

QUEER FEELING:
AFFECTIVE BONDS, INTIMATE POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Queer Feeling: Affective Bonds, Intimate Possibilities

Taking a broad and shifting definition of intimacy, this dissertation looks to queer and/or unexpected forms of intimacy that have taken hold of the public imaginary through contemporary popular culture—professional cuddling, feminist pornography, interspecies friendships, and object-oriented sexualities. By analyzing representations of these intimate connections that are found in online public cultures and in responsive forms of queer and feminist art, this project offers a way to rethink our approach to intimate knowledge formation, including challenging dominant structures of relation, kinship, and affection.

Through grounded sites of intimate encounter, this project suggests that critically valuing unexpected or dissenting moments of affective connection is fundamental in resisting oppressive and restrictive social orders, including intensified neoliberalisms, ongoing colonial and imperial state projects, and renewed heteronormativities and homonormativities. Methodologically, this work blends scholarly writing with personal narrative and practice-based research methods in a proposal of *practice-based affective research*: a hybrid methodology which accounts for the ongoingness of affect-based research and values the personal ‘sparks’ that guide one’s objects of study. Located at the crossroads of cultural studies, digital humanities, queer theory, and affect theory, this research aims to diversify the scope of what we understand to be intimate knowledge by augmenting marginalized knowledges, re-imagining intimate futures, and broadening possibilities for living lives in resistance to the status quo.

DEDICATION

For my most precious love, Dolly Mae (2005-2017).

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INTRODUCTION.

QUEER AFFECT AND INTIMACY IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE.

[0.1]

Early Intimacies

I grew up in a sea of white faces, blond hair, and very little else. I was still a babe in arms when my parents moved us out of our notably diverse neighbourhood in downtown Toronto—after my father was witness to a double homicide on our block and my twelve-year-old brother brought home a hypodermic needle he had found in the local park, we settled in a rural area a little over 100 kilometres east along Highway 401. It was a sleepy town. For all intents and purposes, I had a nice life there. Our relocation meant that we could survive comfortably enough on the salary of my father, a then-struggling documentary filmmaker, and have plenty of green land to explore. We took in a few stray animals, and then a few more. My mother tended to life on the farm while my dad commuted into the city for work. We grew asparagus, raspberries, and hay, and twice a year we would all come together to harvest the hay bales for the rescue horses we housed in the barn. It was all a fine distraction from the oppressive monotony of whitewashed country life and my parents' emotionally fraught marriage.



Figure 1: Me (right) on the farm, with my sister (left) and my brother (centre), 1988.

Amongst the social homogeneity of my town, even small differences made people hypervisible. Virtually everyone in my elementary school was white, with only a couple of exceptions: a refugee from Haiti who had been adopted into a wealthy white family, and my best friend, an overachieving hockey-player-slash-dancer who was one-quarter Korean but was often referred to simply as “the nice Asian girl.” Even my sister and I were known as “the Jewish ones”—though we were neither religiously nor culturally practicing Jews—because somehow everyone already seemed to know that our socialist Jewish grandparents had escaped Germany during the Holocaust. In a poor imitation of what people of colour face all the time, I was frequently called on to tell the story of how my family “got here”—a story filled with trauma and near-death misses for them, but one diluted to triumph and exotic intrigue by my classmates.

These ancestral differences were accepted because they were relatively invisible in my everyday life, and so they became folded into the liberal Christian mindset of tolerance that

dominated amongst my peers. Still, I felt an inarticulable dis-ease knowing that the line between “minor” and “major” variance was deeply coded, and any personal trait that crossed the line to major digression was seen to be untenable and was something to be eliminated. My brother—whose father is Ojibwa—experienced micro and macro aggressions that are still steeped in silence within the space of my family. Conversely, the first time I remember hearing about a gay person in my town was through a local myth that contained all too much detail: A rather flamboyant high school boy a few years my senior had apparently been jumped by a group of guys and was beaten badly. As the story goes, they took out a knife and carved *F-A-G* into his forehead. I was never able to confirm or disprove this event, but the story stuck with me deep in my gut for years to come, and it served as a warning to stay within the gendered lines of normalcy. Even though I had known for years that heterosexuality would not be a way of life for me, I was only able to utter the word “queer” for the first time after I had left for university.

Despite these implicitly violent regulations, the sea of white felt comfortable enough for me to survive, and eventually even thrive—that is how white privilege works, after all (see Frankenberg 1993, 1997; McIntosh 1989)—as long as I didn’t rock the boat too much. Yet the whole environment of my hometown was simultaneously tedious and exhausting. Stifling. I became preoccupied with detecting any small disruption in the status quo, valuing the complexities that lurked beneath the surface of the monochromatic pale faces staring back at me. I took refuge with the animals we housed, and I spent much time favouring their company instead of that of my human counterparts. I learned to retreat into the literal and figurative space of the fields and forests that surrounded my house because they offered a break, some new outlook and form of knowledge that would continue to grow my young mind.

These particular stories about my formative years are but one way into my own encounters

with intimacy, a textual simplification of the limited and limiting context in which I came of age. Yet there are many other experiences I could have shared instead, had I been able to find adequate words to express them. This struggle for articulation illuminates some of the key questions that motivated my early dissertation research: How can one convey the intricacies of intimacy, draw out its impacts and affective resonances, when the very foundations of intimacy rest on a *feeling*? Or on a set of feelings. Intimacy is formed through swift and passionate encounters as much as it is in subtle moments that stick with you long after they have passed. It is not always easily detectable, sometimes building in slow, delicate ways that accumulate seamlessly. It can be found in sustained relationships built over time, in fleeting glances caught across the room, in paid sessions with professionals, and in familiar gatherings with old friends. We seek out intimacy all the time, many of us holding true to the belief that it is *the* thing to strive for and towards, yet we repeatedly cut its possibilities short for fear of rejection, failure, or uncomfortable vulnerability. Despite these resistances, unexpected intimacies continue to crop up and offer a lifeline, a way out of the stuckness and all-too-often repetitive existence within late capitalism, (yet another) technological revolution, and shifting social relations.

Intimacy is everywhere, but defining the term is a near impossible task. In academic realms, the study of intimacy has developed through many disciplines and scholarly approaches—perhaps most notably within socio-legal studies and anthropological notions of kinship—with varied uses and contextualizations. Oftentimes, in colloquial use, “being intimate” with someone is a euphemism for having sex and is equated with romance and/or dating. Women’s underwear is often referred to as “intimate apparel” or simply as “intimates.” Outside of sexual relations, commonly recognized intimate others include family members and close friends, and potentially pets as “intimate familiars” if one is being generous. Aside from these

cultural messages and my personal experiences, my own understandings of intimacy have been deeply informed by the extensive works of queer cultural theorists who have long been challenging such master narratives of intimacy.

The extensive body of work produced by Lauren Berlant has been particularly instructive for my thinking. Berlant frames intimacy as a relation that is typically thought to exist within the types of familiar “zones of comfort” I reference here—i.e., “friendship, the couple, and the family form” (2000, 1). She explains that in order to be recognized by publics and the state, intimacy must be “animated by expressive and emancipating kinds of love” (*ibid.*), and it is typically limited to realms that reinforce governmental and sociocultural norms. Of course, there are many cases where intimate connections are formed outside of these sites, but there are few opportunities for these disobedient intimacies to be reflected back in mass culture. To this regulatory end, Berlant suggests, “desires for intimacy that bypass the couple or the life narrative it generates have no alternative plots, let alone few laws and stable spaces of culture in which to clarify and cultivate them” (*ibid.*, 5). Berlant has dedicated the majority of her writing to exploring and clarifying the myriad spaces of culture which alternately refute and support non-dominant forms of intimacy.

Shaka McGlotten (2013) likewise understands the expansiveness of intimate worldings. In *Virtual Intimacies*, they describe intimacy as “a vast assemblage of ideologies, institutional sites, and diverse sets of material and semiotic practices that exert normative pressures on large and small bodies, lives, and worlds” (1). Attending to new technologies and public spaces of sex and desire, they frame intimacy—both online and offline—as “proximity, connection” and as “a necessary precondition for certain affective states to bloom” (*ibid.*, 8). With increased access to visual media, especially through the “smart” devices many of us carry around daily (e.g.,

smartphones, tablets, and other digital technologies), we are inundated by imagery and access to new forms of sometimes-intimate interaction. Unlike many critics of the smartphone era, however, who may see our virtually mediated communications as poor facsimiles of “real” exchanges, I join McGlotten in their appreciation of the productive slippages between the virtual and material aspects of intimacy. As McGlotten skillfully argues, “intimacy is already virtual in the ways it is made manifest through affective experience” (ibid., 8). Thus, the way that intimacy both depends on and produces affective states, seeping through different spaces of life, makes it a topic rife for further investigation.

In its simplest description, this dissertation is a collection of stories about intimacy. Some of them are my own, while the majority are found through the lives of others who are likewise fumbling their way through the messy landscapes of desire and comfort, excitement and reservation, and proximity and fear that intimacy produces. In each chapter that follows, I add to and complicate my personal understandings of intimacy. In particular, I draw from the work of scholars who have expanded the concept of intimacy through discussions of queer kinship structures (e.g., Eng 2010; Povinelli 2006), labour politics (e.g., Bernstein 2007; Boris and Parreñas 2010), and interspecies ecologies (e.g., Haraway 2008, 2016; Kirksey 2014). Since intimacy is textured, uneven, multilayered, and complicated, it often necessitates creative engagements in writing and research. The conflation of the personal and political in experiencing the intimate is so naturalized that it is often difficult to gain theoretical distance. In my research, I embrace this difficulty and fold it into both my methodology and my method, using the personal–political collapse as fuel for conducting what I term *practice-based affective research*.

One of my central goals in this project is to explore how a queer “turn to affect”—a subfield of queer research that has seen an explosion of scholarly production during the course of

this dissertation writing—might work to disrupt aggressively normative, racist, and capitalist modes of relation. Rather than conflate the conceptual borders of *intimacy* with the complex and contested boundaries of *affect*, I read the two categories against and through one another in order to draw out some of their productive overlaps and resonances. Within each section of this dissertation, I attend to the following research questions: (1) How do queer and non-normative intimacies circulate in current socio-political climates, ones characterized by neoliberalism, ongoing/renewed colonial and imperial state projects, and hetero- and homonormativities? (2) How are the construction, overdetermination, and regulation of intimacy reflected in contemporary pop culture, particularly in Canada and the United States? and (3) How might emerging methodologies within queer and feminist theory help to diversify structures of intimate knowledge and expand intimate possibilities? Though these questions are at times taken up in more direct ways and at times left more subtly in the background of my observations, they have structured all of my writing in this project.

Taking these inquiries as entry points, *Affective Bonds, Intimate Possibilities* examines a broad range of cultural artifacts, case studies, and queer subjects that might be identified as affective outsiders—people, objects, and/or structures of relation that have been placed adjacent to, outside of, or in opposition to normative affective and intimate formations. The personal scale of intimacy is set alongside, and often in juxtaposition to, public concern over “proper” expressions and visibilities of intimacy—we need look no further than to popular tabloid sources, reality television, or ongoing legal battles to understand the socio-cultural preoccupation with regulating the accepted scope of intimate relating. The five chapters of this dissertation gather together non-dominant forms of knowing or feeling intimacy and explore some of the current epistemological and ontological discourses about intimate relation. Each chapter targets an

interrelated set of questions about affective attachments and intimate connections that draws on the three key questions above and looks to a cluster of instances where *intimacy* and *affect* converge.

Through a blended process of personal narrative and cultural analysis, I utilize this dissertation to mine the contemporary cultural landscape for sites of intimacy that move against the grain of normative, expected, and/or unmarked intimate imperatives. My idiosyncratic sites of analysis feature nonsexual intimacies, queer kinships, interspecies bonds, intimate economies, new technological connections, sex work and sexual performance, queer desires, grief, longing, loss, and other relations that interrogate and push up against the bounds of intimate knowledge. What is consistent across the forms of intimacy that circulate in *Affective Bonds*, *Intimate Possibilities* is that they all resist the prioritization of blood-based, familial, and heteronormative romantic structures. I have chosen to focus my research largely on the realm of visual cultures—though audio, aural, and tactile realms could have been equally fruitful—for the simple reason that they are the most familiar to me. In addition, because intimacy both infuses and is infused by popular culture, many of my objects of study are primarily located within pop culture. Overall, in this research, I parse out various narratives that are commonly disseminated about intimacy, including how intimacies are regulated in both state and socio-cultural realms and what political, affective, and interpersonal possibilities might be opened up by reinterpreting dominant scripts of where and how we should find intimacy, how we should perform it, and why, in short, intimacy matters.

[0.2]

Rethinking Intimacy

Individual experiences of intimacy are often elusive, but the broader contours of intimacy's

borders, limits, and permissions is ongoing, calculated work that ends up structuring political and social worlds. With this in mind, this dissertation makes a few central interventions into the study and analysis of intimacy. My first premise is that *it takes work to produce and maintain intimacy*. Intimacy is inextricably linked to labour practices, formal and informal, visible and invisible, and paid and unpaid. This dissertation is concerned with making visible the emotional, affective, and physical labour that goes into the production of intimacy and the ways in which intimacy is disproportionately mapped onto some bodies above others. Following this line of thinking, my second premise is that *intimacy is a relation that is undeniably feminized and racialized*. Contrary to popular expectations, women and feminine folks do not contain an innate drive towards intimacy, nor do racialized folks of any and all genders, yet intimacy is assumed to be somehow easier for or more desired by these groups of people. The formation of intimacy is far from a biological compulsion; it is an ongoing, repetitive, and highly structured social process. These dominant narratives are important components of the social (re)production of intimacy, and the stories, scripts, and/or descriptions that are disseminated about intimacy are also important objects of analysis.

My third and related premise is that *in order to make non-dominant intimacies viable, we must be able to imagine them flourishing in the world*. This means that we must see examples reflected back to us, and we must value the instances that already exist. For those of us who do not have—and perhaps especially for those of us who do not *want*—normative relationships to intimacy, cultural landscapes can lack models of possibility. To that end, I have included a fair bit of description in the specific cases of non-dominant intimacy that I study in the chapters below. As Heather Love (2015) argues, descriptive practices can form a valuable archive—especially for marginalized people and communities—where evidence of “deviant,” “non-

normative,” and/or “impossible” relational practices exists. Sometimes finding intimate hope in these sites requires disidentificatory practices and filters (see Muñoz 1999), yet the creative consumptions that are developed by necessity through lived experience means that we can and do also find queer possibility where many others only see absurdity (e.g., object-oriented love, discussed in Chapter Five), entertainment (e.g., narrative representations of sexual surrogacy, discussed in Chapter Three), or models of ownership (e.g., reciprocal networks of care with nonhuman animals, discussed in Chapter Four).

The final premise I have outlined in this project is that *we cannot study the everydayness of intimacy without attending directly to affect*. Moreover, as researchers, we cannot effectively or responsibly attend to affect without interrogating our own affective landscapes. While writing through affect does not necessarily require one to air their proverbial “dirty laundry” and lay bare their own vulnerabilities on the printed page, it does help. Accordingly, I have chosen to weave my own affective processes/processing into my research methodologies in visible and explicit ways (see more on my methodologies in Chapter One). The embodied, sensory, and material production of intimacy depends heavily on affective circulations and nonlinguistic energetic exchanges. Forming intimate relationships of any kind requires multiple layers of vulnerability, trust, and exposure, and I have attempted to mimic some of those properties in this writing. I am, however, acutely aware that this goal has been met inconsistently.

Much like intimacy itself, my methods are sometimes messy, inconsistent, and nonlinear. Early feedback from committee members asked me to commit more fully, to dig deeper, and to show more of myself in my writing. I was told that my own intimate resistances and hesitations were evident through what I chose to make visible and what I obscured. Still now, the life writing and personal narratives I have included sometimes feel contrived, and I take this as an

indication of the in-process-ness and ongoingness of my own intimate developments. At other times, the narratives offer suitable context for my motivations and investments in the intimate worlds I have chosen to explore.

In prioritizing “extimacies” (see Chen 2012, 37) in my research, I have worked to diversify the scope of objects, relations, and cultural texts that are understood to be valid contributions to the realm of intimate knowledge. The case studies I engage in the chapters that follow are a mere sliver of the ways in which one might participate in dissenting structures of intimacy, and in no way do I mean to position them as an exhaustive collection nor as necessarily more “radical” or more “queer” than other counter-cultural structures people have established. In my work, I am interested in parsing out the intimate structures and relations that are deemed to be possible and likely from those that are deemed to be impossible, improbable, or altogether unthinkable. Queer relationship models, though certainly not always or exhaustively challenging of heteronormative, homonormative, and domestnormative status quos, are instructive in rethinking and restructuring intimate relations, and thus I have conducted my research through queer frameworks. Moreover, queer theory, as a field of inquiry, has offered me a wealth of knowledge for both illuminating and working to dismantle normative systems of relation. Though queer theory’s allegiance to antinormativity has been critiqued in recent years (e.g., Wiegman and Wilson 2015), its wisdom as a body of scholarship is absolutely central to my own work in this dissertation.

Focusing on intimate others is a decidedly complicated ethical move, since I myself do not sit outside of the accepted bounds of many of these categories.¹ The lessons I learned about

¹ For in-depth analysis of the insider/outsider debate in social research, see Pat Thomson and Helen Gunter (2011) “Inside, Outside, Upside Down” and Nancy A. Naples (2004) “The Outsider Phenomenon.”

intimacy in my own early years were complicated, deeply layered, and full of secrets. My family life was ideal and idealized from the outside, a picture-worthy product of parents who were (and continue to be) artists and healers, of grandparents who survived the Holocaust and wartime migration, and of siblings who got along almost unnervingly well. The traumas and hardships, fights and struggles, were all swept under the proverbial rug and were filtered through the shiny gloss of middle-class mobility and whitewashed success. In a family of survivors, I grew up thinking very little about intimacy and the intricate constellations that go into its production and maintenance; doing so almost seemed like a luxury. Yet I—like most others—was immersed in stories about intimacy every single day, through dominant scripts and expectations, through disappointments and losses, in both formal and informal ways. As a whole, this dissertation offers a modest collection of possibilities for living (intimate) life otherwise. In employing queer cultural studies frameworks that prioritize experiential knowledges, exploratory ways of being, and creative engagements with existing discourses, my research works to de-privilege traditional narratives of domestic couplehood and familial kinship as the prime and privileged sites of intimacy in service of re-invigorating and re-opening their potentiality.

[0.3]

Theorizing Intimacy

Chapter One offers an extended discussion of my methodologies, which I have collected under the working title of practice-based affective research (PBAR). The story of intimacy that is woven through each individual chapter connects to all others in this dissertation, but the transition from one chapter to another is sometimes disruptive to the overall flow. This may prove to be annoying to readers, or it may cause other emotional and/or intellectual reactions, but the interruption is deliberate as it mimics the nonlinearity and frequent dis-ease of intimate

formations. Each chapter acts as a sort of re-set button on the broader narrative. Instead of trying to gloss over the inevitable disruptions and life events that take place during the writing process of a years-long research project, I have allowed for the specificities of time and place to come through in my writing. For example, the narrative piece in Chapter Two around the 2016 U.S. election and the sense of anxiety, dread, and anger I felt in the initial aftermath of the results forms a clumsy but affectively real bridge into discussing misogyny, power, and intimate labour. Each story I share, though not necessarily theorized directly, comes out of the affects that are incited by my research and works to connect seemingly disparate sites of intimacy. In this sense, the narrative pieces included here produce the theory of this project as much as the scholarly sources do.

In moving through the web of intimate realms of this dissertation, I continually return to one deceptively simple question: What role does the circulation of affect play in processes of intimate worldmaking? Certainly *gut feelings* and *emotional encounters* matter to the building of relational worlds at least as much as material circumstances do. Existing scholarly works, those which have historically sought to understand intimacy through socio-legal studies or traditional anthropological notions of kinship, lack the type of opportunities offered by affect as it is taken up in my dissertation work: an insistence on the physical body and sensory experience that also prioritizes exploratory ways of knowing—ones that are not always obvious within the structures of what is deemed to be “knowable” in current academic theory. Key writings from queer and anti-normative perspectives, however, draw out complicated interactions between realms of intimacy, affect, sex, desire, romance, kinship, labour, humour, art, and loss; these are crucial works for my ongoing analysis of non-normative intimacies in this project. In particular, I draw from queer theory and affect studies as foundational fields of embodied, sensory knowledge

production.

Queer Theory

When *queer* emerged as a scholarly analytic in the early 1990s, it was quickly imbued with the promise of transformative political possibility. For example, in 1993, Eve Sedgwick defined *queer* as an “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” (8); in 1994, Lee Edelman positioned the category of queer as an immersive “zone of possibilities” (114); in 1995, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argued that queer commentary brings a wide range of dissenting forms of culture into being and “aspires to create publics” through an expansion of world forms (344); and in 1996, Annamarie Jagose wrote that *queer* is always productively in flux, and that it is “inflected by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet quite articulate” (2). In contemporary usage, queer has become commonly used to signal multiple referents: a collection of wide-ranging, non-heterosexual identities (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, two-spirited, asexual, aromantic); a politicized, anti-normative sexuality (often positioned in contradistinction to liberal gay and lesbian identities); and/or, a theoretical standpoint (i.e., queer theory). These distinct categories are perhaps falsely divided, given there is much overlap between them, yet they have been reiterated in popular discourse. Their common trait is an active, contentious, and necessary resistance to normative forms of intimacy and desire, and thus queer analysis serves as my primary approach in this dissertation.

In their reflection on queer theory’s origins, David Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Muñoz (2005) write,

Given its commitment to interrogating the social processes that not only produced and recognized but also normalized and sustained identity, the political promise of the term [queer] resided specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality (1).

This necessarily intersectional approach is what Berlant and Warner (1995) referenced when they positioned the field of queer critique as one of creativity, experimental genres, and diffuse cultural texts. As they state, “queer theory is not the theory *of* anything in particular” (344), but rather it is an anti-normative critique that attaches to a wide variety of objects of analysis in attempts to “address the full range of power-ridden normativities of sex” (345). This framing of the term is echoed in many early writings on the promises and pitfalls of critical queer theory: queer theory was—and, for many, still is—an appealing framework due to its expansive possibilities and wide-reaching utility. Jack Halberstam (2011) positions the uses of queer within a quest to “articulate an alternative vision of life, love, and labor” (2). He stresses that this quest “announces a political project, begs for a grammar of possibility [...] and expresses a basic desire to live life otherwise” (ibid.). I see the political project referenced by Halberstam to be one that is rooted in both epistemology and pedagogy and as a way of diversifying forms of intimate knowledge through sustained engagements with alternative structures of relation.

Although the specific terms of engagement have differed across (inter)disciplinary thinking, queer approaches have developed in response to socio-cultural regulations of intimacy and desire that are deeply rooted in colonial notions of morality, decency, and heteropatriarchy. I have built my own underpinnings from myriad queer and anti-normative works that take aim at dichotomous friend-lover divides, normative scripts of domesticity, and queer forms of (anti-)sociality. Of course, while I see a queer approach as being necessary to my project, I recognize that a wide range of social and intimate practices can and do disrupt normative structures and master narratives of intimacy. Some of these practices may not appear to be anti-normative or (actively) dissenting to an outsider looking in, yet mitigating factors of race, class, dis/ability, familial context, regional specificity, and/or other biographical details mean that the intimate

actors involved are risking and resisting in ways that are meaningful to them and their particular contexts.

Within academic thought, the field of queer theory has picked up on these intersections and has long been invested in challenging and interrupting ideologies of normative intimacy. Queer and cultural theorists have employed a host of creative strategies, tactics, and methodologies in attempts to develop the kind of *grammar of possibility* that Halberstam points to, in order to tease out the intricacies of how intimate possibilities have been cut short or made to seem impossible under contemporary conditions. This recuperative move underscores how queers in particular have long been cast outside of the nation state (Kinsman and Gentile 2010), and how queers of colour have been further solidified as impossible subjects in cultural and national imaginaries (Gopinath 2005). Queer feelings and unruly affects, particularly those that are experienced through bodies of colour, disabled bodies, trans bodies, and otherwise marginalized bodies, have been used to cast marginalized subjects out of state structures and logics. While this often has devastating material effects for individuals and communities, it has also been a source of strength and resilience.

Affect Studies

The study of affect has been taken up thoroughly and repeatedly since the early onset of queer theorizing (Agathangelou et al. 2008; Brennan 2004; Gould 2009; Hemmings 2005; Massumi 1995; Thrift 2004). There has, however, been a renewed turn to affect in recent years across the humanities and social sciences, and there is a widespread acknowledgement that the palpable, embodied qualities of affect are particularly useful for addressing contemporary socio-political imperatives of being and relating. The renewed attention to affect among contemporary queer theorists offers linguistic and analytic frameworks that are increasingly nuanced and which

remain especially salient in the present moment of neoliberal individuation, ongoing colonial and imperialist projects, and persistent nationalist—and homonationalist—discourses.

Despite its usefulness, *affect* is another slippery term. Generally attributed to psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1991), affect theory has been variously theorized through psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and cultural framings. Though the boundaries between these three categories are not always clearly defined, and though many texts engaging in studies of affect deal with two or more approaches, I have found these three strains to be useful categories in finding my own affective bearings. To begin, psychoanalytic understandings of affect tend to position it as an individual state or experience; affects are embodied and responsive reactions that are pre-linguistic or inarticulable through spoken language. Psychoanalysis sets “affects” (e.g., anger, excitement, hatred, shame, envy) against “drives” (e.g., hunger, love-sex, aggression, fear). According to Clare Hemmings (2005), psychoanalytic affects are “what enable drives to be satisfied and what tie us to the world,” but they can also be “transferred to a range of objects in order to be satisfied [...], which makes them adaptable in a way that drives are not” (551). Though Tomkins is widely recognized as having developed affect theory, Teresa Brennan (2004) and Eve Sedgwick (2003) offer the reminder that these understandings have long philosophical lineages that can be traced back as far as Aristotelian times. Most often, psychoanalytic conceptions of affect are sharply distinguished from “feelings” and “emotions,” which may be interpretations or effects of affective states but remain distinct experiences with their own attending languages.

