim. "Bodies of Interference." *Carolee Schneemann: Split Decision*. MOCCA, 2007, pp. 26-31.
- DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Cosimo, 2007.
- Duncan, Fiona. "I Love Dick on TV: Chris Kraus's Advice for a Young-Girl." *Ssense*. 7 March 2017. www.ssense.com/en-ca/editorial/culture/i-love-dick-on-tv
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*. Routledge, 1990.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau and Ann Snitow. Introduction. *The Feminist Memoir Project*. Edited by Ann Snitow, Three Rivers, 1998.
- Duras, Marguerite. *Writing*. Edited by Mark Polizzotti, U of Minnesota P, 2011.
- Eckardt, Stephanie. "The Dana Schutz Open Letter War Has Now Roped in the Likes of Marina Abramovic and Cindy Sherman." *W Magazine*, 4 August 2017, www.wmagazine.com/story/dana-schutz-ica-boston-open-letter-controversy
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke UP, 2004.
- Eliot, George. *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists*. 1856. Penguin, 2010.
- Elkins, James and Michael Newman, editors. *The State of Art Criticism*. Routledge, 2008.
- Ellis, Carolyn, et al. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Forum*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2011, n/a.
- Evans, Sara. *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.
- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. 1998. Autonomedia, 2004.
- - -. *Wages Against Housework*. Falling Wall, 1975.
- Ferris, Lo. Abstract. "On the Documentary Poetics of the Theorist as Autoethnographer," in *The Rise of Autotheory, Inside and Outside the Academy*, *ACLA*, Los Angeles, *UCLA*, 2018.
- Finley, Karen. *The Truth Is Hard To Swallow*. Crammed Discs, 1988.
- Fisher, Anna Watkins. "Manic Impositions: The Parasitical Art of Chris Kraus and Sophie Calle." *WSQ*, vol. 40, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2012, pp. 223-35.

Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. U of Chicago P, 2011.

Foucault, Michel. "What Is An Author?" 1969. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley et al, New, 1998, pp. 205-22.

Fournier, Lauren. "Exhibition Review: Julian Rosefeldt's *Manifesto*." *Magenta*. Summer/Fall 2016, <http://www.magentafoundation.org/magazine/julian-rosefeldt/>

Fraiman, Susan. *Cool Men and the Second Sex*, Columbia UP, 2003.

Fraser, Andrea. *Andrea Fraser: Texts, Scripts, Transcripts*, Museum Ludwig, 2013.

Fraser, Nancy. "Feminism's Two Legacies: A Tale of Ambivalence." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 114, no. 4, 2015, pp. 699-712.

Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. 1929. Translated by James Strachey, Norton, 1961.

- - -. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. 1905. Translated by James Strachey, Routledge, 1966.

- - -. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, 24 vols, Hogarth, 1974.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Foreword by Harold Bloom, Princeton UP, 1957.

Fulton, Jeni. "How documenta14 Failed Everyone but its Curators." *Sleek Magazine*. 3 July 2017. www.sleek-mag.com/2017/07/03/documenta-14-kassel/

Full Stop Editors. "The Situation in American Writing: Chris Kraus." *Full Stop*. 10 December 2014. www.full-stop.net/2014/12/10/interviews/the-editors/the-situation-in-american-writing-chris-kraus/

Fusco, Coco. "Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go: On Dana Schutz's Image of Emmett Till." *Hyperallergic*, 27 March 2017, www.hyperallergic.com/368290/censorship-not-the-painting-must-go-on-dana-schutzs-image-of-emmett-till/

- - -. *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. New, 1995.

Gad, Amira. "'Whatever Happened to the Institutional Critique?' Andrea Fraser's Reformulation

- of Critical Practices.” Diss, Sotheby’s Institute of Art, 2009.
- Gaerig, Andrew. “Review of Maria Minerva, *Cabaret Cixous*.” *Pitchfork*. 29 September 2011.
<https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15871-cabaret-cixous/>
- Gallery 44. “Emilia-Amalia Working Group.” *Gallery 44*, 5 June 2016,
gallery44.org/events/emilia-amalia-working-group
- Gallop, Jane. *Anecdotal Theory*. Duke UP, 2002.
- - -. *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time*, Duke UP, 2011.
- - -. *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. Duke UP, 1997.
- - -. *Thinking Through the Body*. Columbia UP, 1998.
- Garneau, David. “Migration as Territory: Performing Domain with a Non-colonial Aesthetic Attitude.” *VOZ-À-VOZ*, 13 October 2015, www.vozavoz.ca/feature/david-garneau
- - -. “A Talking Circle about Indigenous Contemporary Art.” Oboro, 28 September 2017,
www.oboro.net/en/activity/everyone-artist-art-after-criticism
- Gay, Roxane. *Bad Feminist*. Harper Perennial, 2014.
- Gelpi, Albert and Robert J. Bertholf. *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of Poetry*. Stanford UP, 2006.
- Gilbert, Joanne. *Performing Marginality*. Wayne State UP, 2004.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. “The Yellow Wallpaper.” 1892. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. 11th edition. Edited by Kelly J. Mars, Norton, 2013, pp. 655-66.
- - -. “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper.” *The Forerunner*, 1913.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *Kaddish and Other Poems*. 1961. Penguin, 2013.
- Godard, Barbara. “Life (in) Writing: Or a Writing-Machine for Producing the Subject.” *Nicole Brossard: Essays on Her Works*, Guernica, 2005, pp. 191-208.
- Godard, Barbara, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei, and Gail Scott. “Theorizing Fiction Theory.” *Tessera*, vol. 3, January 1986, pp. 6-12.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday, 1959.

Gordon, Kim. *Is It My Body? Selected Texts*. Edited by Branden W. Joseph. Sternberg, 2014.

@gothshakira. Keynote. “@gothshakira.” In “What would the community think?” Toronto: Xpace Cultural Centre. Curated by Emily Gove. 15 October 2016.

- - -. Meme. “When the confessional femme meme is longer than a sentence.” Instagram. 20 October 2016. Web. 16 February 2017.