Phenomenological framings of affect, on the other hand, raise questions about cultural and relational aspects of affective experience and consciousness. Brian Massumi (1995) positions affect as being autonomous in its own right, suggesting that it circulates outside of social

signification while holding potential to reframe various modes of relation. While Hemmings (2005) explicitly disagrees with Massumi's claims of affect being external to sociality, she agrees in some ways that attending to affect might reframe the terms of sociality and our understandings thereof—as long as affect is kept *in context* and does not become a mere rhetorical device or framed as a way out of critical theoretical impasses. Patricia Clough (2007) adds that affect is necessarily embodied, writing, “affect refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect” (2). Of particular relevance to my own project is literature that reflects an understanding that the bodies which experience and produce affects must not necessarily be human. For example, Alphonso Lingis (2011) proposes *interspecies phenomenology*, while Livingston and Puar (2011) and other animal studies scholars take up the transmission of affect within, among, and between human and nonhuman animal bodies.

The last strain of affect theory I outline here runs counter to both psychoanalytic and phenomenological framings in that it is necessarily connected to the study of *feelings* and *emotions*. Texts that follow this line of theorizing (which may arguably, though not entirely faithfully, include Ahmed 2004b, 2006, 2010; Berlant 2011; Berlant and Edelman 2014; Cvetkovich 2003, 2012; Duggan and Muñoz 2009; Gould 2009; Halberstam 2011; and Love 2007) most often employ cultural studies approaches and have been the frequent target of some analytic border policing, as many are quick to critique them as sitting outside of affect studies proper. Still, I have found these works to provide invaluable contributions to conversations about the role of affect in producing intimacy and intimate structures, as well as to a consideration of the regulation, manipulation, and coercion of affect within public spheres.

Mel Chen (2012) offers a model that bridges these varied approaches while, ultimately,

defending the inclusion of feeling and emotion. Chen writes,

For the purposes of [*Animacies*], I define affect without necessary restriction, that is, I include the notion that affect is something not necessarily corporeal and that it potentially engages many bodies at once, rather than (only) being contained as an emotion within a single body. Affect inheres in the capacity to affect and be affected. Yet I am also interested in the relatively subjective, individually held ‘emotion’ or ‘feeling’ (11).

Chen’s constructively stubborn refusal to restrictively define affect raises the question of whether these types of distinctions I have outlined here are truly necessary for the study of affect, or if they merely serve to distract from applying affect-based analyses to concrete problems in the world. Is the study of affect itself—as a category or as a framework—where the most interesting questions lie? Or should more of us take a cue from Sara Ahmed and push to ask different iterations of her central, enduring question: *What does affect (and/or emotion) do?* (e.g., Ahmed 2004a, 2004b, 2010).

My own investments lie somewhere along this latter line of thinking. The work of defining affect is tricky and ongoing, and affect raises many questions even as it offers some grounded ways to consider its borders and boundaries. Some central questions will always remain within murky waters, but perhaps that is one of the most useful aspects of affective inquiry. After all, as Patricia Clough (2007) admits, work that steps into “an inadequate confrontation with the social, changed and changing, which exceeds all efforts to contain it” encourages us to “be braver, more creative and even less adequate next time” (28-29). For me, it is more crucial to ask questions related to affect such as how can we who seek to resist dominant structures harness the power of affect and/or use it to organize effectively in order to disrupt some of these systems?

Political Affects

Affect remains a potent site of inquiry within feminist and queer analyses in particular because it offers a framework that resonates with existing understandings of feminism—for

instance, ones that prioritize the personal, taking individual experience as a basis for drawing out connections across systemic patterns of regulation and oppression. Chen (2012) highlights this scholarly resonance, writing that “building upon feminism’s critique of gender difference, [queer theory] has been at the forefront of recalibrating many categories of difference, and it has further rewritten how we understand affect, especially with regard to trauma, death, mourning, shame, loss, impossibility, and intimacy” (12).

As with *queer*, affect is often aligned with political potentiality and an expansive shift in the kinds of questions that are asked to begin with. The move towards affect-based inquiry likewise allows for different kinds of “political registers and intensities” to emerge in and through the research (Thrift 2004, 58). These alternate registers can and often do lend themselves to collective organizing and critical solidarities (Agathangelou et al. 2008; Duggan and Muñoz 2009; Foucault 1989; Gould 2009; Williams 1977). Understood in this way, the turn to affect may be, in significant part, about challenging current dominant normativizing liberal and neoliberal, conservative and neoconservative imperatives and developing different structures of political affect. In short, affect is political.

Though affect has been the preferred language in contemporary scholarship, it builds on extensive lineages of feminist and queer theorizing. Black feminist thought and Chicana feminism, for instance, have long been highlighting the radical potentials of utilizing personal narrative, making visible emotional labour and care work, and politicizing the domestic (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; Castillo 1994; Davis 1981; hooks 1984, 1996; Collins 1990; Lorde 1980, 1984; Moraga 1983). Similarly, queer and trans memoir narratives have long been connecting personal experiences and stories of self to collective struggles and identity formations (e.g., Bergman 2009; Bornstein 1995, 2012; Camilleri 2004; Jacques 2015; Mock 2014; Salah 2013). The

questions taken up in the recent “affective turn,” then, may not be new, but the shifting landscapes that are valued in queer affect theory are varied and complex.

Accordingly, the key texts of my dissertation work are highly informed by, and incorporate extensively, a range of works that span cultural theory, performance studies, queer of colour critique, and queer post/colonial theory (e.g., Chen 2012; Cvetkovich 2003, 2012; Eng 2010; Halberstam 2011; Manning 2006; Muñoz 2009). A specifically *queer* affective turn has proven to be particularly useful in thinking through complex questions of sexual difference, affiliation, dissent, and/or identification, since queer affect theory bridges a range of critical disciplines and crosses the borders and boundaries of coherent identity categories. I take my cue from scholars like Sara Ahmed (2004a, 2004b, 2010, 2014), Lauren Berlant (1999, 2000, 2011), Mel Chen (2012), Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 2012), and Kathleen Stewart (2007, 2008), who allow for messy overlaps and complicated reverberations across “gut feelings,” exchanges of energy, and difficult feelings or emotions in order to explore broader questions related to the socio-cultural regulation of desire and intimacy. Instead of rejecting identity categories altogether, my focus on affect instead moves *through* the lived experiences of identity and focuses on intimate exchanges and affective connections that are formed through embodied interactions.

Because of the way affect is often mobilized in and through normative structures of intimacy and interpersonal relations, it can be easy to lose a critical engagement and get lost in navel-gazing projects of personal exploration. This is perhaps a particular risk in a project like this one, where personal narrative and experiential knowledges are key components of my scholarly practice. However, Lisa Duggan (in Duggan and Muñoz 2009) offers a reminder that the personal can always be powerful, and combined with critical queer lenses of affect, it can interrupt and disrupt the race, class, and gender privileges that are largely upheld through the

logics of late capitalism. The collection of case studies and cultural artifacts explored in this dissertation are taken up through the type of critical queer lens of affect that Duggan incites. In this work, I continually ask how we might build alternate models of relation and challenge structures of dominance rather than resting on the comforts of whatever privileges we may have access to.

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Regulating Intimate Worlds

In the succinctly titled collection *Intimacy*, Lauren Berlant (2000) elaborates upon the role intimacy plays in structuring everyday life. She explains that in intimate relationships, we are always negotiating social, cultural, and governmental regulations that set the script for where, when, and how our connections might form. The “zones of familiarity” discussed by Berlant (ibid., 1) are otherwise known as institutions of intimacy, which play a large role both in producing affective possibilities and in restricting them. As Berlant expounds,

Intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation. Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress ‘a life’ seem in a state of constant of latent vulnerability (ibid., 2).

In this quote, Berlant gestures to the fact that intimate relations require constant repetition and performativity, which, as Judith Butler (1990) has famously drawn out in relation to gender, also signifies that their coherence is inherently at risk. What intimacy also does, however, is both produce affects and create social institutions in its name.

While these socio-spatial institutions do not control affective bonds in simplistic linear or unidirectional ways, they do significantly impact the types of intimate connections that are understood to be valid, valuable, and possible in broader cultural imaginaries. Socio-legal and

policy-based analyses offer important insights into the regulation of intimacy,² but they account for only part of the equation; the affective impacts of regulation are seldom directly acknowledged, though they continue to haunt the literature. Berlant (2000) offers a compelling reminder: while intimacy can sometimes be found in specific, material sites of encounter, it can also be “portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices” (4). She contemplates the potentials of considering the unboundedness of intimacy, moving beyond the realms of institutional and physical connections and asking what might be made possible through an openness towards “more mobile spaces of attachment” (ibid.).

This unboundedness and mobility offer valuable prompts to think about affective exchanges. With the aim of destabilizing heteronormative and homonormative relationship models as the prime and privileged sites of intimacy, my research seeks to recuperate possibilities for building worlds in alignment with queer desires and non-dominant intimate structures. In Berlant’s (2000) formulation, normative ideologies of intimacy manifest “when certain ‘expressive’ relations are promoted across public and private domains—love, community, patriotism—while other relations, motivated, say, by the ‘appetites,’ are discredited or simply neglected” (5). This hierarchy speaks to one aspect of what Nathan Rambukkana (2015) has named *intimate privilege*, and what others have framed as the biopolitics of normative intimacy. Notably, Jasbir Puar (2007) and Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) have linked the privatized organization of intimacy to broader biopolitical and necropolitical practices, while David Eng (2010) has traced the racialized aspects of liberal notions of privacy and kinship structures and Mel Chen (2012) has made connections between biopolitics, animacy, dis/ability, and

² For examples of socio-legal and policy-based analyses of intimate regulation, see Jean L. Cohen (2002) *Regulating Intimacy: A New Legal Paradigm*, Alison Diduck (2008) *Marriage and Cohabitation: Regulating Intimacy, Affection and Care*, and Rachel F. Moran (2001) *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance*.

racialization. I will discuss each of these texts briefly before concluding this chapter.

Private Lives, Public Liberalisms

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar (2007) takes aim at the growing political conflation between private and public spheres and lays out how normative models of domesticity are bound up in the “private liberty of intimacy” (126). This, in turn, often appeals to a state legitimization of private life. In discussing *Lawrence-Garner v. Texas*—which decriminalized sodomy in the U.S. while simultaneously relegating queer sex to private (i.e., hidden/invisible) realms—Puar offers a strident challenge: the very foundations of the ruling requires those engaging in queer sex to have access to private spaces, and if/when/where they do not, they will be criminalized anyway. Puar interprets these unmarked consequences of legal rulings as explicit biopolitical technologies of control, technologies that are heavily raced, classed, and gendered. She states, “the private is a racialized and nationalized construct insofar as it is granted not only to heterosexuals but to certain citizens and withheld from many others and from noncitizens” (124-125). She concludes by summarizing, “the private is, therefore, offered as a gift of recognition to those invested in certain normative renditions of domesticity” (124).

Along similar lines and attending to narratives of choice in *The Feeling of Kinship*, David Eng (2010) examines the racialization of intimacy through both marked and unmarked structures of kinship. He argues that “the neoliberal language of choice now helps to reconfigure not just the domestic but indeed the global marketplace as an expanded public field in which private interests and prejudices are free to circulate with little governmental regulation or restriction” (9). In this sense, normative domesticity—or *domestynormativity*, as Puar has named it—extends from individuals and couples through transnational networks and back again. Eng urges a critical understanding of how neoliberal notions of choice work together with unmarked, racialized and

gendered, constructions of domesticity and privacy in order to produce what he frames as the racialization of intimacy.

The geospatial restructuring of intimacy is also a recurring focal point in transnational examinations of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations. Elizabeth Povinelli (2006), for example, tracks the role of empire and settler colonialism in regulating intimate affairs. She conclusively states, “if you want to locate the hegemonic home of liberal logics and aspirations, look to love in settler colonies” (17). Taking up social imaginaries of the autological subject, Povinelli argues that “the intimate couple is a key transfer point between, on the one hand, liberal imaginaries of contractual economics, politics, and sociality, and on the other, liberal forms of power in the contemporary world” (ibid.). At the same time, kinship structures that move in contradistinction to dominant Western ideals interrupt the stronghold of colonial master narratives and offer an opportunity to “see new forms of life that contest, elaborate, or ignore these discourses,” and to consider “how these new forms of life do, or do not, disrupt deep channels of exploitation and domination” (19-20). Povinelli’s analysis provides an important backdrop to my discussions in Chapter Three and Chapter Four in particular, where I take up challenges to dominant hierarchies of intimate relations, economic valuing, and the attribution of social capital along gendered and species-based lines.

The intimate aspects of biopolitical formations likewise sustain Mel Chen’s work, which includes extensive considerations of *animacy* as an analytic category. As a critical intervention into anthropocentric world orderings, Chen (2012) takes up “animacy hierarchies”—complex systems of meaning where matter is deemed to be somewhere on a scale ranging from “animate” to “inanimate” and where subsequent value is attached to that matter. Where a being or thing is positioned on the animacy hierarchy informs both how much agency, activity, and choice is

attributed to it and where it will fall within political, economic, and socio-cultural structures. Chen weaves an intricate and critical challenge to normative Western framings of in/animate matter, exposing how these linguistic categories are heavily racialized, sexualized, gendered, ability-based, and species-oriented. These deep-seated, hierarchically organized ideas about animacy are, however, troubled through the natural occurrence of non-normative forms of intimate connection, such as within objectum-sexual relationships (discussed further in Chapter Five). As I elaborate throughout this dissertation, the aggressive de-valuing and trivialization of disobedient structures of intimacy points to the affective boundary work that is sparked wherever animacy is attributed to matter that is usually understood to be inanimate.

The literal and figurative lack of space afforded to insubordinate forms of intimacy works to regulate and control the types of intimacies that are allowed to develop, flourish, and evolve within dominant spheres. Gayatri Gopinath (2005) takes aim at these regulations in *Impossible Desires*, wherein she offers an extensive reading of queer female diasporic subjectivity in South Asian public cultures. Gopinath draws out national imperatives of female purity, authenticity, and reproductive capacities as she traces the ways in which queer women become illegible—or “impossible”—subjects when they fail to embody these ideals. Gopinath uses the term *impossibility* as “a way of signaling the unthinkability of a queer female subject position within various mappings of nation and diaspora” (15). Her centering of queer female diasporic subjects highlights another layer of unthinkable intimacies, of desiring bodies that fail to inhabit normative structures of relation. Through her extended study of impossible subjects, Gopinath asserts an embodied resistance, since “those who occupy impossible spaces transform them into vibrant, livable spaces of possibility” (194).

In this dissertation, I engage just a few cases of those who occupy supposedly impossible

spaces; those who offer up an alternate script of how we might live life outside of—or at least in active negotiation with—dominant scripts and imperatives. Though not everyone I feature in the following chapters is consciously dissenting, nor would they necessarily consider themselves to be models for embodied resistance, each site taken up in this dissertation recuperates some of the potentiality offered by non-normative and/or unexpected forms of intimacy.

In the contemporary moment, with so much uncertainty in political, social, and cultural realms, and when all kinds of world structures are being re-formed (e.g., through ongoing globalization, imperial wars, and socio-cultural clashes and collaborations), we have been losing many of the familiar forms of connection we were once able to take for granted. This means that other possibilities and expectations are being fashioned whether we actively participate in their creation or passively wait for them to take hold. Those of us who are interested in creating social change must actively contribute feminist, antiracist, decolonial, access-oriented, and queer analyses of past, present, and future modes of relation. My current contribution to this task is this doctoral project, in which I take other kinds of intimacies seriously and pay attention to the power and possibilities of consciously engaging with alternate forms of intimate relation. The case studies I look at here leak out of the frame of what intimacy was—and in many ways still is—supposed to be, and this is where their central value lies.

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Representing Queer Intimacies

Admittedly, this dissertation project has taken a more traditional format than I had originally intended; I have landed with more linear descriptions and clear-cut narrative pieces than I had anticipated at the start. However, I have also taken inspiration from scholars and thinkers who are disrupting aspects of traditional modes of academic institutional inquiry. As one

strategy for engaging alternate methods of planning, conducting, and articulating research, Brad Haseman (2006) suggests performing an “artistic audit” in place of a more traditional literature review. This type of audit entails highlighting artistic and creative works that inspire, sit in conversation with, and/or otherwise inform the project at hand. My dissertation undoubtedly draws from the legacies of many queer and feminist cultural producers, particularly those whose works explore the role of the body, gendered scripts, private/public spheres, and other aspects of labour, sexuality, desire, affect, and embodiment. Even where I do not engage directly with these artistic works, I am inspired by the rich histories of feminist and queer thought as well as contemporary cultural works that are exploring newer technologies and experimental techniques.

While I have woven many of those inspirations throughout the body chapters of this dissertation, and while I have also produced a series of miniature literature reviews in each body chapter, I have also chosen to include here an initial artistic audit that I performed early in my research process. The artistic works below have inspired my thinking within three key categories of inquiry: “Engaging the Ordinary,” “Disrupting Species-Based Lines,” and “Making the Vulnerable Self Visible.” These are not exhaustive categories and, once again, there is much overlap between them, but these areas of cultural production have provided stimuli that have been vital for my writing. Though there are countless possibilities for which creative projects could have been included within each of these categories, I have chosen to focus on the work of six artists that have offered me food for thought.

Engaging the Ordinary: Roni Horn and Jamie Lauren Keiles

Ordinary interactions are where we learn the codes of intimacy and where social scripts inform and solidify our place within dominant hierarchies of relationship structures. Kathleen Stewart (2007) describes the affective ordinary as “a kind of contact zone” (3), a way of making

meaning that bridges personal feelings with public interactions. She writes, “Ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they’re also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of” (2). Queer and feminist art has sought to make these unmarked processes visible and has often drawn on the ordinary, making the everyday-ness of the lives of women and other marginalized people explicit. Roni Horn’s photo series *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (1999) and the self-reflexive photo essay from Jamie Lauren Keiles “Depressiongrams” (2015) are two works that meditate on mundane aspects of ordinary life while drawing out affects that are raised by familiar substances that are encountered in everyday experiences.

Roni Horn’s *Still Water* series features close-up photographs of London’s River Thames, an urban icon. Horn’s work repositions water as deserving of intimate attention as she pulls affectively charged scenes out of its details. Each photograph is annotated with poetic, meditative statements that offer social, political, and affective commentary on the image. In one footnote on the piece *Untitled, Detail 1*, Horn draws attention to intimate relationality between humans and their natural environments through a sort of love note to water:

26. Water; your water, my water is coupled water. Water is never only a form, it’s a relation, too. The form, for example: liquid; the relation; water’s indivisible connection to all things, superficially with inanimate things, intimately with living things (n.p.).

By thinking through and with *water*—something that is at once entirely ordinary and simultaneously a matter of life and death—Horn offers a slowed form of engagement that is also a sustained reflection on the impacts of the ordinary. This work relates to my consideration of the intimacies that are formed between human and nonhuman entities, in particular the human–animal relations in Chapter Four and the human–object relations in Chapter Five.

Meanwhile, Jamie Lauren Keiles’ photo essay “Depressiongrams” (Figure 2) explores the author’s use of the social media site Instagram over an extended period of depression, making visible the often-mundane experiences associated with medical appointments, therapy sessions, institutionalization, and ongoing recovery. In some ways similar to Horn’s work, but in this case using text and digital online platforms instead of lithographs, Keiles’ piece takes up the personal, everydayness of familiar objects of encounter (e.g., a bed, a pill bottle, a blanket). Keiles engages in critical self-reflection as she works to re-contextualize and re-evaluate her experiences of uneven mental health and depression through revisiting her digital archive of Instagram photos. Much like my examination of the Museum of Broken

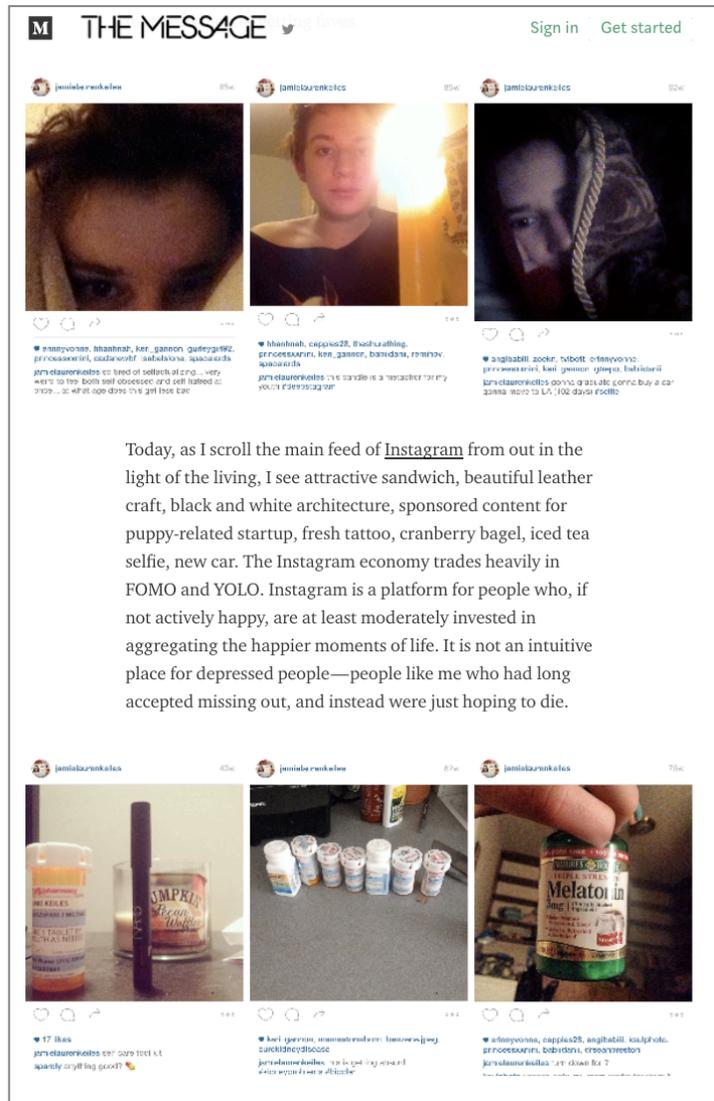


Figure 2: Screenshot of Keiles’ “Depressiongrams” (2015).

Relationships in Chapter Five, “Depressiongrams” considers how humans are intimately entangled with the “stuff of a life” and underlines how material objects often become imbued with affects that are much larger than their material selves.

Making the Vulnerable Self Visible: Vivek Shraya and Michèle Pearson Clarke

Self-representations have long been a site of resistance for marginalized subjects. Whether through selfies and social media (Allen 2016; Gardiner 2015; Murray 2015) or photography and video work (Dean 2016; Meagher 2010), controlling the images of oneself that are being (re)produced in public realms can hold a tremendous amount of reparative power. According to bell hooks (1992), those who are marginalized and subordinated in relations of power “learn experientially that there is a critical gaze, one that ‘looks’ to document, one that is oppositional” and, as a consequence, “one learns to look a certain way in order to resist” (116). Representations that come from within marginalized communities repair some of the strained histories of objectification, pathologization, and representational violence that have come from outside producers. Furthermore, manipulating aesthetics, form, and artistic sensation can be important interventions into dominant modes of representation (see Amin, Musser, and Pérez 2017). Multiplatform artist Vivek Shraya has used film, music, poetry, and children’s picture books to lay bare some of the most vulnerable versions of herself, while writer, filmmaker, and photographer Michèle Pearson Clarke uses her art to explore the personal and collective vulnerabilities of grief, loss, and longing. Both of these artists inspire thoughts on the power of representation (discussed further in Chapter Two), vulnerability, and possibilities for moving through injury and trauma via the strength of artistic creation.

On her 36th birthday, Vivek Shraya released her short film *I Want to Kill Myself* (2017), a quiet and fiercely honest biography of her relationship to suicidal thoughts. As a racialized trans person, Shraya grapples with the weight of racism, transphobia, and gendered regulations and their impacts on mental health and one’s will—and ability—to stay alive. The film doubles as a photo essay, with images by Zachary Ayotte and a voiceover from Shraya herself. The opening

lines, “I wanted to kill myself when I was eleven. / I learned I had a body by your condemnation of my body. / *Please god don't let me wake up.*” introduce the viewer to a series of memories, presented through poetic first-person narrative. Along with being a confessional piece, *I Want to Kill Myself* is also a testament to the reparative potentials of intimate connection and of sharing vulnerable truths.