- - -. Meme. “whom tf invited a meem admin to a mf art history conference Imfoaaaao.” *no neutral art, no neutral art historians*. Concordia Art History Graduate Student Association Conference. Montréal: Concordia University. 27 January 2017. www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZBv016hOmU&feature=youtu.be

Graham, Elaine. “‘Nietzsche Gets a Modem’: Transhumanism and the Technological Sublime.” *Literature and Theology*, vol. 16, no. 1, March 2002, pp. 65-80.

Graw, Isabelle and Daniel Birnbaum. Preface. *It It My Body? Selected Texts*, by Kim Gordon, edited by Branden W. Joseph. Berlin: Sternberg, 2014. 7.

Greenberger, Alex. “‘The Painting Must Go’: Hannah Black Pens Open Letter to the Whitney About Controversial Biennial Work.” *Art News*. 21 March 2017. www.artnews.com/2017/03/21/the-painting-must-go-hannah-black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work/

Gross, Terry and Mary Karr. “Mary Karr on Writing Memoirs: ‘No Doubt I’ve Gotten A Million Things Wrong’.” Podcast, *Fresh Air*, NPR, 23 September 2016.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Allen and Unwin, 1989.

- - -. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana UP, 1994.

- - -. “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory.” *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2010, pp. 48-51.

Guattari, Félix. *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*. Edited by Stéphane Nadaud, translated by Kéline Gotman, Semiotext(e), 2006.

Guggenheim. “Post-Minimalism.” *Guggenheim Collection Online*, 1 June 2018, www.guggenheim.org/artwork/movement/post-minimalism

- Guyer, Paul and Allen W. Wood. Introduction. *Critique of Pure Reason*, by Immanuel Kant, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 1-80.
- Guzmán, Joshua Javier. "Review of *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* by Nicole R. Fleetwood." *e-misférica*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. n/a, hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-81/guzman
- Halberstam, Jack. *In A Queer Time and Place*. NYU, 2005.
- - -. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke UP, 2011.
- - -. "The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons." Introduction. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, Autonomedia, 2013, pp.2-13.
- Hammer Museum. "A History of Refusal: Black Artists and Conceptualism." Panel discussion. 21 May 2015, www.hammer.ucla.edu/programs-events/2015/05/a-history-of-refusal-black-artists-and-conceptualism/
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, 1991.
- - -. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by Sandra G. Harding, Routledge, 2004, pp. 81-102.
- Hatoum, Mona. *Measures of Distance*. 1988, single-channel video with sound, London, Tate Modern.
- - -. *You Are Still Here*. 1994, sandblasted mirrored glass and wood, London, Tate Modern.
- Hauser & Wirth. "Roni Horn, *Rings of Lispector (Agua Viva)*," exhibition, London, Hauser & Wirth, 2004. www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/57/roni-horn-rings-of-lispector-agua-viva/view/
- Hawkins, Joan. "Afterword: Theoretical Fictions." *I Love Dick*, by Chris Kraus, Semiotext(e), 1997, pp. 263-76.
- - -. "Smart Art and Theoretical Fictions." *CTheory*. 20 February 2001. Web. 9 October 2016.
- Hawkins, Katy. "Woven Spaces: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Dialogue on Love*." *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2006, pp. 151-267.

- Hedva, Johanna. "My Body Is a Prison of Pain so I want to Leave It Like a Mystic But I Also Love It & Want it to Matter Politically." *Women's Center for Creative Work*, 7 October 2015, vimeo.com/144782433
- - -. "Sick Woman Theory." *Mask Magazine*, January 2016, maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory
- Heinrich, Nathalie and Michael Pollak. "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position." *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg et al, Routledge, 1996, pp. 231-50.
- Heiser, Jörg et al. "Scenes from a Marriage: Have art and theory drifted apart?" Frieze Talks London 2009, *Frieze*, 19 May 2016, podcasts.frieze.com/?name=2014-07-10_scenes_from_a_marriage_art_and_theory.mp3
- Hejinian, Lyn. *My Life and My Life in the Nineties*. 2003. Wesleyan UP, 2013.
- Heller, Aron (Associated Press). "'Weinstein Effect' goes global as powerful men confronted." *India Times*, 14 November 2017, www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/weinstein-effect-goes-global-as-powerful-men-confronted/articleshow/61645251.cms
- Hesse, Eva. *Diaries*. Edited by Barry Rosen and Tamara Bloomberg, Hauser and Wirth, 2016.
- Herman, Alison. "Is Jill Soloway's 'I Love Dick' the Most Unlikely TV Adaptation of All Time? Peak TV takes on 90s feminist autofiction." *The Ringer*, 17 August 2016, www.theringer.com/2016/8/17/16040158/i-love-dick-adaptation-jill-soloway-netflix-23f47536ed80
- Herrington, Tony. "Erotic neurotic." *The Wire*. 12 April 2011. <https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/thewire/a=3/k=Maria+Minerva>
- Hershman Leeson, Lynn, director. *Women Art Revolution*. Hotwire Productions, 2011.
- Heti, Sheila. *How Should a Person Be*. 2010. House of Anansi, 2014.
- hooks, bell. *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End, 2000.
- - -. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End, 1984.
- - -. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge, 1994.

- - -. "Understanding Patriarchy." *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Washington Square, 2004.

Householder, Johanna. "Apologia." *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women*, edited by Johanna Householder and Tanya Mars, YYZ, 2004, pp. 12-19.

Howe, Fanny. *Indivisible*. Semiotext(e) Native Agents, 2000.

Hudson, Genevieve and Maggie Nelson. "An Interview with Maggie Nelson." *BookSlut*, July 2013, www.bookslut.com/features/2013_07_020156.php

Hval, Jenny. *Apocalypse, girl*. Sacred Bones, 2015.

- - -. *Blood Bitch*. Sacred Bones, 2016.

- - -. *Innocence is Kinky*. Rune Grammofon, 2013.

- - -. *Inn i ansiktet*. Forlaget Oktober, 2012.

- - -. "More Work." *Jenny Hval*. 2014. <http://jennyhval.com/more-work>

If You Want It, LTD. "About." *Gender Is Over*, January 2017, <http://genderisover.com/>

"Immanuel Kant." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP)*. 20 May 2010, www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/

Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. 1984. Translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, Cornell UP, 1993.

- - -. "Luce Irigaray International Seminar." Luce Irigaray International Seminar. University of Bristol, Bristol, UK, 15 June 2016.

- - -. Personal interview. University of Bristol, Bristol, UK, 18 June 2016.

- - -. *Sharing the World*. Continuum, 2008.

- - -. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. 1974. Translated by Gillian C. Gill, Cornell UP, 1985.

- - -. *This Sex Which is Not One*. 1977. Translated by Cathrine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Cornell UP, 1985.

- Isaak, Jo Anna. *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*. Routledge, 1996.
- Jackson, Susan. *Differently Academic? Developing Lifelong Learning for Women in Higher Education*. Springer, 2004.
- Jackson, Shannon. *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Routledge, 2011.
- Jameson, Fredric. "How Not to Historicize Theory." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 3, Spring 2008, pp. 563-82.
- - -. "Periodizing the 60s." *Social Text*, vol. 9/10, Spring-Summer 1984, pp. 178-209.
- - -. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. 1989. Duke UP, 1991
- - -. "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 2, Winter 2004, pp. 403-08.
- Jamison, Leslie. *The Empathy Exams*. Graywolf, 2014.
- - -. "This Female Consciousness: On Chris Kraus." *The New Yorker*, 9 April 2015, www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/this-female-consciousness-on-chris-kraus
- Janiak, Andrew. "Kant's Views on Space and Time." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N Zalta, Winter 2016, www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-spacetime/
- Jones, Amelia. "Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning." *Performing the Body, Performing the Text*, edited by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, Routledge, 1999, pp. 39-55.
- - -. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. U of Minnesota P, 1998.
- - -. *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*. MIT Press, 2004.
- - -. "The Local versus the Global in Curating and Curatorial Pedagogy." *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 6, no.2, 2017, pp. 231-39.
- - -. *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*. Routledge, 2012.
- - -. *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject*. Routledge, 2006.
- - -, editor. *Sexuality: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Whitechapel and MIT, 2014.

- Jones, Amelia and Adrian Heathfield, editors. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Intellect, 2012.
- Jones, Vanessa E. "The Fallen Academic Star of Adrian Piper." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, vol. 36, 2002, pp. 120-23.
- Joseph, Branden W. Introduction. *Is It My Body? Selected Texts*, by Kim Gordon, edited by Branden W. Joseph, Sternberg, 2014, pp. 8-19.
- Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana UP, 2013.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. 1790. Edited by Nicholas Walker, translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford UP, 2007.
- - -. *Critique of Pure Reason*. 1781. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge UP, 1998.
- - -. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science*. 1783. Edited by Gary Hatfield, translated by Gary Hatfield, Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Kapil, Bhanu (@Thisbhanu). *Ban en Banlieue*, Nightboat, 2015.
- - -. "'Citation is feminist memory.'" - Sarah Ahmed." *Twitter*, 30 December 2015, 9:25 am.
- - -. "This is the year I heard the words "autotheory" and now, from Sofia Samatar, "life thinking" -- for the first time." *Twitter*, 1 October 2015, 9:09 am.
- Karr, Mary. *The Art of Memoir*. HarperCollins, 2015.
- KC. "academy, autotheory, and the argonauts." *aminotfemme*, Wordpress, 22 April 2016. <https://aminotfemme.wordpress.com/tag/autotheory/>
- Keeling, Kara. *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. Duke UP, 2007.
- Khonsary, Jeff. Preface. *Hotel Theory Reader*, edited by Sohrab Mohebbi and Ruth Estévez, Fillip/REDCAT, 2016, pp.8-9.
- Killian, Kevin and Dodie Bellamy. "New Narrative Beginnings 1977-1997," *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative 1977-1997*, edited by Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian, Nightboat, 2017, pp. i-xx.

Kosuth, Joseph. "Art After Philosophy." *Studio International*, 1969.

Kraus, Chris. *After Kathy Acker: A Literary Biography*. Semiotext(e), 2017.

-- -. *Aliens and Anorexia*. Semiotext(e), 2000.

-- -. "Chance Event." *Hotel Theory Reader*, edited by Sohrab Mohebbi and Ruth Estévez, Fillip/REDCAT, 2016, pp. 43-54.

-- -. "Chris Kraus: 'I Love Dick' happened in real life, but it's not a memoir." *The Guardian*, 17 May 2016.

-- -. "Continuity." *Feminaissance*, edited by Christine Wertheim. Les Figues, 2010.

-- -. *I Love Dick*. Semiotext(e), 1997.

-- -. *Kelly Lake Store & Other Stories*. Companion Editions, 2012.

-- -. "Littoral Madness." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Inquiry*, 2016, pp. 137-148.

-- -. *Lost Properties*. Semiotext(e), 2014.

-- -. "Private Parts, Public Women." *The Nation Magazine*, vol. 16, November 1998, pp.36-38.

-- -. "Stick to the Facts." *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 18, no. 70, June 2008, pp. 131-33.

-- -. *Summer of Hate*. Semiotext(e), 2012.

-- -. *Torpor*. Semiotext(e), 2006.

-- -. *Video Green*. Semiotext(e), 2004.

-- -. *Where Art Belongs*. Semiotext(e), 2011.

Kraus, Chris and Sylvère Lotringer, editors. *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*. Semiotext(e), 2001.

Krauss, Rosalind. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. MIT Press, 1985.