Where suicide and depression are meant to be individual and isolating experiences, Shraya highlights the ways that bad feelings can also be the basis for connection and care. Shraya’s narrative explains that finally telling those closest to her that she wanted to kill herself

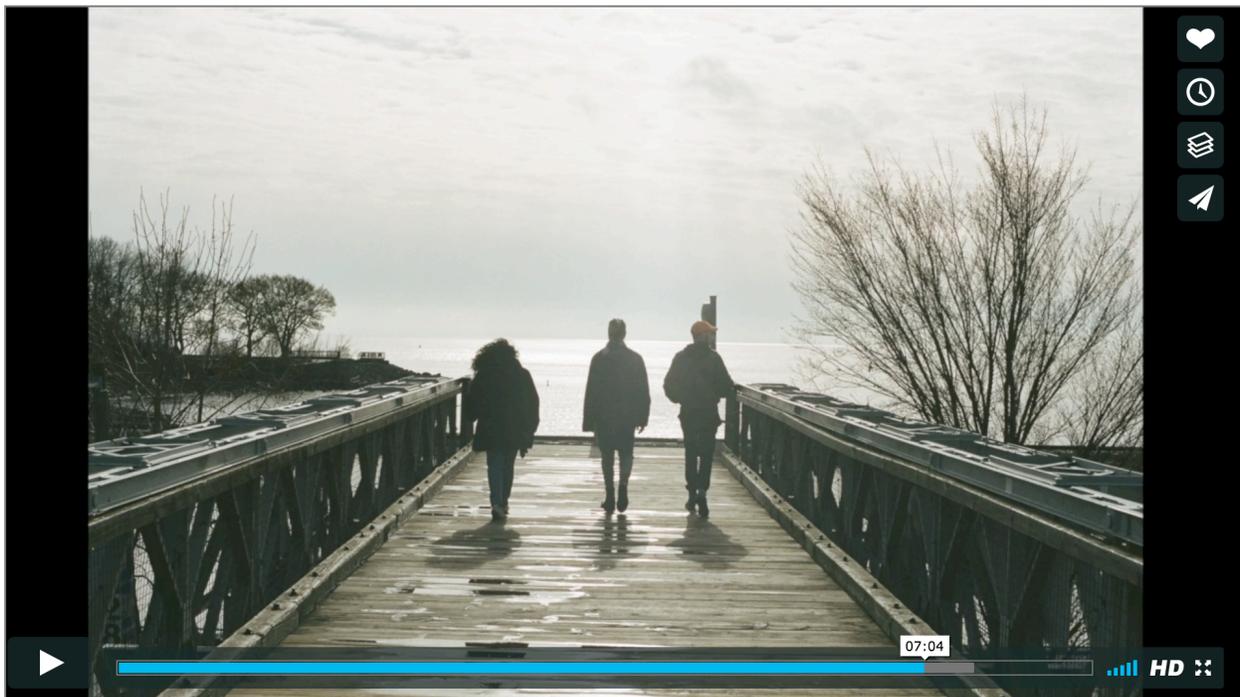


Figure 3: Still from Shraya's I Want to Kill Myself, via vivekshraya.com.

highlighted the urgency she felt, and it was only through speaking the words that she was able to hold the complexity of her experiences (Figure 3). She closes with the lines, “Saying *I want to kill myself* made my pain explicit. / Saying *I want to kill myself* to the people who love me meant I was shown an immediate and specific kind of care that I desperately needed. / Saying *I want to kill myself* kept me alive.” Though it is all too often up to the most marginalized to bear the

burden of making their vulnerabilities visible so that others may learn, there can also be incredible gains through the process. In *I Want to Kill Myself*, Shraya faces some of her own haunting silences head on to demand visibility for and acknowledgment of the social processes and intimate regulations that are constructed in a way that becomes toxic for so many.

The work of Michèle Pearson Clarke offers a different approach to reparative intimacies. In her photography series *It's Good to Be Needed* (2013), Clarke photographs queer exes in the materially simple yet affectively complicated act of handholding. The project description outlines Clarke's intentions for these staged encounters: "The aim of the project was to provide participants with an opportunity to engage in a moment of discomfort/vulnerability and to experience what happens when you perform intimacy despite time and distance and hurt and conflict" (MichelePearsonClarke.com, "It's Good to be Needed"). Much like Shraya's film, Clarke's project highlights personal vulnerabilities that are not often brought to the fore of public conversation. Clarke's images are haunting; the landscapes are grey and sparse, while the human subjects are placed in the foreground. This series cannot be read outside of the affects it summons in the viewer—the uncomfortable intimacies being performed by Clarke's subjects invoke the viewer's own broken intimacies and histories of vulnerability in a way that echoes the reverberations of the Museum of Broken Relationships I discuss in Chapter Five. The act of physical touch also reverberates with the healing potentials for physical intimacy I discuss through professional cuddling services in Chapter Three.

Both of these projects inform and inspire my analysis of cultural texts by underscoring the ways that affect is so often implored or mobilized in creative media. Though both Shraya and Clarke explicitly engage with queer feelings and affective realities, their works inspire further contemplation of the sites and forms of intimacy throughout the case studies of this dissertation.

Disrupting Species-Based Lines: Duke and Battersby and Patricia Piccinini

As Livingston and Puar (2011) outline in their introduction to the *Social Text* special issue “Interspecies,” the “porous nature of the human/nonhuman animal divide” raises questions that are critical to queer theory, sexuality studies, and critical race theory (10). Notably, the authors claim, a consideration of interspecies exchanges serves to “upturn normative modes of thinking, of methods, of scholarly production” and requires new approaches to answering foundational questions within critical research traditions (12). Similarly, the artistic works discussed in this section muddle species-based lines and incite interspecies inquiry that challenges human/nonhuman distinctions. Multimedia artist duo Duke and Battersby’s video piece *Lesser Apes* (2011) pairs nicely with the humanoid-animalesque sculpture work of Patricia Piccinini to consider how intimate boundaries are most often drawn across species lines, and to likewise consider the consequences of crossing or muddling those borders.

Lesser Apes (2011), a short video by Duke and Battersby, tells the story of a love affair between primate researcher Farrah and bonobo ape Meema. Largely narrated from the perspective of Meema, *Lesser Apes* combines video, animation, voiceover, and song to present a story of a nonhuman ape with sexual and romantic agency. This level of agency would be unthinkable under dominant, human-focused, species-based hierarchies. Thus, Duke and Battersby create an alternate reality wherein the viewer is placed in the position of Meema, aligning themselves—if sometimes uncomfortably—with her nonhuman affective and embodied experiences of lesbian interspecies romance. This work is valuable for my research not only in terms of modeling a disruption of species-based lines in relation to various physical and emotional intimacies (e.g., in Chapter Four and Chapter Five), but also in how it is related to non-normative sexual connections more generally. Alongside other creative works and

theoretical interventions I take up in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, *Lesser Apes* probes the question of what kinds of representations exceed the bounds of normative intimacy, of normative sexuality, and even of normative pornographic content.

In another iteration of interspecies thinking, contemporary visual artist Patricia Piccinini has created a series of sculptures that place human figures alongside hyperrealist depictions of human-animal hybrid beings. Constructed in mixed materials, including silicone, fiberglass, textiles, and human hair, *The Long Awaited* (Figure 4), *The Welcome Guest* (Figure 5), and *The Bond* (Figure 6) are three of Piccinini's many sculptures that feature not-quite human figures that manage to simultaneously seem foreign to our contemporary world yet biologically plausible in a world not too far off.

These works confuse the senses and disrupt the simplicity of species-based taxonomies, embodying messy borders and uncanny apparitions. Piccinini's pale-skinned creatures are ones



Figure 4: Screenshot of Piccinini's The Long Awaited (2008), via patriciapiccinini.net.



Figure 5: Screenshot of Piccinini's The Welcome Guest (2011), via patriciapiccinini.net.



Figure 6: Screenshot of Piccinini's The Bond (2016), via patriciapiccinini.net.

of abjection, horror, and uncanny recognition, though they also refigure monstrosity (e.g., the fat body, the sloth, the aged, the disfigured) as intimate and familiar. In each of these works, there is an exchange of comfort and of nonsexual, intimate touch between the human and the not-quite-human characters. None of the characters appear to be scared, combative, or competitive in these works; rather, they all appear to be co-existing, peaceful, and calm. Piccinini's sculptures thus inspire possibility for lives and bodies existing otherwise, challenging the viewer to imagine worlds that account for the ways humans and nonhuman animals are necessarily co-constituted and interconnected. These works inspire my own writing in Chapter Four, in terms of human–animal intimacies, but also my work in Chapter Three, wherein sexual surrogacy and professional cuddling become case studies for looking at physical touch and intimate embodiment as deeply healing practices.

[0.6]

Expanding Intimate Knowledge

Following the theoretical and artistic lineages discussed above, this dissertation moves through five body chapters, grouped by theme, topic, and/or organizing logic. Chapter One, “Towards a Theory of Practice-Based Affective Research,” lays the detailed theoretical and epistemological groundwork for the research conducted in this project. Situated through and against more established feminist and queer research practices of critical discourse analysis, feminist textual and visual analysis, and autoethnography, I explore connections between the emerging fields of queer affect as methodology and practice-based research to propose a hybrid theory of practice-based affective research (PBAR).

As with many other feminist and queer methodologies, PBAR recognizes the ongoing experiences of the researcher as being a foundational guide for the research itself. PBAR allows

for the objects of study to emerge from the everydayness of doing the research rather than being determined at the beginning of the project. As I see it, PBAR is a necessarily feminist approach in that it is based in critical analysis of gendered dynamics, sexual representations, and traditional structures and processes of academic research by valuing affective impulses, emotional entanglements, and experiential truths. Through my application of PBAR, I am invested in breaking down prescriptive notions of gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and citizenship through a focus on affective and intimate knowledges. Notably, PBAR moves away from identity categories as a primary analytic towards the possibilities and complications of using affective connections, movements, and exchanges as organizing principles of the research.

Chapter Two, “The Ambivalent Intimacies of Feminist Porn,” begins putting this affective methodology into practice as it engages the collision and collusion of pornography, affective regulation, and intimate citizenship. In 2011, I performed in a short art-porn film that was shot and directed by my now-ex partner, N. Maxwell Lander. My decision to perform was driven both by my confidence in Max’s personal and professional artistic practice and by a desire to pull myself out of a bout of dissociation that had left me feeling especially nonsexual and decidedly unattractive. In the months that followed, the film won a Feminist Porn Award, was set to release on two of the largest alt-porn streaming websites, and launched me into many, many conversations about the relationship—and, most notably, the tension—between art, porn, and feminism. Eventually, I started writing on this topic and incorporated it into my early doctoral research. Over the next few years, my investments in authoring this material faded: many other porn performers with far more industry experience were writing and speaking about the complicated relationships between feminism and porn; my own connections to feminist porn communities waned with my breakup and other life circumstances; and it no longer felt as

personally urgent for me to work through the academics of it all.

By the time I was writing and editing this dissertation, I found myself experiencing a deep internal resistance to revisiting the topic of feminist porn. It felt at once too vulnerable and too distant; too personal and also like a whole other life. I felt very conflicted. Ultimately, I realized that my own ambivalences echo the ambivalent experiences many feminist-minded performers, consumers, producers, and passersby have with pornography, and I preserved the chapter. With these personal ambivalences circulating in the background, Chapter Two emphasizes the inconsistent and varied circulations of affect and intimacy within communities that have developed through and around the growing sub-genre of feminist porn. As Alan McKee (2016) argues, though pornography has most often been studied as a space of exceptionalism that positions it outside of popular culture(s), understanding the genre as a creative industry alongside all others allows for fruitful entry points into the complex web of labour ethics, social stigma, and representation that is, in fact, unique to porn performers in many regards. Employing this framework through the writing of affect scholars (Berlant 2011; Sedgwick 2003; Paasonen 2007, 2014), disability studies scholars (Clare 2001; Erickson 2007), and queer of colour critique (Miller-Young 2014; Nash 2014; Nguyen 2004, 2014), Chapter Two thus contemplates the circulation of affect through the site of Toronto's Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs).

In this chapter, I have included a Spotlight on the video work of N. Maxwell Lander. Having worked with Max for over ten years and having dated him for several of those, Max and I now have a friendship that is based in honesty, trust, intellectual conversation, artistic collaboration, and a series of messy, painful affective pasts. I am intimately familiar with Max's video and still-portrait work, having modeled in some of it and having been around for the production of much of the rest. In this experimental piece of writing, Max and I navigate our

complex history through a combination of interview, personal narrative, and content analysis of Max's pornographic video work to consider the affective shapings of gendered and sexual selves.

This conversational piece leads into a more direct examination of intimate hierarchies in Chapter Three: sexual versus nonsexual, monogamous versus non-monogamous, reproductive versus non-reproductive, and freely given versus monetized. "The Gendered Politics of Not-Quite-Sex-Work" highlights the messy and slippery qualities of affect and the way it tends to "leak" out across socio-political boundaries. This chapter was inspired by less direct personal connection, but the affective flow has been no less motivating. As an able-bodied-enough, normatively attractive, cisgender white woman, I am constantly navigating a particular set of gendered expectations and necessities of performing intimate labour. I have also found myself in several sex-work-adjacent scenarios in my life, but I would hardly be identified/identifiable as a sex worker by publics at large—my race, class, and education privilege provides a shield against those socially stigmatized labels. This chapter has come out of the varied affective pangs I feel while contemplating the boundaries of sex work, not-sex-work, and practices which I have termed *not-quite-sex-work*: practices that may or may not involve sex but which always involve an exchange of intimate labour for money. Chapter Three thus engages gendered scripts of feminized care work and intimate labour and considers the negotiation of these intimate imperatives through three monetized business endeavours: professional cuddling, paid dating, and sexual surrogacy.

Through the case of Jackie Samuel, a professional cuddler in upstate New York who received a flurry of news attention in 2011, this chapter rethinks the political economies of intimate exchange as an extension of gendered labour. Samuel, founder of cuddling business "The Snuggery," has withstood public outrage and hostile accusations directed at her because she

exchanges nonsexual touch for pay. According to Samuel, scientific studies support the health benefits of affectionate touch, which include lowering blood pressure, reducing stress, and curbing anxiety. The Snuggery, by its very framing, makes connections between physical encounters, health, and bodily processes, and affective and emotional responses. Still, Samuel has faced significant antagonistic, reactionary responses that make clear that intimacy is somehow assumed to be “sacred,” “untouchable,” and, most of all, free of charge. Chapter Three places Samuel’s business against the marketing strategies of paid dating websites WhatsYourPrice and Ohlala and against the clinical framing of sexual surrogacy services in order to examine the backlash that exists against monetized care work. This chapter considers the following questions: What happens when a price tag is put onto emotion work, which is expected to be free of charge and presumed to be offered out of love, duty, and/or affection? What happens when relational economies are challenged through a monetization of the gendered division of labour? And what can be said about the boundary-protecting invocations of “pure” and “natural” intimacy formations in media coverage of those who monetize intimate labour? The discomfort that comes from blurred bounds and uneasy experiences disrupt the urge to fall back on *what has (always) been* and requires deeper thinking and more complex, more creative analyses.

Chapter Four, “The Generous Reach of Interspecies Alliance,” extends the conversation of intimate hierarchies to include species-based hierarchies and affective exchanges between humans and animals. Opening with an illustrated recreation of my own “animal-family” tree—a genealogy of the significant animals I have lived with in my life since childhood set alongside my human parents and siblings—this chapter highlights the interplay of interspecies friendships, unexpected human and nonhuman animal relations, and my own affective experiences of living with a co-dependent and very anxious rescue dog. This section is situated at the crux of animal

studies, posthumanist thinking, and affect theory as I move from my own interspecies encounters to a collection of viral videos that feature interspecies friendships. By looking at the popularity of supposedly unbelievable or unthinkable animal interactions, I argue that human impulses to find evidence of unlikely intimacies reflects a broader desire to resist the limiting boundaries of current acceptable relationship models. I further explore this argument through an analysis of the documentary film *Kedi* (dir. Ceyda Torun, 2016), which offers an intricate reflection on how human–feline relationships co-construct the urban landscape of Istanbul, Turkey.

Finally, this dissertation concludes by moving from the formation of affective intimacies to an analysis of object loss, affect, and intimate hauntings. Chapter Five, “The Haunted Objects of Our Affection,” sheds another layer of anthropocentric assumptions by centering human relationships with matter that is usually deemed to be inanimate. Chapter Five takes up feminist new materialisms, studies of the Anthropocene, and object-oriented ontologies to think through human attachments to species supremacy and the denial of animacy in human-made and natural environmental features. Through a spotlight on Erika Eiffel, I consider the ways that physical objects often serve a much larger affective function for their human counterparts. Known through the media as “The Woman Who Married the Eiffel Tower,” Eiffel identifies as *objectum-sexual*—someone who forms significant attachments to, and has intimate relationships with, nonhuman, non-animal objects. Eiffel’s romantic attachments breach the accepted limits of dominant and “appropriate” models of intimate relations and move away from human-focused claims of interpersonal intimacy while calling to rethink the species-based terms of so-called healthy relations.

The affective and emotional connections of human–object relationships call into question some of the most foundational assumptions of intimate normalcy, including that romantic

intimacy is formed between humans and humans alone. Continuing this line of inquiry, I turn to an in-depth look at the Museum of Broken Relationships—an art-museum with two permanent locations, several pop-up shows, and an online repository (Brokenships.com). Through this museum space, I ruminate on how humans often imbue objects with an affective world that extends beyond the object itself. Through the ways that intimate losses haunt human actors, this chapter insists that the relationship between objects, affects, and intimacies is much more complex than dominant framings currently allow.

As a final deliberation, I have opted to include an Epilogue in lieu of a Conclusion. There, I return to my goals for and methodologies of this dissertation. I offer critical reflection on the successes, failures, and uneven trajectories of practice-based affective research, and I suggest potential revisions to this experimental methodology for future projects. The incoherence and lack of contained knowability of affect is perhaps what makes it most effective as an object of study, as a methodology, and as a political strategy for projects of resistance. In contemplating the collision of affect studies with developing technologies such as robots, androids, and artificial intelligence, I reflect on what affect can bring to the fore and what it has to offer a study of intimacy, intimate regulations, and future possibilities for shifting intimate relations.

CHAPTER ONE.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF PRACTICE-BASED AFFECTIVE RESEARCH.

[1.1]

Intimate Reparations

A fortuneteller once told me that I'm lucky in finding love but am unlucky in holding onto it. It sounded like a canned line that was too all encompassing for me to take particularly seriously, yet it left me with a raw, gnawing feeling in my gut. I had just ended my relationship with a partner of four years and was having flashbacks to my last tumultuous breakup. As upset as I was about this relationship's demise, I also found myself feeling resigned to the outcome: I had wholeheartedly believed that my intimate past was doomed to repeat itself, and so there was a strange sense of relief that came with this new ending. I found myself feeling oddly validated in the process—if I was going to have to endure the painful restructuring of my life and of my self, at least part of me had known it was coming all along.

When people ask why I chose to dedicate my graduate research to the topic of intimacy, I often respond with a quip-y and slightly dismissive, “long-standing personality problems.” This response seems to approach the heart of their question (which I continue to hear as “tell me your

intimate secrets”) while simultaneously deflecting any real personal exposure on my part. Of course, my go-to statement is not mere hyperbole: I have long been accused of having *intimacy issues*. I continue to battle with deep-seated anxiety and depression, which often intervene in my emotional commitments. Physical intimacy has always been complicated for me due to a long history of chronic pain and recurring dissociation. I am not a fan of other people’s surprises, especially where intimacy is concerned. I am still, or perhaps always, working through my need to feel prepared for the (perceived) inevitable doomsday and to stay one step ahead of whatever is coming my way. In other words, embracing intimacy has not exactly been my strong suit.

There are palpable resonances between my intimate self-description and Eve Sedgwick’s model paranoid reader (1997, 2003). Within the context of academic disciplines, Sedgwick argues that paranoid reading practices have dominated in the critical humanities. Paranoid readings are ones that equate *what was* with *what will (presumably) always be* and form a reductive correlation that overdetermines lines of inquiry. Expanding upon Paul Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of suspicion,” Sedgwick lays out five key facets of paranoia that find their way into paranoid reading practices: paranoia is anticipatory; it is reflexive and mimetic; it is a strong theory; it is a theory of negative affects; and it places its faith in the exposure of existing phenomena. Perhaps most importantly, the protective diagnostics of paranoia mean that it is not particularly adaptive, and it is self-reinforcing (paranoia begets paranoia). Researchers with paranoid reading practices often struggle to adjust their approaches according to changing socio-political conditions—i.e., those which might produce different outcomes than past scenarios—and to tackle contemporary issues that may require novel or unfamiliar tactics.

Sedgwick goes on to explain that the paranoid motto “there must be no bad surprises” means that paranoid readers assert what was/will always be at the expense of imagining *what*

else might become. For these reasons, Sedgwick offers a cautionary intervention into fields of study that would take paranoid reading practices as the prime and privileged way to conduct critical scholarship, and she encourages a move towards reparative projects. Reparative readings—i.e., ones that allow for an element of surprise, prioritize adaptability, and value shifting notions of truth—open pathways for new possibilities and unusual structures of relation. Though paranoid readings dominated in early queer theory, Sedgwick herself points out that paranoid readers are often those who are best equipped to make reparative moves. This can take place at the level of the individual as well as it can at the level of a discipline or field.

Counter to my own historical impulses, I have been taking Sedgwick's challenge to heart, and I have shifted towards reparative approaches to my research that resist both academic and personal paranoias. The commitment I made to this dissertation project came late in the game, and I was years into my program of study before settling on a plan of attack. The trajectory of this dissertation has been a meditation on intimate fears, discomforts, neuroses, joys, breakthroughs, intimate amends; it is a story of a world in relation to other worlds, and beings in relation to other beings. In this sense, I have used academia as a way of working through, starting from personal narrative and moving to a broader socio-political analysis that breaks the isolation and monotony of my own little world(s). In many ways, the format and case studies of this project are fragmented and unanticipated. My methods are performative, experimental, and experiential. Yet they are simultaneously normative, mundane, and benign. The substance of this project has been brought to life through the trips and falls of the language I need to mobilize in order to articulate the path I have chosen, when I have only ever had a faint idea of where I might be going. Perhaps—at least, my hope is—that is as fruitful an entry point into the study of affect as anything.

Following Sedgwick's call, I have utilized a set of affect-based methods and methodologies in this dissertation that prioritize adaptability and embrace unknown paths. In attempting to work out some of the layered connections between affect, intimacy, and experiential knowledges over the past few years, I have consulted a myriad of sources and platforms that are synchronously related to my personal and academic inquiries. I have perused countless websites, including BuzzFeed "listicles" (list-based articles), Tumblrs, and YouTube channels, read many sensationalistic and sartorial news pieces, dabbled in self-help texts, attended affect theory conferences and artistic performances, and filtered through the academic literature in attempts to pull together an idea of what affective research might *look* like, *feel* like, and *be* like. I have thought about how to employ practice-based research within the context of my personal and professional work and how I might move it through the realm of everyday conversations, relations, interactions, and (inter)personal intimacies. In so doing, I have learned a great deal from affect theorists, queer scholars, and those working on and through art-based research-creation projects, and I strive to infuse my writing practice with those creative knowledges.

The methodological assemblage I have mobilized in my attempts to reflect the ongoing and uneven processes of intimate relations is one I have collected, at this time, under the name of practice-based affective research (PBAR). PBAR blurs the disciplinary and conceptual borders between certain more established social science methodologies and emerging practices of affect-centered research. PBAR is a hybrid methodology that moves beyond the perimeters of traditional disciplinary research in its mix of multiple methods from within fields of feminist research, affective research, and practice-based research. In reforming existing research practices, I am moving in line with Jack Halberstam's (1998) discussion of queer methodology

as a *scavenger methodology*, one that “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other” and “refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (13).

I envision the “affective” component of “practice-based affective research” as emphasizing a research process that follows the affective impulses and inspirations of the researcher, while the “practice-based” component indicates that it is a necessarily process-centered and grounded methodology wherein the theory and praxis make themselves known only through the work of actually doing the work. The very nature of PBAR means that I have attempted to enact this methodology in the research and writing of my dissertation without knowing at the project’s outset where exactly it would take me. While I had a series of methodological inclinations from the start, and while those yearnings eventually developed into specific objects and case studies, I have not ever had the luxury of a concise answer to the question of what, exactly, my methodology *is*. Except maybe to say that I have been exploring it, practicing it, testing it every day through my own intimate relationships, through my own resistances to and excitements in my work, and through my conscious and concerted efforts to feel and think intimate connection differently.

Admittedly, much of this process has been rendered invisible in the finished product of my dissertation. As discussed in the Introduction, I have found my way to each of the topics in the chapters that follow through affective spark, intimate necessity, or just plain happenstance that has generated an affective pull in me. Each of the case studies I take up address a part of my own affective process(ing) while speaking to broader structures of affective regulation and intimate knowledge. My initial questions about the relationship between intimacy and affect have brought me on a research journey that could not have been scripted from the start and which has been

messy and uneven, but the final product has necessarily cohered into an academic document that fulfills the requirements of the University. The expectations for what a doctoral research project will look like has unquestionably influenced the final format of this dissertation, and in some ways, my implementation of PBAR was a failed experiment (I discuss this aspect more in my below, as well as in my Epilogue).

The ongoing negotiation between institutional requirements and the research-creation-infused project I was originally envisioning means that my writing has moved from poetic interludes and affect-laden vignettes into a format that includes more linear forms of life writing, personal narrative, description, and discourse analysis. I have experimented with multiple other formats over the course of this project (for example, free-form poetry writing, dream journaling, drawing/sketching, cross-stitching, signing up for dating and cuddling websites, and brainstorming art installations), but ultimately this dissertation has congealed into a more traditionally accepted academic format. That being said, because the specific sites and cases I consider have emerged throughout the ongoing process of my research, they may, at first glance, seem to be a somewhat disjointed selection. Across its chapters, this dissertation contemplates mainstream and subcultural performance, documentary film, narrative film, blog posts, news reports, personal experiential accounts, and non-commercial, politicized projects. I allow these idiosyncratic objects of study to sit in sometimes-uncomfortable conversation with one another as I contemplate the instructive qualities of affect, seeking where and how affects circulate in site-specific spaces of cultural events (for example, at the Feminist Porn Awards in Chapter Two), in online blogs and pop news pieces (scattered throughout Chapter Three, Chapter Four, and Chapter Five), and through artistic and cultural production (seen especially in Chapter Two and Chapter Five). At times, my personal connection to these areas of study is obvious and

explicit, and at times it is more elusive. Apart from the difficulties of expressing affective experiences through the constraints of language, these obscured connections have taken shape through further experimentation with layers of visibility and reflexivity that have sometimes necessitated letting the inarticulable remain unarticulated.