- - -. *Perpetual Inventory*. MIT Press, 2010.
- - -. "Truth." *Texte zur Kunst*. vol. 66, 2007, pp. 133-34.
- - -. *Under Blue Cup*. MIT Press, 2011.
- - -. "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism." *October*, vol. 1, Spring 1976, pp. 50-64.
- Krauss, Rosalind et al. "The Reception of the Sixties." *October*, vol. 69, Summer 1994, pp. 3-21.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.
- Kunzel, Regina. "The Flourishing of Transgender Studies." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 1-2, May 2014, pp. 285-97.
- Latson, Jennifer. "This Is Why a Radical Playwright Shot Andy Warhol." *Time*, 3 June 2015, www.time.com/3901488/andy-warhol-valerie-solanas/
- Lazer, Hank. *Opposing Poetries: Readings*. Northwestern UP, 1996.
- Lazard, Carolyn. "In Sickness and Study," *The Blackwood*, vol. 1, 2017, pp. 23.
- Legrady, Miklos. "Martin Luther Paradigm." *KAPSULA*. 3.2 (October 2015): 16-20.
- Lehtinen, Virpi. *Luce Irigaray's Phenomenology of Feminine Being*. SUNY, 2014.
- Lejeune, Philippe. "A New Genre in the Making?" *a/b*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2017, pp. 59-161.
- Lévesque, Claude. "Roundtable on Autobiography." *Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, by Jacques Derrida, translated by Peggy Kamuf, edited by Claude Levesque and Christie McDonald, Schocken, 1985, pp. 39-90.
- Levine, Gabriel. "Radical Vernaculars: Experiments with Tradition between Politics and Performance." Diss. York University, 2014.
- LeWitt, Sol. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10, June 1967, pp. 79-83.
- Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Studio Vista, 1973.

- - -. "Two Proposals: Lucy Lippard Presents the Ideas of Adrian Piper and Eleanor Antin." *Art and Artists*, vol. 12, March 1972, pp. 44-47.
- Lippard, Lucy and Adrian Piper. "Catalysis: An Interview with Adrian Piper." *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1972, pp. 76-78.
- Lispector, Clarice. *Água Viva*. Translated by Stefan Tobler, edited by Benjamin Moser, New Directions, 2012.
- Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, The Crossing, 1982.
- Lorentzen, Christian. "Is Radical Queerness Possible Anymore? Poet Maggie Nelson's New Memoir." *Vulture*. 4 May 2015, www.vulture.com/2015/05/poet-maggie-nelsons-queer-new-memoir.html
- Lotringer, Sylvère. "The Dance of Signs." *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*, edited by Chris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(e), 2001, pp. 173-90.
- - -. "Libido Unbound: The Politics of 'Schizophrenia'." *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1977.
- - -. "Schizoculture." *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1978.
- Lotringer, Sylvère and David Morris. *Schizo-Culture: The Event, The Book*. Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Lotringer, Sylvère and Christian Marazzi. *Italy: Autonomia: Post-Political Parties*. Semiotext(e) Intervention Series, vol. 1, no. 3.3, 1980.
- Love, Heather. "Low." *Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell: I'm Not Myself At All*, edited by Meg Taylor, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2015, pp. 38-49.
- - -. "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading." *Criticism*, vol. 52, no. 2, Spring 2010, pp. 235-41.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable." *The Inhuman*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford UP, 1991.
- Macey, David. *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Penguin, 2000.
- Manchester, Elizabeth. "Hannah Wilke - Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism." *Tate*, 2008, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wilke-marxism-and-art-beware-of-fascist-feminism-p79357

- Maple, Sarah. Artist talk. *The Practicing Feminist*. Tate Britain, 21 May 2016.
- . Video. *Freedom of Speech*. 00:05:15. 2013. Screened at "The Practicing Feminist," Clore Auditorium, Tate Britain, 21 May 2016.
- Maracle, Lee. *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. Press Gang, 1996.
- "marginal, adj. and n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/114043
- Mars, Tanya and Johanna Householder. *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women*, YYZ, 2004.
- Martin, Richard. "Andrea Fraser: *Official Welcome* (Hamburg Version) 2001-2003." *Tate*, 2014, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fraser-official-welcome-hamburg-version-t13716
- Mattar, Mira. Introduction. *You Must Make Your Death Public: A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*, edited by Mira Mattar, Mute, 2015, pp. 11-18.
- McBride, Jason. "On the set of the *Transparent* creator's next show, *I Love Dick*." *Vulture*, 25 July 2016, www.vulture.com/2016/07/jill-soloway-i-love-dick-c-v-r.html
- McCrary, Micah and Maggie Nelson. "Riding the Blinds: interview with Maggie Nelson." *LA Review of Books*, 26 April 2015, www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/riding-the-blinds/
- McGraw, Taylor. "Protest hits Tate over exhibition of alleged killer." *Dazed*, 16 June 2016, www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/31568/1/protest-hits-tate-over-exhibition-of-alleged-killer
- McMillan, Uri. *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*, New York UP, 2015.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The World of Perception*. 1948. Translated by Oliver Davis, Routledge, 2004.
- Meunier, Karolin. "Speaking Candour." *You Must Make Your Death Public: A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*, edited by Mira Mattar, Mute, 2015, pp. 75-86.
- Meyer, Hazel. *No Theory No Cry Anthem*. Art Metropole, 2009.
- . Personal interview. Toronto. 6 October 2016.

- Miller, Nancy K. *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, Routledge, 1991.
- Miserandino, Christine. "The Spoon Theory." *But You Don't Look Sick?*, 2003, www.butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/
- Mitchell, Allyson. "Deep Lez I Statement." *nomorepotlucks*. vol. 1, 2009.
- Mitchell, Allyson and Deirdre Logue. Exhibition. *I'm Not Myself At All*. Curated by Sarah E. K. Smith. Agnes Etherington Art Centre. 2 May - 9 August 2015.
- - -. Exhibition. *We Can't Compete*. Curated by Josephine Mills. University of Lethbridge Art Gallery. 23 January - 6 March 2014.
- Mitchell, Allyson and Ann Cvetkovich. "A Girl's Journey into the Well of Forbidden Knowledge." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, pp. 603-18.
- Mohebbi, Sohrab. "A Brief Quasi-History of Hotel Theory." *Hotel Theory Reader*, edited by Sohrab Mohebbi and Ruth Estévez, Fillip/REDCAT, 2016, pp. 11-25.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Methuen, 1985.
- Moisey, Andrew. "Who Can Represent Black Pain? Hannah Black's Letter to the Whitney Biennial." *The Philosophical Salon*, 17 April 2017, www.thephilosophicalsalon.com/who-can-represent-black-pain-hannah-blacks-letter-to-the-whitney-biennial/
- Montano, Linda. *Linda Mary Montano: 14 Years of Living Art*. Edited by Adam Silver, CX Silver Gallery, 2016.
- - -. *Linda Mary Montano: You Too Are A Performance Artist*. Edited by Janet Dees, SITE Santa Fe, 2013.
- Moore, Niamh. *The Changing Nature of Eco/Feminism*. UBC, 2015.
- Morris, David. "Kraus Uncut: On Semiotext(e), Disclosure, and Not-Knowing," *You Must Make Your Death Public: A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*, edited by Mira Mattar, Mute, 2015, pp. 107-18.
- Morton, Timothy. "Buddhaphobia: Nothingness and the Fear of Things." *Nothing: Three Inquiries into Buddhism*, U of Chicago P, 2015.

- Moser, Gabrielle. "On the 'new' PhD in Visual Arts." *Gabrielle Moser*. 18 September 2009, www.gabriellemoser.com/on-the-new-phd-in-visual-arts/
- Moser, Benjamin. Introduction. "Breathing Together." *Água Viva*, 1973, by Clarice Lispector, translated by Stefan Tobler, edited by Benjamin Moser, New Directions, 2012.
- Moten, Fred. "Black Kant (Pronounced Chant)." *TextSound: An Online Audio Publication*. Edited by Michael Nardone, vol. 21, 16 November 2016.
- Moten, Fred and Stefano Harney. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Autonomedia, 2013.
- Moynihan, Colin. "Liberating Lipsticks and Lattes," *The New York Times*. 15 June 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/books/16situation.html>
- Mueller, Cookie. *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black*. Semiotext(e), 1990.
- Munder, Heike. "It's Time for Action!" *It's Time For Action (There's No Option): About Feminism*, edited by Heike Munder, migros museum fur gegenwartskunst, 2006, pp. 167-89.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. NYU, 2009.
- - -. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. U of Minnesota P, 1999.
- Myles, Eileen and Liz Kotz, editors. *The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading*. Semiotext(e), 1995.
- Myles, Eileen. *Afterglow (a dog memoir)*. Grove, 2017.
- - -. *Chelsea Girls*. Semiotext(e), 1994.
- - -. *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays In Art*. Semiotext(e), 2009.
- - -. *Inferno*. OR, 2016.
- - -. *Not Me*. Semiotext(e), 1991.
- - -. "On the Death of Robert Lowell." *Maxfield Parrish/Early & New Poems*. Black Sparrow, 1995.

- - -. Foreword. "What About Chris?" *I Love Dick*, by Chris Kraus, Semiotext(e), 1997, pp. 13-15.
- Nagler, Christian and Joseph del Pesco. "Curating in the Time of Algorithms," *Fillip*, vol. 15, Fall 2011, pp. 1-10.
- Nails, Debra. "Socrates." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, 2017, plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates/
- Nakassis, Constantine V. "Citation and Citationality." *Signs and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2013, pp. 51-77.
- Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. Graywolf, 2015.
- - -. *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning*. W.W. Norton, 2011.
- - -. *Bluets*. Wave, 2009.
- - -. *Jane: A Murder*. Soft Skull, 2005.
- - -. *The Red Parts: A Memoir*. Free, 2007.
- - -. *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions*, U of Iowa P, 2007.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. 1908. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1967.
- Obadike, Keith and Mendi. *Blackness for Sale*. August 2001, obadike.com/
- O'Hara, Frank. *Lunch Poems*. City Lights, 1964.
- Ono, Yoko and John Lennon. *Double Fantasy*, The Hit Factory, 1980.
- Ono, Yoko. "Witchshocktronica." *Yes I'm a Witch!*, Astralwerks, 2007.
- Pelly, Jenn and Jenny Hval. "Interview with Jenny Hval." *Pitchfork*. 6 May 2013. <https://pitchfork.com/features/rising/9126-jenny-hval/>
- Peña, Daniel. "*The Argonauts* is a Direct Descendant of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and No One is Talking About It." *Ploughshares at Emerson College*. 9 May 2016. www.blog.pshares.org/index.php/the-argonauts-is-a-direct-descendant-of-anzalduas-

borderlandsla-frontera-and-no-one-is-talking-about-it/

Penny Arcade. *Bad Reputation: Performances, Essays, Interviews*. Semiotext(e), 2009.

Phelan, Peggy. *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. Psychology, 1997.

- - -. "Review: Adrian Piper's *Out of Order, Out of Sight*." *The Women's Review of Books*, vol. 15, no. 5, February 1998, pp. 7.

- - -. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 1993.

Piper, Adrian. Artist statement. *Food for the Spirit*. Adrian Piper Research Archive, 1971.

- - -. Artist statement. *The Mythic Being: Doing Yoga*. Adrian Piper Research Archive, 1975, http://www.adrianpiper.com/art/the_mythic_being-doing_yoga_2.shtml

- - -. Artist statement. *Some Reflective Surfaces*. 1975. Adrian Piper Research Archive, www.adrianpiper.com/vs/sound_surfaces.shtml

- - -. "Food for the Spirit, July 1971." *High Performance*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1981, pp. 34-35.

- - -. "Flying." *Adrian Piper: Reflections 1967-1987*, edited by Jane Farver, Alternative Museum 1987.

- - -. "Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic." 2006. *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*, edited by Francis Halsall et al., Stanford UP, 2008, pp. 1-20.

- - -. "The Logic of Modernism." *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters*, vol. 16, no. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 574-78.

- - -. "Moral Theory and Moral Alienation." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 84, no. 2, February 1987, pp. 102-18.

- - -. "My Art Education." 1993. *Out of Order, Out of Sight, I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992*, MIT Press, 1996, pp. 3-7.

- - -. "NEWS (September 2012)." September 2012, adrianpiper.com/news_sep_2012.shtml

- - -. *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Selected Writings in Art Criticism 1967-1992, Volume II*. MIT Press, 1996.