My doctoral work began in 2010 with a series of major life changes: the end of a long-term relationship, my aunt passing away unexpectedly, a spiked increase in my chronic pain, a crisis of gender/sexuality/self, and a massive turnover in my friend-family group. These changes were unforeseen and forced me to confront the aspects of my life that had turned from healthy and desired stability to toxic stagnation. They also inspired me to pay closer attention to thinking and rethinking intimacy within my own life and to critically examine how my own intimate relations reinforce, challenge, and are otherwise impacted by the master narratives of intimacy that prevail in Canada and the United States. Over the course of writing a dissertation, life will inevitably “happen” to everyone, but given the flexible and unstable methods I have been developing, the personal and professional upheaval I have experienced throughout this project has indeed been a strange gift. My dissertation work has been a project of exploratory movement, but it has also been a project of deep grounding.

As previously mentioned, my proposed methodology of PBAR draws from several established practices as well as ones that have only recently been taken seriously in academic realms. Most notably, these established methods include feminist approaches to critical discourse analysis, textual and visual analysis, and autoethnography, while the affective research methods I borrow from include those which incorporate queer affect as methodology, including artistic performance, creative nonfiction, poetry, and affective vignettes. My proposed version of PBAR is part participant-observation in that it involves being attentive to, reflecting on, and engaging

the worlds and environments around the researcher (see Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011), while it is also part life writing and part autoethnography through a reflexive and political tracking of the researcher's own movements through and with the particular subcultures and social environments they encounter in their everyday (see Adams, Jones and Ellis 2014; Chang 2008). Affect-centered approaches often employ methods that can be deemed somehow queer, strange, non-normative or anti-normative, and which are decidedly rooted in various feelingscapes and gut impulses (see Cvetkovich 2012; Love 2009). These frameworks—elaborated upon further in the sections below—treat affective experiences as central to practices of theorizing, writing, and/or research-creation, and they are critical components of my ongoing research.

[1.2]

Feminist Research

In using my own affective experiences and intimate engagements as an entry into my research, I am developing PBAR in conversation with extensive lineages of feminist practice. From the early feminist research of Dorothy Smith and Kimberlé Crenshaw and the postmodern moves of Cherríe Moraga and Judith Butler, feminist approaches to research have often included an explicit recognition and incorporation of the researcher's own positionality as well as a politicized goal of creating social change. Following these robust histories, my dissertation borrows from feminist approaches to critical discourse analysis, textual and visual analysis, and autoethnography.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Often attributed to Derridian (1966) and Foucauldian (1978) thought, critical discourse analysis recognizes that “all knowledge is contextually bound and produced within a field of

shifting power relations” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007, 89). Employing critical discourse analysis means unpacking the dominant worldviews and master narratives that are embedded in a particular cultural text through deconstructing the use of language, visuals, and taken-for-granted premises, as well as being attuned to the absences or silences in the work. In examining online videos, blog posts, news stories, and public event spaces, my work utilizes critical discourse analysis as a means of performing politicized readings of cultural texts that insist on the representation power and value of pop culture (see Zeisler 2008). Critical discourse analysis allows for a sustained engagement with popular culture that draws out the complexity of meaning within texts and reveals the implications of representations that reflect dominant messaging regarding intimacy and supposedly proper affective engagements.

Feminist social science researchers often stress the value of discourse analysis for understanding historical trajectories of gendered oppression, sexual and intimate regulation, and hierarchical structures of knowledge (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004; Reinharz 1992). Because intimate regulation is enacted through a range of social and cultural discourses, on multiple levels, through multiple avenues, and in multiple locations, drawing out the power differentials within discursive histories is crucial to my project of dissecting and refiguring forms of intimate knowledge production. I thus combine critical discourse analysis with feminist textual and visual analysis to probe my research objects, sites, and cultural texts.

Textual and Visual Analysis

Along with analyzing discursive messaging, I incorporate textual and visual analysis to provide grounded context for my examinations of intimate regulation in the cultural imaginary. As Patricia Leavy (2007) observes, “Culture has a visual landscape of images, which through

increased technologies of production and reproduction infuse many cultural spaces” (239). By interrogating these images through textual and cultural analysis, feminist researchers are able to reflect on the relationship between human actors and “the textual environments they create and inhabit,” as well as considering the macrosocial processes and worldviews that infuse both pop culture and feminist cultural production (ibid., 245). With the relationship between microsocial and macrosocial experiences, we are drawn back to Lauren Berlant’s (2000) assertion that intimacy begs a question of scale—the intimate, in Berlant’s view, necessarily takes into account both micro and macro politics and demands an analysis of the various levels of circulation occurring between them.

Textual analysis allows the researcher to engage in practices of description while also observing potentials for disruption. Leavy (2007) notes that specifically feminist forms of textual analysis mean that researchers “are likely to ask different research questions” from the start, and they are likely to approach the resulting data differently while using their “resulting knowledge to effect intellectual, social, and political change” (236). Again, these framings of decidedly feminist practices identify an indispensable politicization of the research. According to Süheyla Kirca, feminist interventions “might offer feminist politics a pragmatic strategy to shift the balance of power and [...] help transform society” (cited in Leavy 2007, 223). The descriptions of feminist textual analysis offered by Leavy and Kirca identify critical approaches to cultural texts that address a variety of analytical needs and provide a foundation from which to consider my sites and objects of study through their textual and visual elements.

Autoethnography

As perhaps the most well known method that makes the researcher explicitly visible through its output, autoethnographic research might be positioned as a kind of “first cousin” to

my methodology. Autoethnography uses the self as a vehicle through which to analyze cultural experience, utilizing personal narrative and politicized reflection to draw conclusions about socio-political dynamics, power, and systems of oppression (Adams and Jones 2011; Adams, Jones and Ellis 2014; Chang 2008). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) assert that, as a research method, autoethnography refers to both “process and product” (Sec. 1); the method is as much about the types of analysis implemented as it is about the research performed. These types of analysis are key in distinguishing autoethnography from other forms of personal storytelling, which may present an account of the researcher’s experience without the incorporation of critical reflexivity. By contrast, autoethnography necessitates a relational frame that “uses deep and careful self-reflexion [...] to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political” (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2014, 2). In this sense, autoethnography is action-oriented, a way of calling for social change within socio-cultural landscapes and in relational exchanges. As a consequence of this dynamic, it is a particularly useful informant to my own formulations of practice-based affective research.

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) highlight another unique strength in autoethnography in that it recognizes “the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process” (Sec. 1) and makes the emotions and experiences of the researcher visible. They explain that “the act [of personal storytelling] provides a space for us to create a relationship embodied in the performance of writing and reading that is reflective, critical, loving, and chosen in solidarity” (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2014, 5). Adams, Jones and Ellis (2014) also appreciate that autoethnography shows “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” rather than simply presenting the final—and much-neatened—result (2). They further divulge that “telling personal stories in/as research always carries personal,

relational, and ethical risks,” though they see these risks as essential “not only for [their] research but also for living meaningful lives and changing the world in important and vital ways” (ibid., 5-6).

As with my proposal of PBAR, autoethnography moves against traditional imperatives of scientific objectivity and, rather than downplaying or attempting to eliminate the subjective, uses the personal as an animating force in the research. Autoethnographic research allows scholars “to reconsider how we think, how we do research and maintain relationships, and how we live” (Adams, Jones and Ellis 2014, 8), and it instructs me to similarly think through the assumptions and relational preconditions I bring to my own research. Though my methodology sits very much in conversation with the foundational premises of autoethnography, I differ mainly in the execution of my method and within the disciplinary contexts and conversations of the field. While autoethnography responds to the “colonialist, sterile research impulses” of existing ethnographic and scientific research, it has been developed largely through the discipline of anthropology and preserves a disciplinary fidelity (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, Sec. 1). My own work moves beyond these types of anthropological lineages and invests in interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches that pull from a variety of fields to create an assemblage of research knowledge and a related set of practices.

[1.3]

Affective Research

The literature on autoethnography inspires a closer examination of affect within the research process, since any inclusion of experiential knowledge also involves an affective journey. Even outside of autoethnographic accounts, feminist researchers have been including personal narrative and critical reflection for many decades. In order to account for the

uncontainability and sometimes-ephemeral nature of affect in this dissertation research, I have turned to scholars who utilize queer affect as a guide as well as those who use it as a methodology in its own right. Many of the key tenets of both queer theory and affect theory, as discussed above in my Introduction, also run throughout affective research. While framing any particular research practice as being “affective research” is a contested move—since many would argue that *all* research is situated and driven by affects and/or emotions of the researcher—the methodologies I position here are ones that explicitly name or invoke affects, emotions, and/or experiential impulses that fall in line with contemporary scholarship in affect studies.

Queer Affect as Methodology

Building on the field of affect theory as discussed in the Introduction, the recent “affective turn” across the social sciences and humanities refers to a proliferation of scholarly focus on affect, the body, (pre-)linguistic constructions of experience, and (anti-)social processes of relation (Bersani and Phillips 2008; Clough and Halley 2007; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Taking the Deleuzian-Spinozist model of affectus, Anna Hickey-Moody (2013) describes affect as “a hunch” and “a visceral prompt” (79). Continuing, Hickey-Moody writes, “Affect is a starting place from which we can develop methods that have an awareness of the politics of aesthetics: methods that respond with sensitivity to aesthetic influences on human emotions and understand how they change bodily capacities” (ibid.). In order to explore these methodological possibilities, scholars within queer affect studies have increasingly turned to experimental methodologies that locate the personal within broader understandings of public and private relations. Jack Halberstam (2011) highlights ways that the “manifestos, range of political tactics, and new technologies of representation” offered by artist-scholars play a key role in resisting the demands of heteronormative, capitalist notions/markers of success (2). In arguing for a

disruption of disciplinary methodologies, Halberstam offers instead a critical embrace of *failure*, where failing signals falling outside of or in opposition to hegemonic systems of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and gendered exploitation. This shift, he argues, both challenges and re-contextualizes disciplinary boundaries and, I would add, turns critical queer methodology into a prime site for affective re-engagement.

Experimenting with different articulations of these ideas, many scholar-artists and theorist-practitioners have responded to restrictive, oppressive, and/or dissatisfying conditions of intimacy through practice-based methodologies of affect. For example, artist/curator/scholar Emily Roysdon (2010) develops a combination manifesto, call to action, set of strategies, and artistic practice through her proposal of *ecstatic resistance*. Roysdon frames ecstatic resistance as a strong “positionality of the impossible” (3) and as a response to increased frustration that necessitates reflection, creativity, and imagination. Guided by affect, Roysdon explores the urgent need to tell dissenting stories and suggests a methodological framework for inverting the vernacular of power and disrupting oppressive systems. My dissertation work flows from researchers like Roysdon, who are working within a framework of affect as methodology. This means highlighting circulations of affect, considering intimate possibilities, and marking potentials for resisting, restructuring, and/or re-visioning existing narratives. Critical queer uses of affect theory as method and methodology have offered potentials for melding emerging and experimental research formats with the more established disciplinary methods discussed above and the writing experiments discussed below.

Creative Nonfiction and Affective Vignettes

Creative nonfiction uses literary techniques to construct a narrative that is based in truth telling and factual events (Bloom 2003; Caulley 2008; Root, Steinberg and Huber 2011). These

might include written forms such as memoir, personal essays, and narrative scenes, which each draw attention to various collectivities while simultaneously accounting for the specifics of the personal. Staging personal narrative through affectively charged vignettes has the potential to bridge lived realities and embodiment with critical analyses of dominant intimacies and structural limitations. Within hybrid academic scholarship, Kathleen Stewart (2007) uses personal moments of affective resonance to collect an archive of “ordinary affects” that speak to the ways that queer, politicized possibility has been limited by dominant systems, particularly in public realms that have become increasingly overwhelmed by capitalism, militarization, and “urban sprawl.” Over the years, Stewart has developed a poetics of the everyday, which she has variously explored under the terms *weak theory* (2008), *poesis of the ordinary* (2008), *atmospheric attunements* (2011), *emergent forms* (2012), and *affect-inflicted ethnography* (2017). These techniques stem from anthropological approaches, but there are many resonances between Stewart’s experiments and feminist genealogies of queer autofiction (e.g., Feinberg 1993; Tamaki 2008; Tea 2000; Whittall 2007), Chicana literature (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987, 2015; Castillo 1994, 2016; Moraga 1983, 1997), and Black feminist thought (e.g., Davis 1981; hooks 1984, 1996; Collins 1990; Lorde 1980, 1983).

In addition to these robust bodies of literature, I draw inspiration from the work of a growing number of theorist-practitioners in queer cultural studies fields who have found creative ways to approach broader, shared experiences of widespread oppression and marginalization through individual moments. For example, employing poetry and creative nonfiction, Claudia Rankine (2014) embraces the affective heaviness of systemic racism and white supremacy through the poetic and devastating scenes in *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Ann Cvetokovich (2012) bridges the genres of memoir and self help writing in *Depression* to explore feelings of

stuckness, sadness, and depression as they take shape through socio-political stressors and the demands of the academy. Meanwhile, an ongoing collaborative project between Kathleen Stewart and Lauren Berlant called *The Hundreds* is an experiment in distilling the ordinary-ness of everyday events into affect-laden short and sometimes-conversational vignettes (Berlant 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014; Berlant and Stewart 2015; Stewart 2012).

My own writing style regularly combines mundane descriptors of events and experiences with vague and/or obscured references to those around me. As Kathleen Stewart (2007) writes, “moving forces are immanent in scenes, subjects, and encounters, or in blocked opportunities or the banality of built environments” (128). She situates ordinary affects as being a key component of critical scholarly thought, and she offers the narrative scene as a productive way into social, political, and affective examinations. She describes each scene as “a tangent that performs the sensation that something is happening—something that needs attending to” (*ibid.*, 5). It is this sensation and impulsive draw that guides one into further research.

As an intentional practice, my writing resists presentations of a whole or complete “truth” and always consciously walks the line between factual presentation and fictionalized vignette. The consequences of implicating friends, colleagues, and/or family in narrative accounts are not always predictable, nor can they necessarily be constrained, and so they raise ethical questions of how much identifying information to include or to remove about others in research-related writing. In this dissertation, I have chosen not to fully anonymize those I write about, though I have consciously used no names and have also offered others who are referenced in my work the opportunity to read and reflect upon accounts where they appear. Recognizing that “the essence and meaningfulness of the research story is more important than the precise recounting of detail” (Bochner 2002 and Tullis Owen et al. 2009, cited in Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, Sec. 31), I

see this non-static and variable style as one way of respecting the personal and private lives of my intimate others while also creating and reflecting upon the affective atmospheres of encounters with experiential knowledges.

[1.4]

Practice-Based Research

Alongside autoethnographic and affect-based methods, my proposed methodology draws perhaps most heavily on the growing field of practice-based research (PBR). Most frequently applied to either artistic or clinical practice (e.g., Candy 2006; Green 2008; Green and Hickner 2006; Leavy 2015), PBR offers applied research, experiential learning, and research-creation opportunities. For my research into affect and intimacy, I am particularly drawn to the possibilities of and for PBR as a grounded methodology that is process-led. PBR also centers lived experiences and positionalities of the researcher, which means that it resonates with the goals of other feminist and queer methodologies and encourages a critical engagement with questions of truth, objectivity/subjectivity, narrative voice, and representational practice. Due to the elusive and often immaterial nature of the affects circulating around my objects of analysis, PBR is particularly useful as methodological inspiration as it is a grounded practice where the research questions, processes, and outcomes are necessarily developed out of the demands of the research itself, and where the objects of analysis shift and adapt as the research unfolds.³

The interplay of personal, public, and collective realms in my writing requires a delicate balance. My own motivations, struggles, passions, and desires are catalysts and driving forces of the research, which means that, in some ways, the scenes I consider in this dissertation are highly

³ In this sense, PBR is also aligned with what Mel Chen has termed a “shifting archive” and a “feral” methodology. For more discussion of Chen’s use of these terms, see *Animacies* (2012, 18-19).

personal and firmly rooted in individual experience. However, rather than turn to more systematic accounts of my experiences through autoethnography, which would more explicitly trace the details of my movement through these worlds through an anthropological lens, this work instead takes up a method in line with what Irit Rogoff (2006) terms *practice driven theory*, and what others have further developed under the term *practice-based research*. According to Rogoff, practice driven theory is highly embodied, often emerges from the personal, and is composed of knowledge unfolding through its own urgencies, needs, and drives. Rogoff (2006) explains that practice driven theory is useful “not because it is self-consciously informed, but because it gives itself a different set of permissions” for how to engage non-standard knowledges and ways of being in the world (n.p.). The permissions referenced by Rogoff include “permission to not cover all the bases all the time, permission to start in the middle, permission to mix fact and fiction, permission to invent languages, permission to not support every claim by the proof of some prior knowledge, permission to privilege subjectivity as a mode of engaging the world and its woes, permission to be obscure and permission to chart a completely different path of how we got here, at this very moment” (ibid.). These permissions enhance self-reflexivity and engagement, and they offer me the flexibility required for my affective interrogations while allowing this type of dissertation project to flourish.

Drawing on similar goals and motivations to Rogoff, Brad Haseman (2006) presents a model of *performative research*. He understands performative research to be “aligned with many of the values of qualitative research, but [as] nonetheless distinct from it” (5). Instead, he views performative research as an alternative to existing quantitative and qualitative paradigms, and he explains how it can be especially useful for those working in areas like the arts, media, and design. Performative research, as a form of practice-led research, insists on “different approaches

to designing, conducting, and reporting research” and, according to Haseman, can more effectively address the methodological needs of non-traditional research projects (1). This means that performative research encourages findings to be presented in forms other than in the linear form of academic discursive text—for example, presentational forms like stage performance, art-creation, cultural interventions, creative writing, and I argue, enacted and embodied moments of interpersonal relation and ways of being in the world.⁴

Barbara Bolt (2008) responds to Haseman’s assertions and pushes the performative aspects of his model further. She writes, “before we make claims for a performative model for the creative arts, [...] we need to define its concepts, methodologies and interpretive methods and assess whether a performative paradigm really can hold its own within the broader field of research” (Bolt 2008, n.p.). Bolt returns to speech act theorist J. L. Austin’s early framings of performative utterances to challenge the singular interpretation that prevails within many areas of art, such as dance, sculpture, painting, and photography. She inquires, “Can we make the assumption that just because a practice brings into being what it names (say a performance or photograph) that it is performative?” (ibid.).

Citing the popularly distilled and uncritical use of “performativity” in film theory and among visual artists, Bolt offers a reminder that Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity, as an iterative and citational practice, very clearly requires *repetition* of the utterance that calls a thing into being. Still, Bolt writes, there is room to accept performative models of research; after all, “artists” only come into being through the repetition of their art practice, and art creation and

⁴ In addition to the written components of this dissertation, I have experimented with other forms and formats of research output. The only one that has made it into the final dissertation is the digital/photo compilation *My Animal Family Tree* (2016), which is included in Chapter Four. The process of researching and creating this artistic digital piece aided in both my affective and theoretical engagements with the written chapter, but it comprises only one instance of the alternative format outputs I have experimented with.

cultural interventions join larger collections and histories of work as they are produced as well. Following a similar logic of repetitive process, my proposal for PBAR includes an ongoing practice of speaking, (re)thinking, and enacting intimate possibilities in a sustained engagement with non-normative modes of relation. This intimate performativity may bring more diversity to what kinds of relations are understood to be “intimate” and may expand the bounds of intimate knowledge within the cultural imaginary.

Practice-based research, as both a method and a methodology, values nonlinear and supposedly messy forms of research that challenge sequential and logic-based ideas of traditional scientific discourse; this mirrors the “slipperiness” of the affective and intimate bonds that comprise the case studies of my dissertation. In this sense, PBR is a nice complement to methodologies of queer affect, which centre embodied sensations and sometimes-illogical connections. Practice-based research, as a sort of “third space” of research (alongside qualitative and quantitative methods, as per Haseman’s formulation), gives my own work permission to move outside of the space of traditional scholarly formats and explore different ways of engaging research material in addition to more traditional written presentations of academic scholarship.

According to Rogoff (2006), the benefits of practice-based approaches lie in their potential for re-articulating “the questions we [already] know how to ask” so that we may be guided towards different kinds of answers—ones that may be unexpected and/or ones that may have otherwise remained inaccessible or been deemed “impossible” because of the limited and limiting framings previously employed (n.p.). This call to expanding possibilities speaks, once again, to my broader project as one that is reparative, and it contributes to my own attempts to develop grammars of possibility for alternate modes of relation and different ways of being in intimate relation with one another.

[1.5]

Practice-Based Affective Research

As I have elucidated above, my methodology seeks to disrupt disciplinary traditions and challenge the linearity of outcome-based focuses while following embodied and experiential knowledges of the researcher. What I am proposing under the term practice-based affective research, then, bridges components of feminist textual and visual analysis (e.g., asking different questions from the get go), autoethnography (e.g., starting from the self to develop a politicized analysis), performative and practice-based research (e.g., developing the texts and analysis through the process of conducting research), and queer affect as methodology (e.g., following the ebb and flow of the researcher's own affective responses). In this sense, no singular component of PBAR is entirely untested, yet the constellation of methodologies I have intertwined has not quite been articulated together before in this manner. I am hopeful that shifting the interpretive lens will help to produce novel approaches that push for the reformulation of intimate knowledge within studies of affect.

In addition to being a reparative mode of inquiry, PBAR conscientiously moves away from identity categories and towards affective connections, energetic movement and exchange, and experiential realms. As discussed above, my research has been inspired by a series of hunches rather than by a pre-mapped research plan. Perhaps understandably, this investigative approach has not provided a clear pathway forward, since it lacks a systematic and clearly articulated step-by-step research guide. Taking on a project that demands an open and direct engagement with affective states of the researcher has presented its own difficulties, and I have found that it is not for the faint of heart. Returning bouts of depression, flares of chronic body pain, relationship fluxes, housing instabilities, precarious finances, and the failing or fatal health of others who are

close to me have all made this project feel, at times, impossible. In this regard, my work relies a lot on vulnerability and exposure, on risk and receptivity; much like affect, and much like intimacy itself. In this sense, my methodology is thus attempting to mimic, or at least account for, the elusive and sometimes ephemeral nature of affect and intimate exchange. Much like in the aforementioned practice-based or performative methodologies, my theorizing has been happening alongside my own affective and intimate experiences in real time, which means that sometimes my analyses have been rudimentary and steeped in affective immediacy.

In pulling together elements of queer affect as methodology, practice-based research, autoethnography, discourse analysis, personal narrative, and creative nonfiction, this project is a necessarily queer, critical, political, analytical, and self-reflexive process. Affective processes are always going to be subjective, disputable, cluttered, and irreproducible—if they are also honest. They will often be disordered, fleeting, clunky, and perhaps even unconvincing to some readers. These realities make it very difficult to satisfy the demands of the University, to procure funding or other forms of institutional support, and to stick to the normatively anticipated timelines of research and writing. Affect is not easily deliverable, and the neoliberal University is increasingly and persistently all about deliverables. These contradictory aims have prompted a series of related methodological questions: How does one go about representing that which resists traditional forms of scholarly representation and still remain relevant in the academy? And how does one go about representing that which cannot be spoken, cannot be concretized? In my dissertation work, I have found a partial answer to these questions through a mix of creative writing, artistic practice, and queer methods, and am continuing to develop it through practice-based affective research.

Queer and feminist methodologies are often about processes of questioning as much as

they are about end goals and teleological answers. Similarly, affect-based research is as much about following marginalized and subjugated knowledges (of the body, of energetic flows, of non-scientifically-proven truths) as it is about the outcomes of the work. Reparative methods certainly do not preclude *also* being critical (Sedgwick 2003; Berlant 2011), cranky (Duggan and Muñoz 2009), depressed (Cvetkovich 2012), unhappy (Ahmed 2010; Litvak 2011; Love 2009), and/or willful (Ahmed 2014), all of which I have inhabited myself at times as part of my research and as part of my everyday life. According to Sedgwick, critical reparative approaches must exist *alongside* the paranoid.⁵ These reparative moves are nice complements to process-led research, to practice-based research, and to affective and experiential knowledges, and they are thus particularly well suited to my project of developing practice-based affective research. In Chapter Two I begin to model/enact PBAR as I trace my own relationship to feminist porn communities and situate my experiences within broader conversations around porn, sex work, representation, and art creation.

⁵ For further discussion of the ways in which Sedgwick's concepts of paranoid and reparative reading practices have been a key influence in queer theory, see Robyn Wiegman's essays "The Times We're In: Queer Feminist Criticism and The Reparative Turn" (2014) and "Eve's Triangles, Or Queer Studies Beside Itself" (2015).

CHAPTER TWO.

THE AMBIVALENT INTIMACIES OF FEMINIST PORN.

[2.1]

Feminism + Porn

The first time I walked into the Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs),⁶ the energy in the room was palpable. Toronto’s Gladstone Hotel was alive with a buzzing sensation that was infectious, and the air was heavy with sweat and laughter. That first year was a modest undertaking, a single night of discussion and screenings called “Vixens+Visionaries: Female Erotic Directors Revolutionizing Porn.” The panelists shared their experiences of performing in and producing more woman-friendly porn, more conscientious porn, and less oppressively stereotypical porn. The first awards were called the “Emmas,” named for pro-sex radical feminist Emma Goldman (FeministPornAwards.com, “How Did It All Start?”). The crowd was packed so tightly into the

⁶ In early 2017, the Feminist Porn Awards announced that they were changing their name to the Toronto International Porn Festival. Though they hold the same values, goals, and spirit as they have in the past, the awards/festival organizers have recognized that, over the years, the FPAs have shifted into a different kind of event that is better reflected by their new name. This chapter was first drafted in 2012, and the bulk of revisions were done prior to the 2017 Festival season. Because I am mainly focusing on events that occurred 2011–2015, I have chosen to maintain the acronym “FPAs” as a reflection of the time period being considered.

Gladstone's Ballroom it was hard not to push up against one another as we strained to listen above the chatter of other event-goers. I stood near the back of the room, pressed between an almost-ex-lover and a soon-to-be-new-lover. I caught only every second word of the conversation, yet I could tell I was witnessing a watershed moment in the city's sex-positive feminism.

Though I attended the FPAs each year after that first night in 2006, the Awards remained the bulk of my engagement with feminist porn. Years later, when I performed in my first porn scene, I still had no real idea what I was stepping into or the robust histories I was aligning myself with. I had been modeling in nude and erotic shoots for years, mostly for my partner at the time, feminist photographer N. Maxwell Lander, but I had not considered performing in video work until Max and his co-director, Beau Charlie, decided to shoot, edit, and submit something to the 2011 FPAs—all within a week's turnaround time. A small group of friends banded together in immediate support of the project, and though we weren't initially sure who would be performing with whom or what we were going to film, I ended up performing with Max's best friend Billy.

In a move echoing the urgency of feminist DIY creation,⁷ Max did a self-directed crash course in video editing, found some creative commons music to pull for the soundtrack, and five days later the short, *Maybe He's Gifted* (2011), screened at the Gladstone Hotel opening night party and went on to win a Feminist Porn Award for best emerging Canadian content (i.e., the "Golden Beaver" award). This is the kind of consensual fast forwarding that can perhaps only

⁷ An extended engagement with DIY feminist politics and activist creation is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For more discussion, see Lisa Darms' *The Riot Grrrl Collection* (2013), Yasmin B. Keffai and Kylie A. Pepler's "Youth, Technology, and DIY: Developing Participatory Competencies in Creative Media Production" (2011), and Allyson Mitchell's "The Writing's on the Wall: Feminist and Lesbian Graffiti as Cultural Production" (2001).

happen with a foundation of years-long friendship and artistic collaboration—as well as with access to newer forms of digital technology that can be picked up and learned quickly—but regardless, it exemplifies the excitement we felt in creating a project we had deemed worthy of our minds, bodies, and political affiliations.

It was only after *Maybe He's Gifted* made its debut and after I had become closer with several of the key players in the FPA scene at the time that I felt compelled to step further into the study of pornography and to think through its fraught relationships within feminist histories. I knew that the uneasy exchanges between feminism and pornography have always been fueled by intense affects and heated debate, but the intricacies had remained at arm's length for me. My own queer coming of age brought me into a feminism that declared itself to be sex-positive and gender transgressive, but it was not so long ago that *feminism* and *pornography* were seen to be altogether incommensurable. The Sex Wars of the 1970s, '80s and '90s popularized the view that all things pornographic were and are inherently “women's issues,” and the frontrunners of anti-porn feminism—i.e., the cohort of Andrea Dworkins, Catharine MacKinnons, and, more recently, of Sheila Jeffreys and Gail Dines—vocally publicized the far-reaching evils of porn.⁸ While grounded in real and material conditions of systemic oppression and experiences of coercion, dialogues that focus solely on violence, desperation, and rape in the industry ignore all other types of interactions encountered by those performing in porn. Yet the force of this impassioned opposition has propagated the idea that all porn is necessarily and unequivocally anti-feminist and anti-woman.

⁸ See, for example, Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1982), Catharine MacKinnon's *Feminism Unmodified* (1987), Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin's *The Reasons Why: Essays On The New Civil Rights Law Recognizing Pornography As Sex Discrimination* (1985), Sheila Jeffreys' *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade* (2008), and Gail Dines' *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (2010).

Porn studies and affect scholar Susanna Paasonen (2014) argues that a range of feminist responses to pornography have been reduced to simplistic renderings of complex affective reactions. On the one hand, anti-porn feminists summon fear, anger, and anxiety about porn, while on the other, pro-porn feminists often rely on excitement, pleasure, joy, and delight. Despite the messaging of dualistic “pro-” vs. “anti-” porn debates,⁹ these affective resonances are not simplistically nor neatly contained, and they often leak across political beliefs and lines of affiliation. Despite their political allegiances, many performers, producers, and consumers feel a deep ambivalence about the roles and impacts of porn. According to Paasonen, the visceral ambivalence that people experience in relation to porn breeds a tension that keeps the coherence of the category of “pornography” productively in flux. Porn scenes create various intimate and affective circuits that extend from the interactions on film sets—e.g., through the relations between producers, performers, cinematographers, directors, and other crewmembers—outward to include the experiences of future viewers/consumers. The circuits of desire, passion, performance, and labour are as impossible to contain as the political complications referenced above.

Paasonen (2014) astutely explores these embodied elements through the concept of *carnal resonance*, writing,

The carnal resonance [...] of porn involves the viewers’ ability to recognize and somehow sense the intensities, rhythms and motions depicted in porn in their own bodies. Such resonance may involve unpleasant dissonance as well as reverberations of altering intensity that range from sharp jolts to the barely noticeable: the issue is one of visceral contact that can harbour a range of affective responses. Affect, then, points to uncontrollability in our encounters with porn—to a rupture between gut reaction and the fantasy of self-control, as

⁹ Even as I attempt to resist binaries in my work, I continue to engage this dualism in some of my writing below for ease of reference to other texts that engage these terms. I would, however, like to note that I recognize the messiness and “leaky” quality of the affective realms associated with porn and feminist ideals.

well as to the capacity of images, words and sounds (138).

She explains that such embodied responses towards porn disrupt coherent notions of *self* and *other* and have the potential to “move those looking, listening and reading beyond ideological affects that the genre is seen to hold” (ibid.). In other words, the visceral quality of pornographic encounters makes it impossible to discuss porn solely within the realm of logic and detached objectivity; at the same time, it is that viscosity that allows us to move into both affective and material realities. Following Paasonen’s insights into the relationship between affect and porn, this chapter takes up the affects and intimacies that circulate at the intersections of feminism, representational practices, and pornography. Rather than concentrating on in-depth analyses of porn texts themselves, this chapter reflects on the affiliations and tensions that arise within communities that are shaped through and around the unstable category of feminist porn. In the following sections, I trace a brief history of state intervention into sexual regulation before returning to a discussion of the goals, successes, and failures of the FPAs as well as to my own intimate experiences of engaging with feminist porn.

Sex and the State

In spite of Pierre Trudeau’s 1967 proclamation that “there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation” (CBC 1967), the Canadian state has continued to be intimately entangled with the sexual regulation of its citizens. These regulations have not only targeted the private sexual acts of national subjects, but they have also fused together the realms of the private and public through codes of morality and social mores. Even within the last quarter century, we have seen the impacts of moralistic debates on the definitions of obscenity, protective measures, and potential harm. In 1992, for example, the Supreme Court of Canada levelled its decision in *Butler v. Her Majesty the Queen*, the case that shifted Canada’s legal

definition of *obscenity* from one based on imprecise references to “community standards” to one based on a supposedly more objective notion of “harm done to women” (Walsh 1994). As a purportedly progressive decision, the ruling was largely taken up as a win for women everywhere; however, not everyone was in agreement. Pro-porn feminists reasoned that the decision inscribed a coded hierarchy in the perception of harm that encouraged stronger reaction to porn and sexually explicit images than to other kinds of harmful representations that might involve, for instance, images of gendered violence and abuse.

Legal scholar Kelli Walsh (1994) writes plainly that “the feminist obscenity standard developed by the *Butler* Court is ineffective because it fails to protect women from the harm that the Court perceived to be caused by pornography while creating a new type of harm: censorship of art and literature” (1022). In many realms, it is true that historically and pervasively oppressive conditions in sex industries persist, and widespread misogyny, racism, and labour exploitation have been significant factors in the experiences of some porn performers and consumers (Nguyen 2004; Shimizu 2013; Smith and Luykx 2017; Williams 2004). All too often though, it is not the oppressive and restricting labour conditions of porn that are targeted but rather the sex industry as a whole. Pro-porn advocate Persimmon Blackbridge of the performance group Kiss and Tell (1994) elaborates on the impacts of the law, writing, “the way the law is currently written, brutal images of sexualized violence against women are acceptable if there’s no nudity or actual sexual contact, whereas if their clothes are off, all it takes is the slightest implication of violence for it to run up against *Butler*” (79).

The hypocritical foundations of this legal ruling encouraged anti-porn, so-called radical, feminists to align themselves with the most right wing of politicians and with the most socially conservative of citizens. Blackbridge continues her analysis, suggesting, “it seems like the reason

[the majority decision] passed with such ease is because it *was* and *is* easily co-opted into a right-wing anti-sex, anti-gay, and anti-feminist agenda” (Kiss and Tell 1994, 77). Much like the workings of contemporary gay liberalisms and homonationalist rhetoric, anti-porn feminists have been repeatedly hailed into the state to propagate normative ideas of sexual citizenship, and for the most part, they have willingly obliged. By and large, anti-porn stances take exploitation and shame for granted as pre-conditions of participating in sexual labour, and they often rely on harnessing the bounded affects of either disgust and shame against the sex industry and/or a supposed benevolence toward performers in order to change the hearts and minds of the general populous (Brest and Vanderberg 1987; Ciclitira 2004; Duggan and Hunter 2006). This strategy, however, has been ineffective for creating real improvements in the lives of vulnerable workers, and in the end it serves only to make those working in porn industries less safe in their increasingly-precarious employment, while those working in and on behalf of the state are awarded more job security and increased cultural capital.

These forms of sexual regulation often have as much to do with preserving suitable appearances of intimacy, relationship structures, and affective engagements as they do with sex itself. State regulations of sex work—as seen, for example, through Canada’s recent Bill C-36 regarding public visibilities of prostitution, or through California’s Measure B (Los Angeles) and the *California Safer Sex in the Adult Film Industry Act* (state-wide), which each mandate condom use on porn sets regardless of other precautionary measures taken—support a rhetoric of progressive sexual politics, modernity, and “civilized” sexualities in Canada and the United States, respectively. These patriotic self-narrations occur *in the name of* sexual labourers, yet they most frequently exist at the expense of the lives and economic wellbeing of sex workers themselves. These types of time-honoured contradictory directives have been cornerstones of

Western nation-states.

In their influential essay “Sex in Public,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998) draw out the deeply imbedded connections between narratives of sexuality and narratives of citizenship. They articulate a tension that exists in the social construction of the ideal neoliberal subject-citizen: the “proper” and “acceptable” citizen is expected to keep sex acts (especially so-called non-normative ones) contained within private spheres, yet one’s recognition as a full citizen also requires public visibility and certain forms of active participation in public domains. The authors argue that feelings of relation such as intimacy—both as an affective attachment and as a cultural construction—are increasingly narrated as private connections and are linked to privatized sex, coupledness, and family, while they are also distanced from work and (normative) public engagement. Prevailing ideas of citizenship, therefore, both demand and remain dependent on engagements with the state that are necessarily and exclusively normative, and ones that are therefore largely desexualized as well. These parameters of citizenship echo contemporary homonationalist projects, which rest on the promise that those who adhere to the normative values of sex and sexual practice will eventually be granted state acceptance and support, whereas those who cannot or will not adhere are denied the same endorsements (see Puar 2007).

In his approach to these issues, sociologist Ken Plummer (2003) favours the language of *intimate citizenship*. Plummer argues that intimate citizenship transcends categories of gender and sexuality to include instead the rights and duties involved in the intimate spheres of life—including who one should live with, how to handle one’s body, how to raise one’s children, how to interact as a gendered body, and, finally, how to be an erotic person. He claims that the notion of intimate citizenship recognizes deeply pluralized public worlds and encourages an

acknowledgment of overlapping and complicated relationships between all aspects of the intimate spheres. As Berlant (2000) explains, normative ideologies of intimacy create world orderings that establish a particular hierarchy of affects, delineating which are expressible while maintaining cultural citizenship in North American and which are inexpressible or costly.

The Shift to Feminist Porn

Queer and feminist responses to these types of intimate regulations have often targeted normative constructions by challenging the messages that are encoded in familiar media formats and embracing the means of socio-cultural production. Most relevant to my work in this chapter are those who have created pro-porn, pro-feminist cultural production through the realm of sexually explicit representation. Since the early 1970s, conversations around women's engagement with porn have become increasingly nuanced, and, more recently, critical deliberations on the roles and representations of trans people, racialized people, and people with disabilities in porn have flourished as well. These have been happening both in communities formed through feminist porn and, to a lesser extent, those formed through porn consumers at large. Influential feminist sex workers such as Annie Sprinkle, Candida Royalle, Susie Bright, and Nina Hartley have continued to reiterate their views, time and time again, that neither viewing pornography nor performing in it is inherently bad for women, men, or anyone else; rather, it is the intersecting conditions both inside and outside of the industry that set the tone for how one experiences it (Bright 2011; Comella 2010; Royalle 2005; Sprinkle 1998).

More recent years have seen an increase in publications that feature thorough and thoughtful contributions from current and former sex workers that bring analyses of labour conditions for marginalized performers—particularly for racialized performers, trans performers, and performers with disabilities—to the fore (Lee 2015; Ray 2014; Taormino et al. 2013). The

performers and performer-producers featured in these anthologies have articulated a politics of sexual labour through experiential knowledges, advocating for ways to address gendered, racialized, and sexualized dynamics, even despite mainstream resistance to treating sex work as labour (Lee and Sullivan 2016; Webber 2015).

These interventions have caused mainstream discourse to more seriously consider the possibilities of incorporating feminist politics into porn production. Sitting in dialogue with alternative porn genres that include woman-positive porn, alt-porn, indie porn, and queer porn, *feminist porn* is a term that has been taken up to describe a loose assemblage of pornography and explicit imagery that interrupts dominant, exploitative production standards. These interruptions might come in the form of representing alternate kinds of performers, desires, and/or intimacies. At its best, feminist porn refigures modes of intimate relation by refusing normative standards for off-screen sex (e.g., that its labour goes unrecognized, that it be un-monetized) *and* by refusing normative standards for dominant, mainstream—i.e., patriarchal¹⁰—porn (e.g., that male viewers be centered, that women be objectified, and that the process of production be erased or glossed over).

Accordingly, the shift to feminist porn production is marked by two key, concomitant aims: (1) to address the (mis)representation of women and marginalized people in pornographic media, and (2) to address the sometimes harmful and oppressive labour conditions on the production side of porn. In relation to the first of these two aims, early iterations of feminist porn often placed it within a logic of *authenticity*; through the efforts of early pin up sites like Suicide

¹⁰ In this chapter, I am strategically invoking a dichotomy of “feminist” versus “patriarchal” porn. Though I recognize there is far more overlap than these two terms allow, I am inspired by the work of Wilma J. Henry (2010), who writes on hip hop feminism and strategically uses the term *patriarchal hip hop* to describe “mainstream hip-hop, which liberally uses racist and sexist messages” (141). In a similar vein, I am strategically using the term *patriarchal porn* to describe mainstream productions that liberally use racist, sexist, ableist, and transphobic tropes.

Girls and NoFauxxx, representing authentic scenarios, authentic bodies, and authentic orgasms became emblematic qualities of feminist porn.¹¹ This emphasis on authenticity has since been disputed and nuanced, with feminist porn makers foregrounding the development of ethical production standards (e.g., Scott 2016; Stryker 2015; Taormino 2013), critiquing the demand for authenticity (e.g., Ashley 2016; Raphael, cited in Ms. Naughty 2015), and finding other ways of preventing static or stable notions of what feminist intervention does or could look like. Where once accessing the means of production was prohibitive, new production technologies like digital cameras, more user-friendly editing software, and virtual platforms like websites, blogs, and video hosting sites have made it easier for feminists, queers, and low-income folks to produce and distribute erotic content of their own. One consequence of this technological shift is that the question of what constitutes “authentic” representation has become more complicated.¹² Still, the notion of authenticity continues to haunt narratives surrounding feminist porn.

In relation to the second aim of feminist porn production, pro-porn feminists have long issued counter-calls to take aim at the broader hierarchies of regulation and oppression that inform and impact the sex industry while recognizing that the systemic issues cannot be pinpointed to porn production alone. Ethical production practices have been developed as a political response to negotiating various complexities within late capitalism. Influential porn producer Tristan Taormino has spearheaded the move towards “ethical porn” as a feminist priority, and the parameters of such an approach are further articulated in the introduction to *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (Taormino et al. 2013). For Taormino, acknowledging and interacting with porn performers as skilled labourers is central to any ethical

¹¹ For more on the role of authenticity in early pin up sites, see Attwood (2007), discussed further below.

¹² The impacts of technology on porn, intimacy, authenticity, and representation are discussed further below.

production practice.¹³ This is one of the foundational values in her version of ethical porn production (which she likens to a type of “organic, fair-trade” porn), where production sets are stocked with everything from performers’ preference of toys and safer-sex products to nutritious snacks and other items that make working conditions as intentional and comfortable as possible. For Taormino, this is one way of recognizing that porn performers work physically demanding jobs that can and should be approached with the same progressive politics as other labour and employment practices.

Internal challenges from feminist porn makers are certainly not new, but they have become increasingly nuanced over the years and include targeting the existing assumptions about what it means for a representation to be labeled “feminist,” “pornographic,” “anti-oppressive,” “artistic,” and/or a variety of other politicized categories as well. Although there is no universally accepted set of criteria for what makes a piece feminist *enough*, pornographic *enough*, or disruptive *enough* to be included in the category, feminist porn generally begins from a process-centred belief that eliminating porn and the sex industry is both an impossible and misguided goal; instead, feminist porn as a genre or as a collection of works is aligned with the belief that these industries should actively support and value both the work and identities of performers.

In this chapter, I begin the case studies of my dissertation by tracing these issues through a localized context that is most familiar to me: the Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs) in Toronto, Canada. Whereas other case studies in this dissertation may circle around sex without necessarily

¹³ Tristan Taormino has a long history of working in feminist porn, and she has been a great influencer in feminist porn communities. She started her sex education career in educational porn performance (Taormino 1999, 2000) and moved to the role of producer/director in the late 1990s, producing through both independent and mainstream production companies. She has been honoured by the Feminist Porn Awards since its inaugural year, when she won the “Smutty Schoolteacher Award for Sex Education” and spoke on panels about feminism and pornography. In 2014, she became a founder of the Feminist Porn Conference.

taking it up directly, this first site is one that deals with sex and sexually explicit imagery head on, contemplating the collision of intimacy with sexual representation as I take up the affective and intimate affiliations that circulate around the FPAs. Histories of porn censorship, the regulation of sex work, sexual citizenship, and intimate citizenship all remain connected to but distinct from those in the U.S., Europe, Australia, and around the world. Local conversations continue to be heavily informed by, and organized around, the FPAs and their associated events. Taking my cue from the multi-layered debates that both infuse and are infused by the FPAs, this chapter explores spaces of possibility that are opened up when we adopt a starting point that no longer treats *feminism* and *porn* as mutually exclusive categories, but rather treats them as complex assemblages of mutually constitutive value and meaning.

In my writing, I have chosen to refrain from conducting an ethnographic study of the FPAs overall, favouring instead my personal experiences of performing in porn as a way into and as a connection to the world of feminist porn production. My work here joins a growing response in academic scholarship and contributes to a body of knowledge that critically reconsiders and reconstructs the foundational terms of porn while taking up the difficult ambivalences and contradictions of celebrating a genre of representation that remains part of an industry that has historically been (and continues to be) oppressive and damaging for so many. Central to my discussion are the ways that community affiliations can mediate, (re)produce, and disrupt broader sociopolitical structures of intimate belonging. The FPAs are one context where some of these complex realities are made visible. Grounded in discussions, then, of the growing body of work taken up under the rubric of *feminist porn* and through considerations of the affects and intimacies that circulate around Toronto's FPAs, the remainder of this chapter considers the affective dimensions of intimacy, sexuality, and citizenship as/where they collide with sex work

and sexual representation, new technologies, digital media, and shifting political landscapes.

[2.2]

The Feminist Porn Awards

Started in 2006 in Toronto, Canada, the Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs) boasted an explicitly sex-positive approach in their celebration of pornography and challenged the often-problematic depictions of sex, sexuality, eroticism, and desire in mainstream productions. Over the course of their ten-year run, the FPAs were transformed from a one-day celebration and awareness-raising night into a relatively large-scale annual production. Developed simultaneously as a dissenting political space and as a fundraiser for Toronto's independently run feminist sex shop Good For Her (GoodForHer.com), the Awards expanded over the years to encompass a series of event nights, panel discussions, featured speakers, and porn screenings. As an annual undertaking, the FPAs sought to offer complex, multifaceted representations of women and other marginalized people and continued to revisit their criteria and organizing logics over the years. Initially conceived as a way to "recognize erotic filmmakers who are creating hot, sexy, woman-positive porn," the awards grew steadily to highlight a broad diversity of "ethical, feminist smut" (FeministPornAwards.com, n.p.). The ongoing impacts of the FPAs' 2017 re-launch as a porn "festival" are still unknown, but it is clear that the first ten years of the FPAs accomplished complex practical, discursive, and educational work through their celebratory, far-reaching, and ultimately contentious series of events.

Each Awards season, a jury comprising members of the FPA organizing committee and people invited from the community would award films, performers, producers, and websites with achievements ranging from "Sexiest Short" and "Most Deliciously Diverse Cast" to the "Smutty Schoolteacher Award for Sex Education" and "Heartthrob of the Year." The FPAs have always

been a fan-based event rather than one that targets industry members, though plenty of industry people have participated in various roles (Gallant 2017). A combination of playful humour and astute intellectualism, the Awards and the works they feature have offered alternatives to widely proliferated (mis)conceptions of those working in porn industries and have presented opportunities to shift engagements with visual representations of sex and desire. Much like feminist porn more broadly, the specific realities of the FPAs are far from utopian, and I remain appropriately critical of them and the work that has been both featured in and omitted from their programming. I also remain acutely aware of their capitalist-fundraising imperatives and of their contributions to the complex web of sexual-affective caveats on citizenship and inclusion. With that said, I persist in my support of the feminist grassroots politics of Good For Her and of other, increasingly rare, feminist sex stores across North America.

Creating the Awards

In an article published to the *Huffington Post*, Chanelle Gallant, then store manager of Good For Her, explains that the pervasive racism, marginalization, and disempowerment found within many mainstream porn productions were major driving forces behind the creation of the FPAs (Gallant 2017). Gallant, along with store owner Carlyle Jansen and the store's "resident porn expert" Lorraine Hewitt, wanted to recognize people who have chosen to make porn differently and find ways to publicly support their work (ibid.). In the official origin story posted to their website, Good For Her explains that "despite [their] efforts to look everywhere for something different, the same stereotypes arose over and over again and most of [their] customers did not see themselves reflected in the films that [they] were able to source" (FeministPornAwards.com, "How Did It All Start?").

The website continues to explain that organizers took advantage of increased diversity in

porn production due to greater access to film technologies in the early 2000s, and they organized the FPAs in order to acknowledge, support, and celebrate all of the “people of colour, trans folks, queers and lesbians in particular directing films that featured their communities without being fetishized and with respect” (ibid.). Gallant adds, “What the FPAs announced is that women are consumers in the sex industry too and that our sexual desires and fantasies deserve so much more than the largely crappy, racist, male-dominated images being produced” (Gallant 2017, n.p.).

Gallant’s statement recognizes that mainstream productions systematically relegate marginalized performers to exceptional spaces of representation. Marginalized bodies are, more often than not, placed within the realm of fetish or exoticized “niche markets” and are devalued accordingly (Erickson 2007; Love 2013; Smith and Luykx 2017). The bodies and interactions of performers, as well as the types of sexual acts performed, are generally distinguished through simplified taxonomies used in the categorization of porn scenes on DVDs and online, with race, size, and gender sitting among the most commonly demarcated if and when they deviate from white, small, curvy, cisgender (i.e., non-transgender), heterosexual, and female.¹⁴ Often, the further away from this mainstream ideal performers are, the more limited their performance opportunities become.

By celebrating feminist porn and raising the profile of issues at the heart of the Sex Wars, the FPAs have been an important disruption of mainstream pornography’s stereotypical and marginalizing representations. Though they have necessarily run counter to the affective ambivalence discussed above through their overt goals of festivity and celebration, and though there have always been many producers and performers in attendance who work simultaneously

¹⁴ For a thoughtful discussion of some perils and pitfalls involved in cataloguing pornographic content in an institutional library setting, see Lisa Sloniowski, “This Is Not a Love Story: Libraries and Feminist Porn” (2012).

in mainstream and alternative realms, the FPAs remain a critical point of intervention in the history of sex-positive organizing in Canada. These interventions are what I was sensing that night in 2006 when I could not articulate the specificities of *how* “Visionaries+Vixens” was altering the course of sex-positive organizing but I could still *feel* it—that inarticulable *something*—happening in the room. As Kathleen Stewart (2007) writes, these kinds of humming, buzzing atmospheres might be articulated as *ordinary affects*—experiences of the “varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion” (1-2). For Stewart, ordinary affects build intimate worlds “in modes of attention, attachment, and agency,” and “in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*” (2).

Loree Erickson, a self-identified “queer femmegimp pornstar academic” and winner of “Sexiest Short” at the FPAs in 2008 for her film *Want*, has long been discussing the role of affect in sexual representation. In particular, she looks at the function of shame in restricting the sexual expression of people with disabilities and argues, “one of the main effects of shame is to keep us isolated and separate from our bodies/selves, and from each other” (2007, 43). Erickson positions her own video work as an interruption into widely circulated ideas about people with disabilities being “unsexy” and as necessarily incapable of sexual desire or agency. She goes on to explain how “this isolation and separation from others and ourselves keeps us from unlearning the current body politic and discovering new ways of being in the world” (ibid.). Erickson discusses the necessity of shifting the existing record and of creating narratives that position normatively undesirable bodies as both desirable and actively desiring.