- - -. *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992, Volume I*. MIT Press, 1996.
- - -. Press release. *The Hypothesis Series, 1968-1970*. Paula Cooper Gallery, 1994, www.paulacoopergallery.com/exhibitions/adrian-piper-the-hypothesis-series-1968-70/installation-views
- - -. *Rationality and the Structure of the Self Volume II: A Kantian Conception*. Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation, 2013.
- - -. *Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object*. Marilena Bonomo, 1975, pp. 38-39.
- - -. *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, a Moment of Embarrassment*. Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation, September 2012, www.adrianpiper.com/news_sep_2012.shtml
- - -. "Two Conceptions of the Self." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 48, no. 2, September 1985, pp. 173-97.
- - -. Untitled statement. In "Make a Political Statement." *Art-Rite*, vol. 6, Summer 1974, pp. 24.
- - -. *What It's Like, What It Is #3*. 1991. Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation, 2012, www.adrianpiper.com/art/What_Its_Like-What_It_Is.shtml
- Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. 1963. Faber and Faber, 1966.
- Plotnitsky, Arkady. "The Medusa's Ears: The Question of Nietzsche, the Question of Gender, and the Transformations of Theory." *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, edited by Peter Burgard, U of Virginia P, 1994.
- Poletti, Anna. "Periperformative Life Narrative: Queer Collages." *GLQ*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2016, pp. 359-79.
- Pollock, Della. "Performing Writing." *The Ends of Performance*, edited by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, NYU, 1998, pp. 73-103.
- Pollock, Griselda. "Is Feminism a Trauma, a Bad Memory, or a Virtual Future?" *differences*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2016, pp. 27-61.
- - -. "The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories," edited by Griselda Pollock. *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, Routledge, 1996.

Powell, Thomas C. *Kant's Theory of Self-Consciousness*. Oxford UP, 2011.

Preciado, Paul B. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. 2008. Translated by Bruce Benderson, Feminist, 2013.

Prickett, Sarah Nicole and Maggie Nelson. "Bookforum talks with Maggie Nelson." *BookForum*, 29 May 2015, bookforum.com/interview/14663

Prosser, Jay. *Second Skins: The body narratives of transsexuality*. Columbia UP, 1998.

Purdie, Susan. *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*. U of Toronto P, 1993.

Radchenko, Valeria. "Autotheory." *FLUX: Valeria Radchenko*. 22 April 2017, vvval.wordpress.com/2017/04/22/autotheory/

Randolph, Jeanne. "Out of Psychoanalysis: A Ficto-Criticism Monologue." *Canadian Cultural Poesis*, edited by Garry Sherbert et al, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2006, pp. 231-48.

- - -. *Symbolization and its Discontents*. YYZ, 1997.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf, 2014.

- - -. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. Graywolf, 2004.

Regel, Hannah. "When You Cast An Organ You Stifle a Cough." *Fermenting Feminism*, edited by Lauren Fournier, Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, 2017, pp. 72-76.

Reines, Ariana. "LAZY EYE HAVER." 2015, www.lazyeyehaver.com

- - -. *The Origin of the World*. Semiotext(e), 2014.

Rich, Adrienne. "Notes toward a Politics of Location." *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. Norton, 1989, pp. 210-31.

- - -. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton, 1976.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Translated by Denis Savage, Yale UP, 1970.

"rigour | rigor, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2018, oed.com/view/Entry/165946

- Robertson, Lisa. Introduction. "Theory, A City." *Theory, A Sunday*. Belladonna, 2013.
<https://lemonhound.com/2014/09/05/lisa-robertson-theory-a-city/>
- Ronell, Avital. "Kathy Goes to Hell." *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, edited by Amy Scholder et al., Verso, 2006, pp. 12-34.
- - -. *The Test Drive*. U of Illinois P, 2005.
- Rower, Ann. *If You're a Girl*. Semiotext(e), 1990.
- Ruti, Mari. *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects*. Columbia UP, 2017.
- Ryan, William. *Blaming the Victim*. 1971. Random House, 1976.
- Safaei-Sooreh, Sona. *V+I*. Artist multiple mug. Sona Safaei, 2014.
- Salamon, Gayle. "The Argonauts by Maggie Nelson (review)." *philoSOPHIA*, vol. 6, no. 2, Summer 2016, pp. 303-06.
- Samatar, Sofia (@SofiaSamatar). "The Pleasures of Reading, Viewing, and Listening in 2015, pt. 28: Sofia Samatar." *Ambling Along the Aqueduct*. acqueductpress.blogspot.ca 31 December 2015.
- - -. "what @Keguro_ does here: gukira.wordpress.com is a kind of life-thinking.reminds me of what @Thisbhanu does here: jackkerouacispunjabi.blogspot.com." *Twitter*, 1 October 2015, 8:58 am.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. 1960. Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith and Quintin Hoare, Verso, 2010.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2006.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *The Explicit Body in Performance*. Routledge, 1997.
- Schneemann, Carolee. Artist Statement. *Fuses*. 1965.
<http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/fuses.html>
- - -. *Imaging Her Erotics*. MIT Press, 2002.
- - -. *Up To and Including Her Limits*. New Museum, 1996.

Schwarz, Henry and Anne Balsamo. "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*: The Story according to Sylvère Lotringer and Chris Kraus." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 37, no. 3, Spring 1996, pp. 205-20.

Schott, Robin, editor. *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant*. Penn State UP, 1997.

Scott, Sabrina. *witchbody*. Self published, 2015.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia UP, 1985.

- - -. *Dialogue on Love*. Beacon, 1999.

- - -. *Epistemology of the Closet*. U of California P, 1990.

- - -. "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 3, Summer 2007, pp. 625-42.

- - -. *Tendencies*. Duke UP, 1993.

- - -. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke UP, 2003.

- - -. *The Weather in Proust*. Edited by Jonathan Goldberg, Duke UP, 2011.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky and Adam Frank. *Shame and its Sisters*. Duke UP, 1995.