These types of dissenting representations are especially important given the deeply Eurocentric nature of the bulk of mainstream porn (Cante and Restivo 2004). All too often,

marginalized bodies are considered to be inherently disruptive (Erickson 2010); therefore, presenting active desires, intimate moments, and sexual engagements between people of colour, Indigenous people, and otherwise “transgressive” bodies is a radically important political project. In (re)claiming the power of production and representation, people who have had little control over how they have been represented in sexual media are able to shift their relationship to shame, desire, and sexuality (Erickson 2007). Other filmmakers at FPA events have spoken out about the importance of this kind of representational jurisdiction as well.

Director Nenna, winner of “Most Deliciously Diverse Cast” in 2011 for *Tight Places: A Drop of Colour* and winner of “Hottest Dyke Film” in 2012 for *Hella Brown: Real Sex in the City*, emphasizes that productions featuring casts comprised mostly or entirely of Black people and people of colour, as well as those produced and/or directed by people of colour, are still far too difficult to find (HotMoviesForHer.com 2012). Similarly, Tobi Hill-Meyer, winner of the “Emerging Filmmaker Award” in 2010, discusses problems of representation for trans women in sexually explicit film, noting that a vast number of films and scenes that feature trans women and people of colour continue to be created by cisgender and white producers (QueerPornTV 2011). Although cisgender and white people working with trans and racialized performers may still work to diversify existing representations, both Nenna and Hill-Meyer stress the importance of placing the bulk of the power of such representations in the hands of those who have been marginalized under pervasive and systemic oppressions.

Although the work of the FPAs is certainly not exhaustive nor all encompassing, and though it has always and importantly been contested, I understand the work of the FPAs as functioning on multiple levels—interpersonal, local, interlocal, and international—both to productively engage cultural visibility by providing a public platform and to create distance from

neoliberalism's preference for individualizing models of personal success by creating community support and intimate alliances. In so doing, the FPAs have funneled energy toward new and fluctuating creativities and community constructions, and they have facilitated personal and political collaboration, artistic exchange, and community-building projects. This is in part due to the physical space the Awards created and in part due to the conceptual boundaries of belonging and exclusion into the category of "feminist" set out by the organizers.

Representing Feminist Sexualities

According to their website, the FPAs have always encouraged filmmakers to submit "anything that reflects eroticism," although to be considered for an award, entries were required to meet certain criteria. These criteria shifted significantly over the years. In 2013, films were required to meet at least two of the following conditions:

1. Women and/or traditionally marginalized people were involved in the direction, production and/or conception of the work;
2. The work depicts genuine pleasure, agency and desire for all performers, especially women and traditionally marginalized people;
3. The work expands the boundaries of sexual representation on film, challenges stereotypes and presents a vision that sets the content apart from most mainstream pornography. This may include depicting a diversity of desires, types of people, bodies, sexual practices, and/or an anti-racist or anti-oppression framework throughout the production (GoodForHer.com, accessed April 2013).

In 2015, the requirements were updated with more detail and included a significant shift in focus:

These are the guidelines we give our jury members in evaluating films submitted to the Feminist Porn Awards for nomination and awards.

1. Quality – We love to award films that look great. We believe it is possible to make a great-looking film even with a limited amount of resources. We consider such factors as editing, framing, lighting, sound and overall production value when making selections. Attention to detail is appreciated! Story-crafting, acting, music, and direction are all factors that reveal how much care was put into the production of a movie. (Earnest feminism is not enough.)
2. Inclusiveness – We recognize in a niche-based industry like porn not all films are for all audiences and aren't able to include everyone. But we

also love it when films make an effort to explore sexualities that are often marginalized or ignored by mainstream porn.

- We like to include films that contain kink, BDSM, and consensual non-consent in a fictional context. We believe that these can be valid feminist fantasies. We do not view consensual BDSM as violence or abuse.
 - We don't include or support films that rely upon sexual stereotypes. There are way more fantasy options out there and we love it when people are creative.
 - It's our goal to highlight and celebrate films that appeal to a diversity of audiences.
3. The "it" factor: Movies that showcase a unique perspective are especially appealing, whether this is about the story being told, the interactions between characters or technical aspects like framing and editing. We are always most impressed when we encounter something novel, innovative and exciting that causes us to think about sexuality in a fresh way.
 4. Hotness: Bodies are well-lit, framed and shot to perfection, desire radiates off the screen, and all parties involved appear enthusiastic. Plenty of orgasms don't hurt either!"

Who are these films for? The movies and websites that we select are for everyone. We wish to introduce all kinds of different people to all kinds of different films. We strive to provide pleasurable viewing options for a diversity of audiences so that we all can see ourselves and our desires reflected on screen. This includes EVERY BODY (FeministPornAwards.com, "Judging Criteria for FPAs," accessed March 2016).

Beyond these broad requirements, there were never any specificities that must be met in terms of identities, sexual acts, embodiments, or sexual dynamics represented (the exception, of course, being the minimum legal age of consent). In their engagement with feminist porn, the FPAs accomplished several things. To start, and most obviously, they drew public awareness to porn productions that can be identified as "feminist" in some regard, as laid out by the organizers and jury.¹⁵ They also provided material and ground-level possibilities for engaging with these bodies of work, by developing an archive of feminist porn and by sparking conversation and debate around what makes (or could be qualities of) porn that is loosely recognized as "feminist,"

¹⁵ Other recent projects, such as the Feminist Porn Archive and Research Project, headed by Bobby Noble and Lisa Sloniowski at York University, have also started taking on the digitizing and archiving of feminist porn in an attempt to preserve related aspects of feminist histories.

“nonexploitative,” “ethical,” “indie,” “queer,” and so on. By offering a space to exhibit and engage with work, the FPAs have also encouraged more people to create collaborative and diverse representations of sex and sexuality with the intent of distributing it into public spaces.

Notably, the FPAs coincided with an increase in access to digital technologies, which influenced their trajectory. As with the broader relationship between technological advances and digital mediations of intimacy, as discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation, the ease of access to multiple platforms for connecting with other performers, producers, and porn enthusiasts has been a crucial part of developing these newer networks. Over their first decade, the FPAs grew up alongside the expansion of the internet and other digital platforms. Though porn has been available online essentially since the internet first went public, digital technologies and online networks have grown exponentially since then. Digital technologies and internet-based networks have become crucial in the development of transnational circuits of production and distribution (Cante and Restivo 2004).

The use of these technological developments has continued to shift as ways of demarcating what constitutes a challenge to dominant stereotypes in porn become increasingly nuanced. Perhaps one of the FPAs’ most valuable contributions is their role in a more widespread discursive shift, most notably through their demand for public presence and fostering of feminist visibility, their stubborn insistence on aligning *feminism* with *porn*, and broadening the scope of what might be understood to be pornographic content to begin with. Although they are not exclusively or explicitly queer, in this sense, the FPAs have been a project of queering dominant paradigms and rupturing normalizing imperatives. This is not an easy task, nor is it one with a linear trajectory of progress.

From earlier blogs and photo-based sites to clip-heavy depositories, a variety of newer

social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) have allowed performers to connect with other performers, producers, and fans, and crowdsourcing and paid clip sites have allowed performers to further monetize their sexual and emotional labour (e.g., Patreon; Clips4Sale).¹⁶ These technologies also allow producers to connect with less expensive and more accessible modes of production (e.g., the short film *Because I Want You To Watch*, winner of the Golden Beaver Award for Canadian Content in 2013, was shot entirely on an iPhone 5); likewise, they allow fans to connect with more content through more user-friendly designs and with performers through online interactions. The increase in performer accessibility, however, also has a flip side: more demand for more (forms of) labour.

[2.3]

Intimacy, Desire, Authenticity

It is clear then that the collusion of porn and feminism is not extraordinary, despite the two being framed as necessarily incommensurate. While the pornographic fantasy remains intact in feminist porn, it is a remarkably different fantasy than that of patriarchal porn; the fantasy of feminist-driven content often relies on notions of *authenticity*, as discussed above, and is placed in juxtaposition to the artificial falsehoods of mainstream pornographic representations (i.e., seen as “fake sets, fake tits, fake orgasms”). Porn studies scholar Feona Attwood (2007) writes about authenticity as a necessary component of “new sex taste cultures” that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when more consumers desired evidence that performers *wanted* to be doing the work they were doing and that they *enjoyed* their sexual labour.

Attwood (2007) traces the ways that commerce and community became explicitly

¹⁶ It is worth noting that many of these social media sites have implemented user agreements and codes of conduct that actively target sex workers and their self-promotion. Still, community members have found ways around these limitations, and personal accounts remain active.

intertwined through the platforms of alt-porn and indie erotic websites of the early 2000s, explaining that, through the incorporation of message boards, personal webpages of models, and requirements for models to engage directly with consumers, “sexual display [was] recast as an expression of authenticity and combined with an ethos of community” (441). These community-building aspects were fairly unique to alt-porn and indie porn websites at the time, and this feature set them apart from large mainstream porn repositories. Attwood cites vegan porn site founder FurryGirl, who claims that alt-porn “should also work towards building a participatory culture. This should involve ‘people who are a part of each other’s lives outside of porn’, so that porn becomes ‘an expression of the people who make it’” (450). Many contemporary producers of feminist porn have echoed this sentiment as well; however, in recent years, sex workers have critiqued the very idea of authenticity as being antithetical to sex worker support and solidarity.

The self-promotion and fan engagement that became a requirement in online participatory cultures were major selling points, but they also produced a demand for increased labour from performers. As Melissa Gira Grant (2014) and others argue, mandating *any* particular kind of interactions with viewers/consumers outside of explicitly negotiated and paid dynamics is inherently counter to sex worker solidarity. Part of the skill involved in sex work is being able to produce, on demand, an “authentically intimate” experience for your client or viewer. However, the production of that intimacy need not be authentic or truthful for both parties, and indeed, many veteran and skilled sexual labourers learn how to perform intimacy without engaging in the necessary vulnerabilities of authentic connection. Demanding that performers be vulnerable, open, and “authentic” requires another layer of emotional and intimate labour that also denies the labour and skill involved in delivering an engaging sexual *performance*. So while one element of the fantasy of feminist, alt, and indie porn is that performers—many of whom are amateurs—are

somehow more authentic because they are less practiced at intimate mediation, and while many consumers of feminist, alt, and indie porn believe they are supporting more equal and just elements of the sex industry, this appeal to necessary transparency and authenticity ends up being inherently—if often inadvertently—anti-sex worker. Asking performers to perform anything beyond the paid scene demands an emotional and temporal labour that feeds into the dynamics of feminized care work and intimate labour, as I discuss further in Chapter Three.

My own scenes have never been about authentic sex for me. For *Maybe He's Gifted*, Billy and I discussed our artistic goals, our desire to engage in embodied experimentation, our vanity, and our investments in aesthetic possibilities, but the scene was never part of a broader desire we had for one another. Do our motivations count as “authentic,” even if the particulars of our sexual dynamic were not? And what of porn performers who earn a living doing sex work, an industry that relies on creating and/or engaging in fantasy? Are they inherently unable to create change simply because their scenes are not “authentic” enough? The complex constellation of both pride and shame I felt in the quality of my performance during that shoot, the ego boost of complimentary feedback I received when the short screened in public, and my confusion and curiosity about existing relationship dynamics in the feminist porn world all collided as inspiration for years’ worth of research, writing, and personal inquiry.

Five years after filming *Maybe He's Gifted*, N. Maxwell Lander and I sat down in a Toronto apartment on a chilly fall day to reflect on our personal histories of engagement with feminist porn. Our politics, communities, and intimate allegiances had shifted since those early days of filming. Max and I now have a friendship that is based in honesty, trust, intellectual conversation, artistic collaboration, and a series of messy, painful affective pasts. In the lengthy experimental piece of writing below, Max and I navigate our multifaceted history through a

combination of interview, personal narrative, and content analysis of Max’s pornographic video work. Through Max’s role as artist and creator, and my role as performer and collaborator, we contemplate the varied makings of sexual selves through the creation of art, porn, feminism, and queer aesthetics.

SPOTLIGHT ON: N. Maxwell Lander’s Video Work

After producing *Maybe He’s Gifted*, Max created a handful of other “art-porn” videos. Though Max’s repertoire is small in numbers, his moving-image pieces show a clearly developed vision—a vision that plays with the relationship between bodies and technology, narrative, and politicized representation to construct inauthentic yet highly intentional relationships to time, sex, sound, and selfhood. In my reading, Max’s work rejects the focus on authenticity that I have discussed in this chapter and tends instead towards a fragmented, immersive, and highly stylized aesthetic that conscientiously obscures any coherent notion of erotic “truth.” In this spotlight, I describe Max’s work in some detail, then follow with excerpts of a conversation that Max and I had in late 2016 about the role of authenticity, sexual representation, and new platforms/technologies in his work. In this section, I identify a counter-logic that runs throughout Max’s work—one that denies authenticity by way of visual confession and pushes back upon the historically feminist imperative to narrativize experience in order to legitimate it.

REAL UNREAL: *MAYBE HE’S GIFTED* (2011)

Maybe He’s Gifted is a four-and-a-half-minute short that opens on two performers, Varina and Billy, sitting in a dark, smoke-filled living room. Their dress and visual aesthetic evoke ’90s-butch/femme dynamics, yet the atmospheric, synth-infused soundtrack is decidedly current. The scene is dreamlike and nonlinear: frames are alternately layered, broken, pulled out of focus, and

hyperfocused on the minutia of intimate detail. Varina pairs her short dark hair and pale skin with a black and white polka dot swing dress, beige thigh high stockings, and peep toe heels, while Billy balances her ginger complexion and facial piercings with a classic white t-shirt and black suspenders. The camera alternates between close ups of eyes, mouths, hands, and feet, and wider shots of bodies that are pressing up against one another in playfully earnest exploration. When Varina and Billy move from the living room into the hallway, the smoke clears way for a backlit make out session (Figure 7). The light behind them almost becomes a third character in the scene, peering out from between the performers. As the couple moves into the bedroom, the lighting becomes cleaner and brighter as clothes come off and a black latex glove is snapped onto Varina's hand.



Figure 7: Still from Maybe He's Gifted (2011).

In many ways, the short is as much music video as it is porno. The soundtrack—"Pathetik Party" by Erdbeerschnitzel (creative commons licensed)—is front and centre, drowning out any noise that might be coming from the human bodies. The only time the track fades away is when performer Billy orgasms and her vocalizations echo resolutely in the foreground. Rather than focusing on a narrative presentation of "authentic" desire or sex, *Maybe He's Gifted* draws the

viewer into an intimate experience with the multisensory narrative unfolding on screen; the pulsing music, light flares, glitches, and camera angles are just as integral to the story as the human performers are.

Max: *Maybe He's Gifted (MHG)* was a real experiment, both in form and representation. At the time, I still saw very few accessible representations of queer bodies and queer sex, let alone ones that were created by visual artists trying to explicitly make artistic pieces. Today, watching two thin, white, able-bodied queers is far less interesting because we have so much more content out there, but at the time there was a real dearth of anything nonmainstream and queer in a politicized and overtly sexual sense (with a few notable exceptions, like Shine [Louise Houston]'s work for example). Because it was the first time I was making porn, I was looking for a roadmap or a formula, but I didn't actually *have* a roadmap or formula—It's like I asked, "How do you make a porn? Well, I guess you get two people together and they have sex on camera and then you make it look pretty." Later, I realized art-porn could be literally anything you eroticize, but when I was making *MHG*, I wanted to show actual sex, including a real orgasm, and even though I played around with the visual aesthetics in postproduction, I thought it should be at least somewhat authentic in its representation of what had happened in my apartment that day. This is by far the most "authentic" piece I've made in terms of its sex and aesthetics, even though the editing still makes the visuals glitchy and fragmented.

Naomi: I want to talk more about this idea of using fragmentation as an aesthetic choice. You often use close up shots to isolate specific body parts in your work, and you make cuts that interrupt the kind of long-hold shots that are typical of porn (and many kinds of video) shoots. Aside from it being an aesthetic preference, I wonder what kind of political implications this might have, especially because most of your performers are female-identified. Conversations

about media representations of women often include some kind of critique of the tendency to fragment—and subsequently objectify—women’s bodies. I think your work, though, manages to resist that equation and create a different kind of aesthetic that isn’t about treating women as non-agential objects.

Max: All of my films have involved a number of conversations with performers beforehand about what they wanted to do and what they liked about porn, what they didn’t like about porn, what aesthetics they enjoyed, and things they wanted to avoid. I’ve always felt like when you’re shooting people’s bodies, you should probably let them do whatever the hell they want with said bodies. Fragmentation is an interesting language choice to use with regards to visual imagery, because I think another way to frame it is about pulling focus—either term could be applied to the same shot. I could shoot a close up of your lips, and it could either be that I’ve disembodied that pair of lips or that I’ve pulled focus towards that pair of lips. Of course, I’m not sure there would be an inherently visible difference between a sexual image that looks exploitative and one that looks empowering, because nudity can be both of those things; it can be exploitative and empowering at the same time. While a lot of that has to do with the viewer’s experience and their interpretation of what they’re seeing, I think that in film, when you have a larger narrative and more contextualization, you can actually manipulate to some degree whether a scene feels more empowering or whether it feels more exploitative.

Naomi: I think that question brings us back to some of the conversations around “feminist” porn or “woman-positive” porn, where context and narrative become important parts of the discussion. Very often we hear about *narrative* and *emotional connection* being markers of what makes porn “woman-friendly,” along with more realistic representations of sexual scenarios. It’s often assumed that all women who watch porn want to see more intimacy in their scenes, that an

unfolding narrative and building connection is what's erotic for women—as if women's desires are monolithic, as if a storyline somehow equals sexual empowerment while lack of one equals coercion, and/or as if performers never experience exploitation in narrative-driven scenes.

Max: Of course some women and some people of all genders would like to see more narrative in their pornography, because that's what makes it erotic to them, and that's totally great and that porn should exist for those people. Those aren't my turn-ons though, so I'm not going to be the one to make that kind of porn. Still, audience response to *MHG* has been really positive. I'm sure a large part of that was because the performers were conventionally attractive, but I think another reason was because I was making work that still followed some of the conventions of feminist porn at the time. Over the next few months, I had more exposure to and involvement in porn industry realms, I had many more conversations with industry folks and porn performers, and I found that I really wanted to push back against some of the most common audience expectations. I wanted to push the genre more and experiment with different kinds of (lack of) narrative. That's when I created *Emile*, and then shortly after that, I did *'98 Bit*.

MEDITATIVE EXCESS: *EMILE* (2012) AND *'98 BIT* (2012)

Emile and *'98 Bit* show two extremes of Lander's experiments with genre and style. Both feature solo performances and an aesthetics of excess, yet they have distinct approaches: *Emile* is a slow, meditative, romantic piece that is over the top in its overstated erotic gravitas, while *'98 Bit* is a loud, bright, and campy film that is over the top in its parodic enactment of gender and porn stereotypes. Unlike more traditional cinemas of excess, which tend to present descriptive scenarios of superfluous and hedonistic behaviour (see Black 2014; King 2009), Lander employs a form of aesthetic excess that uses sensorial overload to interrupt the coherence of mainstream representations and porn tropes.



Figure 8: Still from Emile (2012).

Emile features rich sepia tones, soft lighting, and a luxurious soundtrack that is replete with orchestral inflections. The visuals are sharp and clean, but the air is thick with a meditative melancholy: The opening shot reveals performer Geena sitting on a windowsill, drinking coffee and having a morning cigarette. When Geena exhales, a close up on her mouth reverses to show her suck the curl of smoke back in through her full lips (Figure 8). Taking place in the intimate space of the bedroom, the scene is one of eroticized domesticity; the solo performance cuts between the textures of bed linens, the angles of Geena's face, and her hand between her own legs as she masturbates. Similar to Billy's climax in *Maybe He's Gifted*, Geena's orgasmic sounds take centre stage as the music fades into the background, if for only a moment. Unlike in *Maybe He's Gifted*, however, Geena's "orgasm" was reshot several times, and her vocalizations were cut together between actual orgasm sounds and performed approximations. Viewers have no way of knowing this from the final product alone, however, which blends multiple tracks together seamlessly.

In a disparate approach, *'98 Bit* features fast cuts, neon colours, and up-tempo electronic music. This piece marks a shift for Lander's work from an aesthetic of heightened reality to one

of decidedly humorous hyperreality. The six-minute short is styled like a late-1990s music video with a cyberpunk sensibility, and its camp aesthetic simultaneously pokes fun at the conventions of mainstream jerk scenes and stripping routines. Performer Jinxy is dressed in exaggerated attire: she wears a full-sleeved, white fishnet crop top with no bra and a stark white harness (Figure 9). As she is coated with brightly coloured glow-in-the-dark paint, she spreads the fluid



Figure 10: Still from '98 Bit (2012).



Figure 9: Still from '98 Bit (2012).

over her breasts and stomach and plunges her toes into a pile that has accumulated on the floor. She slides on white stiletto pumps, followed by large pink dildo (Figure 10). She strokes the dildo emphatically, and eventually “ejaculates” hot pink paint directly onto the camera lens.

These two moving-image portraits were produced in the same year—just weeks apart—and their intentionally different styles manage similar effect: *Emile* speaks back to the luxury and romanticism that is often expected from “woman-friendly” porn by inflating their presence, while *'98 Bit* pushes back on porn conventions by emphasizing the spectacle of the cum shot, replacing bodily fluids with fluorescent and synthetic materials, and explicitly removing ties to the supposedly authentic body/orgasm/scenario.

Max: In creating both *Emile* and *'98 Bit*, I took a lot of inspiration from music videos. A lot of porn I’ve seen has generic background music that fades away as soon as the hardcore fucking starts, but I really wanted to integrate the music as an important part of the scene and

carry it through as much as possible. I think that music really sets the mood of porn almost as much as the visual, if not more.

Naomi: The interplay of sound and visual cues is really interesting in your work, because the different elements really do play off each other and enhance the overall effect. Soundscapes don't tend to get nearly as much attention in porn studies as visual components do, but as Mowlabocus and Medhurst (2017) write, "the music that features in pornography [...] often frames the pornographic text, providing a bridge between the text and the cultures in which it might be consumed" (212). It sounds like you were really having some fun with the whole genre of porn, and even though you were poking fun at a serious kind of romantic porn (with *Emile*) and an excessive kind of jerk porn (with *'98 Bit*), it's also clear that you have enough investment in feminist porn or feminist porn-adjacent communities to stay in conversation with them rather than writing them off or taking your work in an entirely different direction. I wonder, did you have an awareness of the cultures or subcultures in which your porn films are consumed as you were producing them? Would you say you were actively gearing your work towards a particular kind of audience?

Max: Well, I suppose *MHG* was consciously trying to follow an idea of what I thought feminist porn was or what I thought it was supposed to be at the time, but as my understandings of "feminist porn" changed a lot, I found that a lot of other producers and performers were asking the same questions I was. As I said, *Emile* and *'98 Bit* were more about kind of taking the piss out of feminist porn conventions by accentuating the ways that stereotypes and tropes were still operating there. That said, though I'm critical of some of the work that comes out of feminist porn spaces, I'm also invested in lots of folks who are doing work in feminist and alt and art and indie porn worlds. Part of that for me though means I'm going to have fun with the work I make

and that I will continue to experiment and push back. '98 *Bit* is conscientiously over the top. It's ridiculous. I enjoy sensory overload as an artistic and erotic practice, so the idea that the music would build with the fucking or the jerking off instead of fading away, or the idea that the music would fall in line with a series of flashing images that are quick-paced, is pleasing to me. To me, creating sensory overload in my work just heightens the hot factor, and isn't that the point?

Naomi: What I hear in your reflections is that when we talk about gauging an “authentic” representation, there's the question of *are models performing sex acts that are authentic to their off-screen sex and desires?* But then there's also the question of *does the sex act on screen look the same or similar to how it might look off camera? And is the scenario plausible to begin with?* And then we have to think about whether the answers to those questions ultimately matter if the end result looks and feels hot and turns people on. Now that “feminist porn” is being recognized in more mainstream outlets, there is, arguably, more of a commercial market for feminist work. In my experience, the impacts of this shift are thorny: On the one hand, more consumers are demanding feminist work. Great! Right? On the other hand, I think more people are recognizing that what we've come to think of as “authentic” in porn is often (re)produced as just another kind of aesthetic, and that aesthetic is becoming commodified just like everything else. As more people have access to the base means of production for film, and as more people become interested in making feminist or supposedly feminist sexy, erotic content, we get to experience the sometimes-messy but always interesting impacts of *abundance*. Because there is more diversity of content now, we're able to move beyond the base questions of representation (i.e., mere *existence*) and push and challenge those representations to be way more nuanced. To be ever more thoughtful and conscious of the representational work they are accomplishing.

Max: It's funny to think about how much conversations around porn have changed, even

over the last few years. Feminists and queers have been engaging with sexual media for a really long time. They've been having these kinds of conversations for a really long time. Because of digital media though, the conversations have changed, and they've changed quickly. After I released my first couple of films, I was getting a lot of positive feedback from audiences, but I found that I was really uncomfortable with something in the dynamic. It felt kind of lopsided and off. I realized much later that in aligning myself with feminist porn worlds from the get-go, I had boxed myself into something I didn't end up wanting. I thought I wanted to engage in that environment, and I thought I wanted a particular kind of validation, but the whole experience of interacting with strangers at the FPAs felt weirdly invasive. My work wasn't commercial, but it was still being *consumed*. Most people weren't actually engaging with it beyond complimenting surface-level elements. And not only that, but the most validated aspects were not the kinky queer ones that I found most interesting, but they were the most conventional forms of beauty or eroticism, and to me that was kind of counter to what I wanted out of the experience.

Naomi: For so many of us, what we think we want or what we anticipate will feel validating doesn't necessarily play out as predicted. Whether we are performing in or producing a piece of work, audience reception and engagement can feel really personal. We can't pull these conversations apart though from the broader communities and the broader politics that exist around porn and art or feminism and queerness or representation and mediation. It raises the question for me of how we might make our politics visible in work without relying on elements that have become conventions of feminist porn (for example, behind the scenes interviews with performers) and how we might move away from a type of "feminist" porn that is being solidified into a genre and move it back to a political project and dynamic goal that finds its way into every part of the work.

[2.4]

Promise, Resistance, Failure

As I signal in my conversation with Max, feminist porn, as a piecemeal genre, has become increasingly professionalized in recent years and has, tentatively, been acknowledged by some of the largest mainstream porn awards in North America (e.g., the AVNs and XBIZ).¹⁷ This can be read as a reflection that *feminist porn* is becoming an economically viable category; it is now seeing capitalism's embrace alongside its predecessors of "woman-friendly porn" and "alt-porn." The state also has a large stake in porn production and distribution, and, as Mireille Miller-Young (2013) points out, even feminist porn cannot avoid a complicated relationship to capitalist regulations:

Feminist pornography is a for-profit enterprise that relies upon sex workers to manufacture its subversive fantasies and build its consumer base. And like mainstream (heterosexual) pornography, its structure, networks, and modes of representation are regulated and sanctioned by the State, dependent on access to new media technologies, and embedded in the flows of global capital. Though feminism seeks to dismantle structural and discursive exploitation and oppression of women and marginalized populations, our feminist praxis is not external to or untouched by hegemonic systems of domination. Theorizing a feminist pornography then means thinking about a dual process of transgression and restriction, for both representation and labor (107).

The FPAs have certainly not escaped the trappings of increased mainstreaming and visibility either. As a fundraising initiative, they have constantly walked the line between marketability and political merit. As a fan-based event rather than an industry-focused event, they have organized themselves around the entertainment value of finished products rather than the ethics of production behind the scenes.

A decade after they got their start, it was clear that the FPAs had made their mark on public

¹⁷ Though neither the Adult Video News awards (AVNs) nor the XBIZ awards have categories specific to feminist porn, they have both awarded explicitly feminist production companies, performers, and films with accolades at their events.

dialogue around possibilities for empowerment and nonexploitation in porn. It was only through the relative establishment and stability of feminist porn that we saw increased debate from inside the movement going public. In 2015, some performers and industry folks critiqued the FPAs for their sponsorship affiliations and raised concerns about the visibility of and discourses around transwomen at the Awards. In particular, one of the sponsors of the 2015 FPAs, Grooby Productions (Grooby.com), was criticized for using the term “she-male” to promote films featuring their transgender performers. This, along with the knowledge that previous Award winner Lily Cade (LilyCade.com)—a self-named “gold star lesbian”—is notorious for refusing to work with trans performers because they are, in her view, “inauthentic” women, and that crossover performer Christian XXX, 2014 Heartthrob of the Year, has a reputation among performers within the industry as being abusive to transwomen, led to calls for attendees to boycott the Awards.

These concerns are well documented by performer-producer Kitty Stryker, who published an open letter to the Feminist Porn Awards in March of 2015 asking the FPAs to reconsider their policies and practices and declaring a personal boycott of the Awards (Stryker 2015). The FPAs have historically based their decisions only on the final product submitted to them, but Stryker advocated for jury allocations to take into account performer/producer background and community knowledge of all nominees. Also central to Stryker’s concerns were/are the then-newly-listed 2015 criteria included above, most notably the parenthetical declaration that “(Earnest feminism is not enough).” In response, Stryker raises a DIY, working-class politic of vulnerability and urgency, stating, “often, earnest feminism is all we have, *particularly* as sex workers. And that needs to be tenderly held, loved, and recognized, far more than marketability” (ibid., n.p.). Stryker’s call is both generous in tone and affectively charged, making visible her

own investments in feminist porn and in sex worker-positive, trans-positive, anti-oppressive initiatives. As she writes, she was previously elated by the community and feminist possibility she encountered at the Awards, and her decision to boycott the FPAs because of their policies “hurt [her] heart” (ibid.).

For Chanelle Gallant, the FPAs offered an important intervention into mainstream production politics that did not go far enough to support the performers. In reflecting back on her own role in starting the Awards, Gallant writes that the FPAs were “designed to recognize sex work as skilled work and to reward that skill,” but that perhaps this is where “[organizers] stumbled and missed an opportunity to further the rights and respect for the people we’re paying to watch: the sex workers” (2017, n.p.). She states firmly, “if you’re going to call something feminist, it means addressing the question of ethical working conditions, labour standards and wages for sexual and emotional labour” (ibid.). In a moment of strong self-reflection, Gallant admits,

I’ve been a sex work activist for 12 years now and I can’t believe I didn’t insist that we include fair working conditions and fair wages as an intrinsic part of feminism. That is sex work feminism 101. In fact, it’s working class feminism 101—pay women well for work that is feminized, undervalued and often precarious, like sex work (ibid.).

The personal hurt expressed by Stryker and the self-disbelief noted by Gallant are not inconsequential to my explorations here; in fact, they are central. In my experience, the FPAs have provided both physical and conceptual space for feminists and porn lovers of all kinds to imagine a world where sexually explicit films can be—and actually *are*—produced differently, with overtly queer and feminist ideals. This kind of queer worldmaking is in line with José Muñoz’s (1999) notion of disidentifications, where dominant forms, representations, and ideologies are taken up only to transform their messaging into life affirming material for minority subjects. For Muñoz, the persistent and necessary negotiation involved in navigating a

majoritarian-run world produces a wealth of queer creative work that reimagines possibility and facilitates survival against all odds. Of course, the radical potentiality of queer worldmaking also opens one up to radical disappointment, vulnerability, loss, and hurt. The political possibility of a queer project like the Feminist Porn Awards inspires mobilizing energy in the form of myriad hopes and dreams that will never, and can never, really be fulfilled. This may be the “cruel optimism” of feminist porn (Berlant 2011); *possibility*, the very thing that keeps participants going, is also the very thing that continually lets them down. To paraphrase and extend Muñoz (2009), no matter how much work we do, feminist and queer utopias will always be forever on the horizon. There will always be dissenting views on how to implement and engage feminist ideals, projects, and events, though something in the constellation of critiques in 2015 seems to have hit home with FPA organizers.

In response to the critiques voiced by Stryker and others who chose to boycott in 2015, Good For Her released a statement and initially held strong in their position, avowing, “When we evaluate a film, most often, all that we can fairly review is the end-product of the film itself. We cannot be on set, nor can we realistically evaluate the off set behaviour of performers or production staff” (FeministPornAwards.com, “In Response to Some Questions and Concerns About This Year’s Feminist Porn Awards”). The statement also explained that high-quality production standards have always been a part of their criteria, and that they were attempting further transparency in their newly clarified terms. However, the organizers of the FPAs also declared a hiatus for the 2016 Awards season, citing the “ease of access to technology” as “a huge democratizing force in the adult industry” that has lessened the former urgency of their work (FeministPornAwards.com, n.p.). They thus gave themselves time to “re-vision and strategize about how [they] wish to transform and rebirth the event that is so dear [to them]”

(ibid.). The internal critique and subsequent pause in programming begs several questions: Have the goals and ideals of the FPAs run their course? Did the institution perhaps outgrow itself or make itself obsolete? And if it did, is that a sign of success or failure for the FPAs? After all, feminist and social justice projects, geared towards producing change, should always be working to put themselves—and/or the need for their existence—out of business.

As the newly minted Toronto International Porn Festival, the former FPAs have created an opportunity to reset and/or revive their political, cultural, and community affiliations. Their website explains, “As a response to the growth and popularity of independent and progressive erotic films, the former Feminist Porn Awards have now been rebranded, to broaden the conversation about positive porn and reflect the diverse audience it attracts. These films are for people of all genders, sexualities, bodies and pleasures” (TorontoInternationalPornFestival.com).

The site further elucidates,

After ten solid years of growth and change, it was time re-evaluate our goals in order to create an even better event. Good For Her decided to broaden the conversation about porn and bring in people who felt that the previous name and contexts were not inclusive of them as attendees, directors and/or performers. In 2016 Good For Her rebranded the events as the Toronto International Porn Festival recognizing Toronto as a hub for international film festivals and sex positivity (TorontoInternationalPornFestival.com, “About”).

All evaluation criteria remain the same as in 2015, and Good For Her maintains that their political affiliations and representational goals are consistent with their previous investments. Still, it remains to be seen how the new branding will land with event-goers, filmmakers, and performers, and what—if any—changes will be made to the ways films are assessed.

[2.5]

Porn and Intimate Citizenship

In contemporary sex-negative and erotophobic worlds, fear and disdain become fixed to

bodies that blur the lines between intimate feelings and public lives. Sexual bodies, desiring bodies, and actively consenting bodies—especially when they belong to already marginalized people—contend with particularly harsh sanctions in attempts to control and manage their scope of visibility and public participation. The ongoing effects of colonialism, classism, ableism, and homophobia mean that marginalized bodies are repeatedly and consistently deemed to be *deviant* or *perverse* and are subsequently denied agency (Butler 2008; Erickson 2007; Nguyen 2014; Puar 2007). The FPAs have developed their events by recognizing and celebrating the ways that resistance might be found in marginalized people taking control over whom and what is made visible and under what circumstances. They have opened important lines of discussion and sustained engagement through the conscious creation of space for complex, and often subtle, nuanced representations of various marginalized people. The shift in representation is one that both reflects and produces intimacy on and off screen.

Offering and propagating public visibilities of non-normative bodies, identities, and/or desires has been one of the strengths of the FPAs since their establishment in 2006. The sexual and intimate policing of bodies are deeply embedded in considerations of sexuality and sexual representation, racialization, and settler colonialism (Morgensen 2011; Mulholland 2016), and a multiplicity of tactics and strategies is needed to address the multiple levels on which these regulations operate. Although decidedly (and with self-awareness) nowhere near enough to address the pervasiveness of these issues on their own, the FPAs and the composite communities they sustained were one step toward unlearning and denaturalizing deeply held normative assumptions and discursive oppressions.

Kitty Stryker's pained heart, Chanelle Gallant's reflective revisioning, and Max's ambivalences about affiliating himself with feminist porn movements are important additions to

our understanding of intimate citizenship. Our visceral reactions to porn, intimacy, desire, and community are all instructive in building space for (im)possible futures. Kath Albury (2009, 649) draws on Eve Sedgwick's call for reparative approaches to ask how even "flawed or imperfect" porn might provide opportunities to move from dualistic either/or approaches to more productive and complex analyses of pornography and sexual representation. Similarly, Susanna Paasonen (2007, 2014) employs a move from paranoid readings of porn—those which serve to uncover the representational violences and oppressions we already know to exist—to ameliorative readings—those which explore "representational dynamics as the very building blocks of porn as a genre while also pushing for more complex theorizations" (Paasonen 2014, 137).

In this chapter, I have traced not only how the FPAs offer borders and rubrics of classification for what kinds of work might be considered "feminist porn," but also how, upon closer examination, these taxonomies quickly break down. Though not centrally discussed, my considerations here raise questions about what sex might be, what porn might be, what desire might be, and what intimacy might be. They also question what is being deemed by the state as being regulatable, recognizable, and commodifiable. Even within their overall framework of celebration, then, the FPAs have offered a platform for complex and more realistic affective responses to and engagements with porn, including the ambivalent or "bad" feelings that arise from viewing dominant portrayals of marginalized people in normative productions or, conversely, the feelings that arise from viewing dissenting portrayals of minority subjects that still let us down. With the recent break in programming of the FPAs and subsequent re-launching of the newly minted Festival, it remains to be seen if the Awards can withstand discursive shifts around feminism and porn and renew their place in the conversation among current socio-political climates, or if they will eventually declare themselves to be productively irrelevant.

Borrowing from legacies of rejection and reclamation present in feminist porn, the next chapter takes up hierarchies of intimacy present in emotional and affective labour as deeply coded through gendered, raced, and classed relations. Chapter Three continues to probe these questions and looks more closely at hierarchies of intimacy through an analysis of affective economies and the emotional labour of professional cuddlers—those who offer non-sexual intimate touch for pay—as well as the circulation of intimate economies in paid dating services and in sexual surrogate therapy. I treat these sites as investigative opportunities to consider where the boundaries of desire, intimacy, sexuality, and affective exchange continue to dissolve. Questions of paid versus unpaid care work and intimate labour cannot be addressed outside of such historical and ongoing encounters, since the lines that are drawn around structures of intimate economies have always served the state and those in power within it.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE GENDERED POLITICS OF NOT-QUITE-SEX-WORK.

[3.1]

A Bitch, A Witch, A Tease

Between the time of my writing about feminist porn and my taking on this chapter about gendered labour and intimacy work, there has been a huge—*yuge!*—political shift. I am drafting this chapter in the aftermath of a U.S. Election that was won through a vitriolic, hateful rhetoric that has been unparalleled in my lifetime on this scale. This is one of those instances where timing matters, and matters big. My mental and affective health cannot be separated from my (in)ability to produce theoretical work. Material conditions are all too critical right now, and they are literally a matter of life and death for so many. The reassertion and widespread validation of overt and celebrated racism, white supremacy, misogyny, and xenophobia has sent my communities reeling. We are, if not in shock, in collective mourning. And anger. For those of us who have been paying attention in the build up, the outcome of the election was so clearly a backlash against the effective, systematic, and desperately needed organizing of resistance

movements like Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, and Occupy;¹⁸ it is a retreat into the white majoritarian status quo under the false, glossy guise of political change and a supposed resistance to “business as usual.” Of course, knowing this context—and recognizing the falsities of its foundations—only makes the initial wound throb that much more vibrantly. I have been unable to separate my research and writing from this immediate perspective, from the constellation of feelings and actions a Donald Trump Presidency elicits, but perhaps my inability to set this context aside is the very point of my methodological aspirations in this dissertation.

For better or (likely) worse, a clearer picture of North American politics will continue to solidify over the following months and years. Some things will settle while others will continue to exist within the horrendous upheaval caused by governmental incompetence and an era of Alternative Facts. In this world, I feel deeply confident that academic scholarship and truth-writing is of critical import. Admittedly though, at the moment, this dissertation project feels trite. At a time when I am trying to both process and anticipate the ongoing impacts of a Trump Presidency, and when I am trying to sort through the objectionable and gruesome harnessing of affects that not only occurred, but succeeded, in the 2016 presidential campaign, I struggle to see the use of bringing more of myself and my voice (most notably, aspects of my middle-class,

¹⁸ A detailed discussion of these social movements is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For other work that takes up Black Lives Matter, see Alicia Garza (2016) “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) “An Indigenous View on #BlackLivesMatter,” and George Yancy and Judith Butler (2015) “What’s Wrong With ‘All Lives Matter?’” For work that takes up Idle No More, see Glen Coulthard (2012) “#IdleNoMore in Historical Context,” Wanda Nanibush (2014) “Idle No More: Strong Hearts of Indigenous Leadership,” and Scott L. Morgensen (2014) “White Settlers and Indigenous Solidarity: Confronting White Supremacy, Answering Decolonial Alliances.” For work that takes up the Occupy movement, see Sandy Grande (2013) “Accumulation of the Primitive: The Limits of Liberalism and the Politics of Occupy Wall Street,” Margaret Kohn (2013) “Privatization and Politics: Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Toronto, and the Occupation of Public Space in a Democracy,” and Judy Lubin (2012) “The ‘Occupy’ Movement: Emerging Protest Forms and Contested Urban Spaces.”

white, and cisgender realities) into the world when there needs to be more space and larger platforms for marginalized voices and action. It is overwhelmingly difficult to sort through the affective din of this particular time and place.

I have found myself reflecting on various personal, familial, and community histories that are informing my responses to this election, and I have been asking many complex questions: What role does my position as a daughter of an immigrant and survivor of decades' worth of sexual and physical violence play in my read of this political situation? What of my place as a granddaughter of Jewish asylum seekers who fled Nazi Germany and Austria during the rise of the Holocaust? Conversely, how do my whiteness, middle-class upbringing, cisgender body, and education levels stand to make me further complicit in systems of white supremacy and xenophobic violence? How does my location as a queer, sex-positive femme, friend and lover of many artists, Black and brown people, trans people, and people living in generational and situational poverty—all of whom now have a renewed, deeply-resounding fear for their lives and livelihoods—impact my ability to contemplate, enact, and transform my own intimate relationships? I invoke these questions here not in an effort to somehow claim the experiences of others as my own, nor to even pretend I have adequate answers, but rather to acknowledge the ways in which I am necessarily and conscientiously inseparable from and intertwined with others in my extended networks of kinship and care.

In times of political turmoil and widespread hatred, community intimacies become solidified as necessity tools of material survival and emotional sustenance. My energy and attention are in and on communities I am in conversation with and with whom I will continue to fight alongside. As I move into the bulk of the writing of this chapter, I am likewise trying to make sense of the current socio-political climate as it exists both inside and outside of my own

head and experiences. My communities and the communities I stand in solidarity with are also those that are disproportionately impacted by gendered and racialized structures of labour, and the intimate labour we have been performing for each other during this time has been both vital and exhausting.

Throughout her side of the campaign, Hillary Clinton channeled her best version of a calm and measured political veteran, which sat in sharp contrast to Trump's impassioned posturings. By all accounts and necessity, Clinton presented a version of herself that towed the line between feminine imperatives and presidential poise: warm and inviting, yet tough and well informed. She was criticized for smiling too much (see Shulevitz 2016; Smith 2016). And for smiling too little (see Sankin 2016; Zarya 2016). She was appraised through her propensity to wear pantsuits (see Cheng 2015; Garber 2016), which became expertly folded into the marketing of her campaign (Figure 11). Regardless of the contents of her platform and political record, which

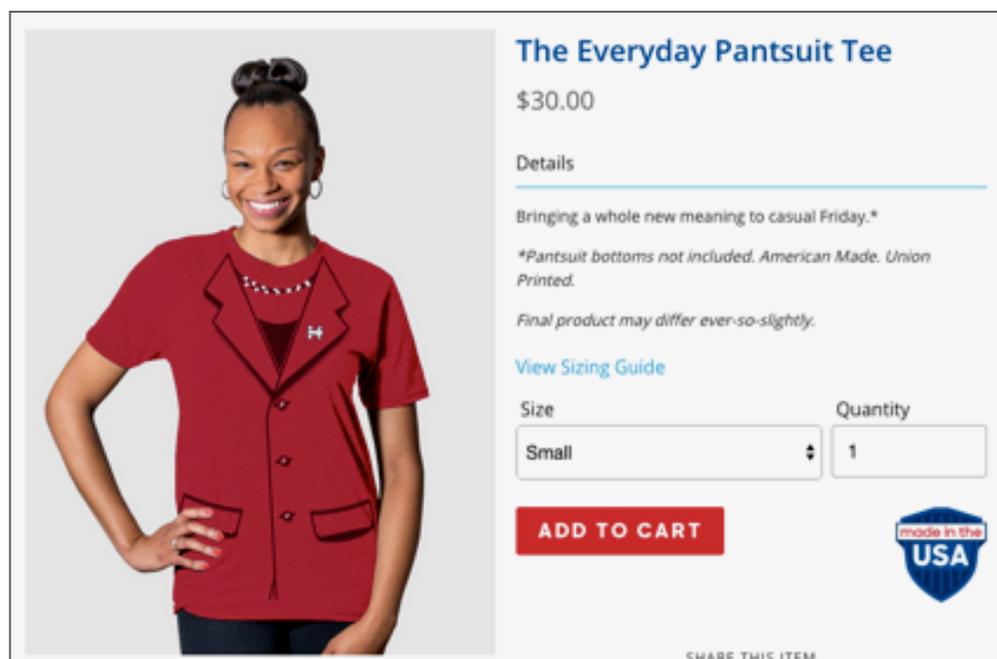


Figure 11: Official campaign merchandise for the Democratic Party, via store.democrats.org (2016).

many progressives have found to be questionable at best, there is no denying that Clinton was

charged with navigating an impossibly sexist political minefield. These gendered regulations, launched at one of the most powerful women in the world, are indicative of the persistence of the intense scrutiny that is faced by even the most privileged of women. This is to say nothing of anyone who is not cisgender, not white, not wealthy, not English-speaking, not U.S.-born, or any other combination of marginalized factors.

Late on the night of November 8, 2016, shortly after the election had been called in favour of Trump, a friend texted me from where she was sobbing on the street, deep in the solemn reminder that “Nothing I ever do will be good enough to be better than the literal worst white dude.” We talked for a while, empathizing with each other about how exhausting it is to be faced with the harsh and messy realities of institutional—as well as very personal—misogyny. Within twenty-four hours of that conversation, as if to hammer the point home, I had been called a “cold bitch” by a male passerby on the street after I wouldn’t smile for him, I had conspired with friends about performing a protection ritual with our half-joke-but-also-very-real witch coven, and I had shed tears for my first real love, a poor trans artist living in Midcoast Maine, who was publicly and painfully processing their initial post-election grief. Yet still, even with my deep empathy for their process, I couldn’t help but remember that it was that same ex who, years ago, had been the first non-stranger to aggressively call me a “tease” and suggest I was being sexually manipulative for personal gain. The socio-sexual regulation of femininity is so complex but so routine, so pervasive and so deeply embedded, that it crops up incessantly and cannot always be registered or reconciled in the moment. The emotional labour involved in navigating these realms is likewise routine and intensely draining.

As I attempt to sort through my own gendered, raced, sexual(ized), and labouring positionalities, I have loosely organized this chapter as both an homage to and a pulling apart of

three common tropes that have been used to regulate women's sexual, physical, and emotional autonomy: the Bitch, the Witch, and the Tease.¹⁹ Each of these figures haunts the realm of feminized labour and is instructive in starting to understand the uneven and overlapping terrains of paid and unpaid work, of sex work and intimate labour, and of intimate attachment and emotional distance. Following the practice-based methodologies of this dissertation, the affects imbedded in these stories remind me of the necessity to make explicit the links between personal experiences and political realities.

Thus far in this dissertation, I have made only brief reference to the emotional management that is expected from sex workers alongside their sexual labour. It is widely known and recognized in sex work communities that these aspects are inextricable from one another and that they are mutually constitutive (and potentially interchangeable) parts of the job (Chapkis 1997; Horn 2015; Establishment 2016; Sanders 2005). In Chapter Two, I theorized the role of affect in building (contested) community spaces through porn performance and the public sexualities found at the Feminist Porn Awards, but I have yet to draw out the interpersonal intricacies of intimate labour that exist within and alongside various forms of sexual labour. Accordingly, this chapter focuses more heavily on the emotion work that is so often expected of women—and of racialized women in particular—both inside of and as adjacent to the sex industry.

I take up feminist engagements with political and affective economies by way of intimate labour, applying feminist analyses of care work to include for-pay economies that I describe as *not-quite-sex-work*: professional cuddling, paid “PG” dating, and therapeutic sexual surrogacy.

¹⁹ In discussing terms like *bitch*, *witch*, and *tease*, I am also always aware of the major role race and racialization play in both their invocation and endurance. Non-white bodies are most frequently the targets of such socio-sexual regulation, though often through different language specificities (see Collins 2000, Walia 2011, Willey 2006). I have attempted to account for some of the regulation and harassment BIPOC people experience as a consequence of these racist and colonial legacies, though this is not a central focus of this chapter.

Each of these service-based interactions promises a level of intimate experience and requires an exchange of money for services rendered; however, they each also distinguish themselves from (other) forms of sex work in a circumvention of the social stigmas and/or potential legal grey areas that might otherwise be triggered. In this sense, they each exist along a continuum of sexual–intimate labour that can be productively mined to illuminate broader socio-sexual structures. In describing the practices of professional cuddling, paid dating, and sexual surrogacy, and by drawing out media representations of them, I address the initial questions of this dissertation by asking how (non-)normative intimacies circulate in contemporary socio-political climates. By considering these monetized practices—which at once engage mainstream dominant values and challenge expected gender norms—I am provoking the coherence of mainstream-versus-queer dichotomies and making visible some of the labour that is involved in producing and maintaining intimacy. The skillful manipulation of intimate discourses within the three case studies of this chapter illuminates the constructed ideals of the *whos*, *whats*, *wheres*, *whens*, *whys*, and *hows* regarding intimacy that continue to hold true in cultural spheres.

Intimate Labours

By placing intimacy and work on a relational continuum, I am drawing on Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parreñas' (2010) framing of intimate labours in their edited collection of the same name, where they describe intimate labour as a broad range of work that “promote[s] the physical, intellectual, affective, and other emotional needs of strangers, friends, family, sex partners, children, and elderly, ill, or disabled people” (2). In their view, intimate labour necessarily encompasses “sex, domestic, and care work” and reveals how “acts of love and work for money” are deeply interconnected, despite being studied largely as independent from one another (1-2). Boris and Parreñas argue that studying various forms of intimate labour simultaneously is a

fruitful endeavor in that it can illuminate how “each of these labors forges interdependent relations, represents work assumed to be the unpaid responsibility of women, and, consequently, is usually considered to be a non-market activity or an activity of low economic value that should be done by lower classes or racial outsiders” (2).

In order to examine contemporary economies of intimate exchange, this chapter establishes context through scholarship on routinized experiences of emotional management that are historically and socially informed by colonial taxonomies of gender, class, and race. Next, I locate interruptions into normative relationship structures by focusing on three case studies of sex-work-adjacent realms. First, a spotlight on professional cuddler Jackie Samuel’s business, *The Snuggery*, takes up online news coverage of those who are paid to provide nonsexual, intimate touch. I argue that the regulatory function of these news stories illuminates how paying for cuddling services complicates and challenges binary distinctions between romantic intimacy and sexual services, and between physical intimacy and therapeutic touch. Second, I assess how paid dating (i.e., giving or receiving financial compensation for going out on dates) walks a fine line between sexual, romantic, and intimate encounters. I consider websites that are set up to match people who are willing to provide payment for dates (variously named “payers,” “generous users,” and/or “(male) clients”) with those who are willing to receive payment for dates (variously named “date providers,” “attractive users,” and/or “(female) clients”). In particular, I analyze the website *WhatsYourPrice.com*, which is marketed primarily through the male experience of “getting women,” against the website and app *Ohlala*, which claims to safeguard the protection and autonomy of female users. Though both of these paid dating services deny association with sexual escorting and declare themselves to be strictly PG, they fall on a spectrum of sexual and emotional labour that blurs the boundaries between that which is

considered to be sex-work and that which is considered to be not-sex-work.