- - -. "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 2, Winter 1995, pp. 496-522.

Seltzer, Mark. "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere." *October*, vol. 80, Spring 1997, pp. 3-26.

Sharma, Sarah. "Selfie-Care and the Uncommons," *Take Care*, edited by Greig de Peuter and Christine Shaw, Blackwood Gallery, 2017, pp. 14.

Silman, Anna. "Jill Soloway's *I Love Dick* Makes Theory Hot." *New York Magazine*, 19 August 2016, <http://nymag.com/thecut/2016/08/i-love-dick-jill-soloway.html>

Silverblatt, Michael. "Dodie Bellamy: When the Sick Rule the World." Audio blog post. *Bookworm*. KCRW, 17 Sept. 2015, www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/bookworm/dodie-bellamy-when-the-sick-rule-the-world

- Sloterdijk, Peter. *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*. Translated by Wieland Hoban, Polity, 2013.
- Smith, Cauleen. "Human_3.0 Reading List." *Human_3.0 Reading List*. 16 June 2015.
<https://readinglisthumanthreepointo.wordpress.com/2015/06/15/june-16-2015/>
- Smith, Cauleen and Lorelie Stewart. "Human_3.0 Reading List Postcards." *Human_3.0 Reading List*. 16 June 2015.
https://readinglisthumanthreepointo.wordpress.com/human_3-o-reading-list-postcards/
- Smith, Isabella. "Protesters Demand 'Where Is Ana Mendieta?' in Tate Modern Expansion." *Hyperallergic*, 14 June 2016, www.hyperallergic.com/305163/protesters-demand-where-is-ana-mendieta-in-tate-modern-expansion/
- Smith, Roberta. "Art or Ad or What? It Caused a Lot of Fuss." *The New York Times*. 24 July 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/07/25/arts/design/25benglis.html
- - -. "Should Art That Infuriates Be Removed?" *The New York Times*, 27 March 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/arts/design/emmett-till-whitney-biennial-schutz.html
- Smith, Sarah E.K. "Bringing Queer Theory into Queer Practice." *Deirdre Logue & Allyson Mitchell: I'm Not Myself At All*, edited by Meg Taylor, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2015, pp. 22-31.
- Smith, Sidonie. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance." *a/b: Auto-Biography Studies*, vol. 10, Spring 1995, pp. 17-33.
- - -. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance." *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, U of Wisconsin P, 1998, pp. 108-15.
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, editors. *Interfaces: women, autobiography, image, performance*. U of Michigan P, 2002.
- - -. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. U of Minnesota P, 2010.
- Society for Critical Exchange (SCE). Panel Description. "Antitheory." *PMLA*, vol. 131, no. 4, September 2016, pp. 935.
- Solanas, Valerie. *SCUM Manifesto*. 1967. Introduction by Avital Ronell, Verso, 2004.
- Soloway, Jill, director. *I Love Dick*. Amazon, 2016.
- Speed, Mitch. "'As a Relief from Language': Hilton Als, as Artist." *Momus*. 13 April 2016.

- www.momus.ca/as-a-relief-from-language-hilton-als-as-artist/
- - -. "The Ellipses of Eva Hesse: Reading Her Collected Diaries." *Momus*, 29 September 2016, www.momus.ca/the-ellipses-of-eva-hesse-reading-her-diaries/
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, U of Illinois P, 1988, pp. 271-314.
- Sprinkle, Annie. *Hardcore from the Heart: The Pleasures, Profits, and Politics of Sex in Performance*. Continuum, 2001.
- Stang, Nicholas F. "Kant's Transcendental Idealism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* edited by Edward Zalta, Spring 2016, www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/
- Stein, Gertrude. *The Geographical History of America*. 1936. Introduction by William H. Gass, First Vintage, 1973.
- Stengers, Isabelle. "Experimenting with Refrains: Subjectivity and the Challenge of Escaping Modern Dualism." *Subjectivity*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp. 38-59.
- Stoll, Diana and Adrian Piper. "Adrian Piper: Goodbye to Easy Listening." *Aperture*, vol. 166, Spring 2002, pp. 38-47.
- Stosuy, Brandon. *Up is Up, But So Is Down: New York's Downtown Literary Scene, 1974-1992*. NYU, 2006.
- Stryker, Susan. "(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies." *Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, Routledge, 2006, pp. 1-18.
- - -. *Transgender History, Second Edition: The Roots of Today's Revolution*. Seal, 2017.
- Stuhr-Rommereim, Helen and Chris Kraus. Interview. "Chris Kraus." *Full Stop*. 4 December 2012, www.full-stop.net/2012/12/04/interviews/helen-stuhr-rommereim/chris-kraus/
- Syms, Martine. "Black Vernacular Reading New Media." 2013, www.martinesyms.com/black-vernacular-reading-new-media/
- - -. "Information." Website description. 2007-2017, www.martinesyms.com/information/
- - -. "The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto." 2015,

- www.martinesyms.com/the-mundane-afrofuturist-manifesto/
- Tanaka, Maiko. "Feminist Approaches to Citation." *C Magazine*, vol. 126, Summer 2015, pp. 46-49.
- Tate Modern. 2016. About. *Performing for the Camera*. Exhibition. London, Tate Modern.
- Tea, Michelle. *Against Memoir: Complaints, Confessions, and Criticisms*. Amethyst, 2018.
- - -. *The Passionate Mistakes and Intricate Corruption of One Girl in America*. Semiotext(e), 1998.
- - -. *Valencia*. Seal, 2000.
- The Artist's Institute. "Hilton Als." *The Artist's Institute*, 1 March 2016, www.theartistsinstitute.org/archives/hilton-als/
- Tiqun. *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*. 1999. Semiotext(e), 2012.
- Todd, Zoe. "Rethinking Aesthetics and Ontology through Indigenous Law: On the work of Val Napoleon and Loretta Todd." *C Magazine*, vol. 126, Summer 2015, pp. 10-17.
- Tremonti, Anna. "Is there a generational divide in the #MeToo movement?" *The Current, CBC*, 16 January 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-16-2018-1.4488140/is-there-a-generational-divide-in-the-metoo-movement-1.4488151>
- Tupitsyn, Masha. *Beauty Talk and Monsters*. Semiotext(e), 2007.
- - -. *Love Dog*. Penny-Ante Editions, 2013.
- turions, cheyanne. "Q&A: cheyanne turions (MVS 2016)." *University of Toronto*, 1 March 2017, www.daniels.utoronto.ca/news/2017/03/01/qa-cheyanne-turions-mvs-2016
- Vaughan, RM. "Nova Scotia College of Art and Design was the darling of the '70s art world—we think." *CBC Arts*, 14 January 2016, www.cbc.ca/arts/nova-scotia-college-of-art-and-design-was-the-darling-of-the-70s-art-world-we-think-1.3403927
- VIDA. "Report from the Field: STATEMENTS AGAINST SILENCE." *VIDA Women in Literary Arts*, 6 March 2016, www.vidaweb.org/statements-against-silence/
- "The V-Girls." *The V-Girls*. 10 March 2014. <http://thev-girls.tumblr.com/>

- Walker, Rebecca. "Becoming the Third Wave." *Ms*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1992, pp. 1-3.
- Wang, Jackie. *Against Innocence*. Semiotext(e), 2014.
- Wark, Jayne. "Conceptual Art and Feminism: Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin, and Martha Wilson." *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2001, pp. 44-50.
- - -. *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2006.
- Wark, McKenzie. "Review: I Love Dick." *Public Seminar*, 25 August 2016, www.publicseminar.org/2016/08/ild/
- Wark, McKenzie and Kathy Acker. *I'm Very into You Correspondence 1995–1996*. Edited by Matias Viegner, Semiotext(e), 2015.
- Warner, Michael, editor. *Publics and Counterpublics*. Zone, 2002.
- Warr, Tracey, editor. *The Artist's Body*. Phaidon, 2012.
- Weed, Elizabeth. "Gender and the Lure of the Postcritical." *differences*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2016, pp. 153-77.
- Weigel, Moira and Mal Ahern. "Further Materials Toward a Theory of the Man-Child." *The New Inquiry*, 9 July 2013, www.thenewinquiry.com/further-materials-toward-a-theory-of-the-man-child/
- Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. 1947. Translated by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, Routledge, 2004.
- Whitford, Margaret, editor. *The Irigaray Reader*. Blackwell, 1991.
- Wilke, Hannah. Poster. *Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism*. Center for Feminist Art Historical Studies, 1977.
- - -. "A Very Female Thing." *New York Magazine*, vol. 7, no.11, February 1974, pp. 58.
- Wollen, Audrey (@tragicqueen). "BEWARE MALE ARTISTS MAKING ARTWORK ABOUT EMPTINESS/NOTHING DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU/GIRLS OWN THE VOID/BACK OFF FUCKERS!!!!" *Instagram*, 18 October 2015, www.instagram.com/p/830V1EszbT/?taken-by=audreywollen&hl=en

- - -. "Patron Saint of Depression And Anxiety St. Dymphna Gel Mouse Pad." *Instagram*, 8 November 2015, <https://www.instagram.com/p/9j-d28MzYa/>
 - - -. "The 'Sad Girl' Starter Pack." *Instagram*, 21 February 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BB0z4iAMzQD/?taken-by=audreywollen&hl=en>
 - - -. "Tell me about Sad Girl Theory." *Instagram*, 22 June 2014, www.instagram.com/p/pcUbM7szQ5/?taken-by=audreywollen&hl=en
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 1792. U of Oregon P, 2000.
- Wunker, Erin. *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life*, BookThug, 2016.
- Young, Stacey. *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*, Routledge, 1997.
- Youngman, Hennessy. "ART THOUGHTZ: Beuys-Z." *YouTube*, 1 March 2011, youtube.com/watch?v=Wcu60--J99w
- - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: Bruce Nauman." *YouTube*, 3 May 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu-l5kSeat8>
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: Damien Hirst." *YouTube*. 10 January 2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y_8DWg5W0w
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: How to Be a Successful Black Artist." *YouTube*, 7 October 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L_NnX8oj-g
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: How to Make an Art." *YouTube*, 7 February 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVFasyCvEOg>
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: Institutional Critique." *YouTube*, 4 July 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pf_aUZ0HZdo
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: Louise Bourgeois." *YouTube*, 1 June 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYBSYzqjySw>
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: Post-Structuralism (THE CLEAN VERSION)." *YouTube*, 3 December 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0NIs1fOkQg>
 - - -. "ART THOUGHTZ: Relational Aesthetics." *YouTube*, 15 March 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yea4qSJMx4&spfreload=10>

--. "ART THOUGHTZ: The Studio Visit." *YouTube*, 15 May 2012,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6OV-ZwG6Z4>

--. "ART THOUGHTZ: The Sublime." *YouTube*, 20 April 2011,
<https://youtube.com/watch?v=LcBwUL6Y3UA>

Zambreno, Kate. *Heroines*, Semiotext(e), 2012.

Zelazo, Suzanne and Irene Gammel, editors. *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*. MIT Press, 2011.

Zembla, Nic. "See Dick Sue: A very phallic novel gets a rise out of a beloved professor." *New York Magazine*. New York Media. vol. 30, no. 44, 17 November 1997, pp. 20.

Živančević, Nina. *Inside & Out of Byzantium*. Semiotext(e), 1994.

Zola, Émile. "I accuse! Letter to the President of the Republic." 1898. *L'Aurore*. 11 January 2017. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/zola/1898/jaccuse.htm>

Zoladz, Lindsay. "Review of *Sacred & Profane Love EP*." *Pitchfork*. 30 November 2011,
<http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16079-maria-minerva-sacred-profane-love-ep/>

Zorlutuna, Alize. "Labour for the Horizon." *MICE*, no. 2, 2016, vimeo.com/189230873

Zorlutuna, Alize and Barbora Racevičiūtė. "The Failure Project: A Conversation Around Work." *Kapsula*, September 2017, kapsula.ca/thefailureproject.html