Finally, to further muddle these distinctions, I examine the ways that services of surrogate partners (i.e., therapists who are paid to provide hands-on sensual and sexual therapy) prioritize the sexual and physical aspects of interactions with clients while repudiating potentially emotionally intimate bonds. The services of surrogate partners are often framed through narratives of health and healing that move them away from recognized forms of sex work and the cultural stigmas that follow. Locating representations of sexual surrogacy within pop culture, I engage a case study of Ben Lewin's 2012 film *The Sessions*. In particular, I look to the character of Cheryl (Helen Hunt) and consider her negotiation of emotional management as she provides sexual therapy to polio-afflicted Mark O'Brien (John Hawkes).

Through my examinations of professional cuddling, paid dating, and surrogate partnership, this chapter takes a closer look at some sex-work-adjacent practices that benefit from, yet simultaneously deny (whether by legal necessity or through morality self-policing), associations with prostitution and sex work politics. The three case studies of this chapter provide differing though unavoidably interrelated narrative negotiations with sex work and intimate labour: The labour of professional cuddling centres on the formation of intimate connections that exist outside of sexual interactions; paid dating monetizes the physical, emotional, and time-based labour of going out on first dates while simultaneously repudiating the monetization of sex within that framework; and surrogate partners must labour to maintain boundaries around intimacy while performing their sex-based therapy work.

[3.2]

Intimacy, Care, and Feminine Failures

As a young person in rural Ontario, my stubborn refusal to placate the people around me—



Figure 12: Me, blond and fair, 1993. particularly the boys—gained me a reputation of being a capital-*B* Bitch: not the kind who goes out of her way to make your life miserable, or even one who believes and/or acts like she’s better than you, but the kind who simply prioritizes her own needs over the comfort of others. Blond haired, light-skinned, and (consequently) appealing to strangers, I was an unsuspecting dissenter from the “friendly banter” embedded in the casual interactions of everyday encounters. Painstakingly shy and chronically withdrawn, but also protectively self-isolating, I seldom responded to the attempts at engagement extended by my classmates, and I showed little interest in the flurried friendships formed by others in the throws of navigating grade school. I was deeply reserved. I couldn’t relate to the intimacies others seemed to find amongst their peers. I never spoke of crushes, and I didn’t care to know about who was crushing on me. Mostly, I just tried to stay out of people’s way and move with as little conflict as possible. This made me an object of suspicion to many, and I felt distrustful eyes following me for most of my youth, but somehow, I managed to stay grounded in myself.

In grade three, I was met with the reality that I was not, in fact, invisible to others: An older boy who lived down the road from me approached me in the schoolyard. He was angry about something. He picked me up, whipped me around by my legs, and threw me down, hard, into the gravel. The tiny shards of rock dug into my palms, and my head missed the ground by just a fraction of an inch. I do not know what set him off, and I’m not sure I ever told anyone what happened. I do remember thinking that it must have been my fault. I made excuses for the

boy, drawing on cultural narratives to tell myself that he probably actually liked me or wanted to be my friend but didn't know how to express himself any better. I told myself his attention was harmless, if violent in that moment, and that it wasn't worth getting him in trouble over. Though I lacked the language to articulate it at the time, I knew that his socio-economic class and (lack of) social standing had already put him at risk for the "wrong kinds of attention" from school authorities. For his sake, I pretended like everything was fine. My palms ached for days afterwards, and I did my best to avoid him for the rest of the year as we rode home together on our six-person bus.

This childhood interaction, complicated in its dynamics but clear in its consequence, is one of the first times I remember sacrificing my feelings of safety to protect another person. As I moved into early adolescence, my resistance to "getting along" with my male peers continued to make me an emotional outsider, keeping me decidedly on the outskirts of any friend group I found myself spending time with. Though I remained generally well-liked (a product, no doubt, of my relative good looks, my compliance with the uniform whiteness of my town, and my propensity to not give a shit), I was called a Bitch and an Ice Queen with some frequency. I felt the regulatory pressure of these supposed insults, but mostly, they suited me just fine: I wore the whispered badge of BITCH in secret pride. It was a convenient and effective armor against the hypervisibility and intense scrutiny of growing up *girl* and gave me permission to keep to myself under the guise of active shrewery.

As an undergraduate student, I was introduced to the field of Women's Studies through a second year class on feminist cultural production at the University of Guelph. It was there where I first learned to recognize that cultivating intimacy—and/or withholding it—is, in fact, a feminist issue. In the dozen or so years since stepping into that classroom, I have learned much

about intimacy from queer theory and critical kinship studies, Black feminist thought, feminist political economies, and others working to cleave apart the stronghold of intimacy from love, romanticism, and/or monogamous partnership. The connection between intimacy and labour runs deep. It is well documented that the typical division of labour in North America positions care work as overwhelmingly feminized and racialized—a product of colonization and nation-building projects.

Colonial Femininities

Upon early colonial expansion of present-day Canada and the U.S., Indigenous women were forcefully and systematically re-placed in structures of kinship and family that both mimicked and re-constructed Victorian ideals (Anderson 2000; Cannon 2012; McClintock 1995), while white women were tasked with being the reproducers of the white Eurocentric nation (Kaplan 2002; Noel 2013; Perry 1997). The establishment of slave economies and racialized processes of social reproduction have further placed the responsibility of emotional management and education on women, and on women of colour in particular (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Collins 1998; Hochschild 1997; Yuval-Davis 1996).

Systematically targeting intimate relations and networks of kinship was seen to be the most effective way to impose the gender order that was embedded in the monogamous model of marriage and to maintain clear and definite familial bounds. Historian Sarah Carter (2008) traces how early colonists in Western Canada actively shaped gender roles and intimate relationship structures with the goal of building hegemonic notions of monogamous heterosexual marriage. She argues this was done to uphold distinctly British notions of morality and piety, and that the particularities of Canadian marriage were set up in direct contrast to the values of the United States, which was seen to be a hotbed of loose morals and wavering intimacies. While female

healers were once considered essential to social networks in the form of midwives, nurses, and community healers, the feminized labour and generations of knowledge were slowly but surely weeded out first by colonizer's accusations of witchery and medical negligence and then again during the Renaissance by both the Church and state (Lara 2005; Whaley 2011). The shift from valued healer to "old crones" and "old wives" has had a lasting effect on feminized medical knowledge that continues to impact the present (Dodd and Gorman 1994; Duffin and Stewart 2012; Ehrenreich and English 2010).

In pairing Indigenous knowledges with feminist thought and queer theory, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear (2016) considers what it might mean to re-imagine structures of care and caretaking that have come about through the fracturing of homes due to these colonial violences. Drawing on Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson's work on mothering, TallBear moves to detach the act of "mothering" from a feminized practice of care and repositions it instead as the responsibility of *all* members of a kin group. She explains that many forms of traditional Indigenous knowledge recognize the ways in which caretaking encompasses a collective of actors, both human and nonhuman, and that it is a practice that necessarily includes caretaking of the land as well as of human and other-than-human kin. TallBear further highlights how early constructions of heteronormative intimacy did not stop with the establishment of European dominance and how colonial impositions worked to actively restructure these intimate constellations in service of the white and human-centric nation. Rather, these intimate regulations have carried through to impact the gendered division of labour and social reproduction, as well as to influence the outsourcing of domestic and childcare work to migrant labourers (Glenn 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2015; Walia 2010; Wong 2000). The realities of labour-motivated transnational migration, including the separation

of family units and disrupted chains of care, similarly necessitate a development of extended care networks and a shift in relationships to childrearing, intimacy, and (lack of access to) private domesticity. These reminders are necessary interventions into well-established colonial knowledges, and the challenge to human-centric notions of care and intimacy also figure heavily into my discussions in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

In both paid and unpaid work, the labour that is required to produce decidedly intimate experiences is manifold and heavily dependent on an attunement to, and skillful manipulation of, feelings and emotions (Hochschild 2003; Boris and Parreñas 2010). Contemporarily, the unstable and slippery boundaries between care work, intimacy, sex, and sexual expression means that this responsibility is carried through different bodies unevenly due to ongoing racist and sexist structures. When considering sexual labour, the “twin reaction” of “moral revulsion and resigned tolerance” that is found in many societies in response to commercial sex and its neighboring practices (Agustín 2005, 618) continue to be an organizing principle of mainstream public responses. As Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) argues, “the global restructuring of capitalist production and investment that has taken place since the 1970s has had consequences that are more profound and more intimate than most economic sociologists ever choose to consider” (4).

Against the backdrop of these racialized, gendered, and sex-worker-negative neoliberal contexts, there has been an increase in recent years of (mostly) white (mostly) women recognizing their intimate labour as a monetizable skill and negotiating their economic positions through the monetization of non-sexual intimate labour. In particular, there has been an increase in those who demand payment for their time, recognizing intimate and emotional labour as valuable and commodifiable through creative means like dating-for-pay or offering “professional cuddling” services in exchange for financial compensation. Though these practices are not akin

to sex work in the most direct sense of payment-in-exchange-for-sexual-services, they exist along the continuum offered by Boris and Parreñas and provide a fruitful expansion of both sex work studies and care work studies.²⁰ The confluence of intimate labour, healing work, and feminine “duty” is illuminated through the case of Jackie Samuel, a professional cuddler who received a bout of news media attention in 2012.

[3.3]

Healing Labour and Emotional(ly Wise) Women

Professional cuddling first came into my field of view in 2012 through an article published to the *Daily Mail* entitled, “No Holds Barred: The Professional ‘Cuddler’ Who Makes \$260 a Day by Inviting Strangers To Take a Nap With Her at Home” (Figure 13; Boyle 2012). A friend had passed it along, wondering what I might make of it. Did I think this was an example of “easy money”? Or a potential new career move? Was this in fact a case of intimacy bought and sold, and could I please explain to them how it was a legitimate form of employment in the first place? What most intrigued me about the article was how many cultural narratives of gendered care work and women’s place being “in the home” were signalled with just this one headline. I wondered why the publication felt the need to invoke “stranger danger” in the by-line to sell their story, by framing professional cuddler Jackie Samuel’s practice as one of engaging with *strangers* rather than with *clients*. I was fascinated also by the language of *invitation* (a decidedly non-service-based term) and the way it was juxtaposed with Samuel’s impressive financial

²⁰ The constellation of intimate labours I engage here could arguably be extended out even further to include, for example, services like life coaching, professional decluttering/organizing, and other (pseudo-)therapeutic practices that rely as much on shifting mental landscapes as they do on reorganizing material ones. While these services sit further away from sexual acts and the realm of sex altogether than what I take up in this chapter, they too exist on the sex-work–not-sex-work continuum through their monetization of emotional labour.

No holds barred: The professional 'cuddler' who makes \$260 a day by inviting strangers to take a nap with her at home

• Jackie Samuel, 29, established The Snuggery in Rochester, New York

By LOUISE BOYLE

PUBLISHED: 17:56 GMT, 4 November 2012 | UPDATED: 18:00 GMT, 9 November 2012

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Spooning peacefully in a double bed, this pair could be any normal couple on a Sunday morning.

But revisit the scene an hour later and Jackie Samuel will be curled up in the arms of another man.

The 29-year-old is a professional cuddler. She turned to snuggling with strangers to help pay for her studies and provide for her young son.



Figure 13: Jackie Samuel featured in the Daily Mail (2012).

earnings (an amount that was apparently notable enough to be highlighted by the news outlet). As I continued reading, I realized that the article's take on both the business and Samuel herself seemed to be mostly positive, if a bit conflicted and suspicious in its tone, and I wanted to know more.²¹

I had previously encountered other small scale social actions that assert the human need for intimate, nonsexual physical contact (for

example, I was invited to Cuddle Parties during my time as an undergraduate student, though I did not attend, and I was regularly accosted by people who offer Free Hugs to passersby as I made my way through the University Centre in Guelph), but I had not yet come across the

²¹ The real-life example of Samuel sits in stark contrast to the few stories I have been able to locate in narrative media. The web series *Just Cuddle: Stories of a professional cuddler* (2016–), for example, features a pale, blonde-haired, young white woman named Winter who is thrust into a professional cuddling job after she answers a mysterious online ad. Each episode features a new and awkward interaction with one of Winter's "eccentric" clients, who are, notably, also almost exclusively white. Winter seems mostly disinterested in cuddling prior to meeting with her first client and readily admits that she "only thinks of herself" in life (though this is disproven as the series progresses). Although she continues to feel uncomfortable and is sometimes judgmental of her clients, she decides to stick with the work. Though featured heavily in *Just Cuddle* as well as in the coverage of Jackie Samuel, the whiteness of cuddlers and clients is not as prominent on freelance-cuddler websites like Cuddlist.com and CAPCuddlers.org. *Just Cuddle* is currently trying to finance a second season through crowdsourcing sites. Episodes are available to screen on Vimeo or through www.justcuddleseries.com.

monetization of such activities on a gendered, individual, one-to-one scale. As I did more research, I discovered that although some cuddling services market themselves through a hippie-esque (antithetical) free-love rhetoric, the majority earnestly invoke scientific and medical narratives of touch therapy and the deeply social nature of humanity in order to lend a mainstream credibility to their work (see CAPCuddlers.org; CuddleMe.ca; TheCuddlery.ca; Cuddlist.com). In some cases, however, there is also a subtle indication that there might be a conscious manipulation of gendered expectations around feminized labour, a negotiation of the obligations of moral purity and presentations of “innocent tease,” as with Jackie Samuel and her business, The Snuggery. This is most evident on the landing page of Samuel’s website (Figure 14), where she is shown reclining in a frilled, white, pioneer-like nightgown, with a warm and inviting—though not overtly sexual—gaze locked on the camera. A closer look at her website alongside several interviews she has given in the popular press shows that Samuel seems to be fairly unique insofar as she is explicitly drawing on and manipulating the historical narrative of the Nice White Lady to offer a non-threatening (yet rather business-savvy) model of healing therapy through nonsexual intimate touch.



Figure 14: Landing page of TheSnuggery.org (Jan. 2017).

Located in Penfield, New York, The Snuggery is a business that offers nonsexual, intimate cuddle sessions with professional cuddlers for roughly a dollar a minute. Providing direct access

RATES & SERVICES

THE SINGLE SNUGGLE:
Select one Snuggler with whom to enjoy your relaxing snuggling session.

45 minute session: \$50
60 minute session: \$60
90 minute session: \$90

THE DOUBLE CUDDLE:
The Double Cuddle allows clients to cuddle with two Cuddlers concurrently.



45 minute session: \$100
60 minute session: \$120
90 minute session: \$180

THE OVERNIGHT CUDDLE:
The Overnight Cuddle is most enjoyable for well-established guests. It begins at 10:30pm and concludes at 7am. Please feel free to bring DVDs, books, and snacks.

overnight session: \$425

to intimate touch that is set outside of sexual interactions, Samuel and The Snuggery have very clear and precise ways of framing their work, and they rely on evidence-based science to justify their authority. According to Samuel, affectionate touch has been proven through scientific studies to have a number of vital health benefits, including lowering blood pressure, reducing stress, and curbing anxiety.²² The

Figure 15: Rates and services at The Snuggery (Jan. 2017).

Snuggery website explains that,

although nonsexual touch in North America is often discouraged, “the research is clear: humans need touch to thrive” (TheSnuggery.org). The Snuggery then, by its very framing, makes connections between physical encounters, health and bodily processes, and affective and emotional responses.

²² Though neither Samuel nor TheSnuggery.org cite specific studies, these findings seem to be widely (and vaguely) referenced. A rudimentary search of health-based scholarship seems to reiterate these benefits, though it is difficult to track down their scientific origins. See, for example, Dworkin-McDaniel (2011), Keltner (2010), MedBroadcast (no date), and Williams (2015).

Though The Snuggery is set up as a domestic space, in a private dwelling complete with couches, beds, and other “home-y” elements, it disrupts normative interactions that typically unfold within the realm of private spheres. A cuddle session with a single cuddler is booked for a minimum of forty-five minutes, costing USD\$50, while a sixty-minute session runs clients USD\$60 and a ninety-minute session totals USD\$90 (Figure 15). Clients can also opt for a double cuddle—with both Samuel herself and her co-worker Colleen—for double the price, or choose an eight-and-a-half hour overnight cuddle (available only to “well-established guests”) for USD\$425.

Samuel, who entered the business as a graduate student, reads as a white female, is a mother of a young child, and makes claims to a “natural proficiency” for snuggling. Samuel is cited in the *Daily Mail* as saying that, though she *hopes* it comes naturally to everybody, she feels that she was “born knowing how to snuggle” (Boyle 2012, n.p.). While the explicitly therapeutic and healing rhetoric upon which Samuel founded her business has lent credibility to Samuel’s work in the eyes of some, the professional cuddler has also faced significant antagonistic, reactionary responses. Her college threatened to expel her when they found out about her “side business,” and her neighbours have let her know that they disapprove as well (Agomuoh 2012; Strombo 2012). Samuel has reported, “Some have said I am worse than a prostitute because they think snuggling is more intimate than sex. I’ve been told I’m monetizing love” (cited in Boyle 2012, n.p.).

The reactionary statements reported by Samuel speak to how *intimacy* and *love* have been equated with one another and how their confluence has been naturalized in the public imaginary. Under dominant scripts, buying and/or selling sexual services can *occasionally* be justified (e.g., out of desperation, sexual failure, or as a matter of purely physical release), but buying and/or

selling intimacy cannot. Indeed, the coverage of Samuel and The Snuggery implies that there is a quiet acceptance that sex is commodifiable, but the intimacy involved in such interactions must remain unspoken. Even if the whorephobia of the statement “worse than a prostitute” could be temporarily bracketed off, the implicit hierarchy of relations it sets up cannot be overlooked. With its perceived lack of pragmatism, physical contact *without* sexual activity is somehow seen to be necessarily and inherently *more intimate*. This intimacy simultaneously makes its commodification more threatening to the dominant, normative order of things and codifies professional cuddling as being lower/worse on the social-morality scale, opening it to more vehement opposition in the public eye.

The backlash aimed at Samuel is instructive in thinking through the construction of normative intimacy. What happens when a price tag is put onto emotion work that is expected to be (a) free of charge and (b) offered out of love and/or duty and/or affection? What happens when relational economies are challenged through capitalizing on the gendered division of labour? And what happens when emotional encounters are offered extensively, for pay, to a multitude of people, who are often strangers? Popular news coverage of Samuel’s work reflects a deep ambivalence about how to approach these questions. On the one hand, Samuel’s business venture is treated as a clever and innovative approach to capitalizing on human need within the realities of late capitalism. On the other, moral judgments and affective discomforts have led to dismissive attitudes in much of the reporting on Samuel’s work.

Since the *Daily Mail* interviewed Samuel and drew attention to her seemingly unusual business venture, a series of online articles have cropped up with their own views on Samuel’s professional move. Though often accompanied by click-bait descriptors like “bizarre,” “odd,” and “peculiar,” the published pieces tend to approach The Snuggery largely as a legitimate and

respectable business, at least on a surface level. The fact that these intimate interactions belong to a specifically capitalist endeavour works, in this case, to legitimize the claim to the professionalism of Samuel's cuddling. The *International Business Times*, for instance, opens its story with the caption "A Rochester woman has turned intimacy into a commodity by starting her own professional cuddling business" and presents a fact-of-the-matter commercial venture that naturally *makes sense* within contemporary forms of capitalism (Agomuoh 2012).

Such stories also, however, tend to attribute Samuel with a relatively benign—sometimes verging on dismissively "silly"—approach.²³ This downplaying and trivializing attitude is accompanied by boundary-protecting invocations of supposedly pure and natural intimacy formations. Those who voice their disapproval of Samuel's work most frequently accuse her of "selling intimacy" or being an "intimacy profiteer," reasserting the dominant belief that intimacy is both somehow sacred and supposedly untouchable by the grip of commodification. These reactions hold especially true in relation to a woman circulating intimacy within privileged forms of social capital. The racialized and intellectual privilege Samuel occupies inspires complex boundary work that reinforces the limits of intimate space. The vast majority of the articles in existence at the time of this writing have been sure to distance Samuel's *nonsexual* economic exchanges from pretty much any and all forms of sex work, anxiously reiterating that "Sexual activity—or any touching that is sexual in nature—is against the rules" (Grossman 2012, n.p.). These framings simultaneously conjure up traditionalist Victorian and colonial notions of women's work as existing necessarily and exclusively within the domestic sphere. Additionally,

²³ For other examples of this type of coverage, see James Clothier (2012), "The World's Holdest Profession: Jackie is £35 an Hour Snuggler," Samantha Grossman (2012), "Snuggle With a 'Professional Cuddler' for \$60 an Hour," Spooky (2012), "Professional Cuddler Charges \$60 Per Hour of Cuddling and Snuggling," and Brittney Villalva (2012), "Jackie Samuel Snuggle Business: Offering Over 100 Non-Sexual Positions."

they implicitly place Samuel's labour firmly within the realm of emotional labour, focusing on gendered aspects of intimacy and care without acknowledging the gendered dynamics that make Samuel's claims legible to a broad audience of news readers and potential clients.

With this observation, I am drawing attention to the prescriptive qualities of the attachments and assumptions that continue to be elevated in coverage of *The Snuggery*. Several misguided claims persist in these narratives: it is as if sex is never intimate when paid for, and as if nonsexual acts of touch are always already intimate experiences. This response lacks an acknowledgment that potential intimacies forged at *The Snuggery* are not less impactful simply because they are part of an economic exchange, nor are they inherently less affectively charged for those who do experience them. That being said, intimate connections are also not a necessary or predictable part of the cuddling interaction. An alternative response—one that I maintain in my own analysis of intimacy throughout this project—moves to acknowledge the complex and uneven interactions between intimacy and sex, between sex and love, and between love and intimacy. Returning to my arguments in the Introduction of this dissertation, we can see how lines of thought that reduce the complexity of these interactions not only pre-empt and prescribe limited affective or emotive experiences of touch, but also reinstate strict regulations and narrow possibilities around the relationship between sex, sexuality, and intimacy—and, again, not incidentally, around interactions with race, gender, class markers, and other forms of social capital.

Echoing my discussion in the previous chapter, the narratives that can be articulated around affective bonds and intimate attachments are limited through the systemic devaluation of those whose bodies, whose work, whose desires, and whose intimacies somehow get it “wrong,” while connections that are deemed to be improper are pre-empted by and debased through a wide

range of state-sponsored constructions of intimacy, affect, and desire. Yet still, bringing an awareness of these affects and getting it wrong may open up crucial and productive paths. There are some indications, for instance, that Samuel might be well aware of the narratives of white innocence and purity she is capitalizing on—for example, the Victorian-inspired nightgown featured on the landing page of *The Snuggery* (Figure 14) is a knowing nod to, and potential subversion, perversion, and reclamation of, Victorian femininity. It is also a somewhat cheesy, yet strategic, form of marketing. Additionally, the promotional photos of Samuel with one of her clients that appear in multiple articles (e.g., Figure 13) indicate that Samuel’s ideal client base is made up of white, seemingly heterosexual, cisgender men. While this might be a realistic marketing strategy based on who holds the most disposable income, it could also be understood as a way to further capitalize on the narrative of white innocence Samuel and her co-worker Coleen readily inhabit. The types of intimacies created through the work-based connections of professional cuddlers—often between strangers and rarely in sustained or ongoing relationships—push back against dominant scripts even as they capitalize on them as part of their business model.

Through this kind of creative consumption and repurposing of dominant scripts, I see Samuel’s insistence on the monetizability of nonsexual intimacy as a dissent from the obligations towards normative conceptions of “joy” and “happiness” that are critiqued by Sara Ahmed (2010) in *The Promise of Happiness*. Instead of embracing the joy women supposedly receive from providing unpaid care, Samuel offers others (not incidentally, mostly men) access to that joy for a monetary fee. In Ahmed’s assessment, happiness is a potent form of worldmaking where one’s relation to it comes to structure their place in social, political, and economic systems. Given that the concept of happiness has come to define neoliberal ideals of good

citizenry and proper relations, the failure of marginalized Others to embrace normative notions of happiness have cast them as a threat to the status quo. In this sense, Ahmed continues her earlier affect-based work to ask not how we might define happiness, but rather how we might recognize what happiness *does* and how it circulates in social and political worlds.

In “Affective Economies,” Ahmed (2004) outlines how free-floating affects are often harnessed for political purposes and are solidified into named or known feelings, reinforcing dominant narratives by filtering responses into “appropriate” or “inappropriate” categories. Various affects have the effect of creating and maintaining borders and boundaries (e.g., ones that are political, classed, and/or raced), aligning individuals with communities and mobilizing people and pushing them to action, for better or worse. Ahmed establishes that emotions “do things” through their attachments (119) and that “the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds” by carrying both capital and cultural significance (121). Affects are similarly exploited for capitalist gain in everything from the advertising industry and narrative films to political campaigns. This type of policing of socio-sexual borders is apparent in the news coverage of Samuel, where hostility and dismissive attitudes halt only at the commercial viability of her business. In contrast, things look a little different in the context of paid dating and the apps that facilitate it, where the services provided are also commercial and capitalist in their ideological bases but appeal to both their paid and paying clients through a re-figuring of normative ideologies of love, intimacy, and romance.

[3.4]

Paid Dating and (Non-)Escort Apps.

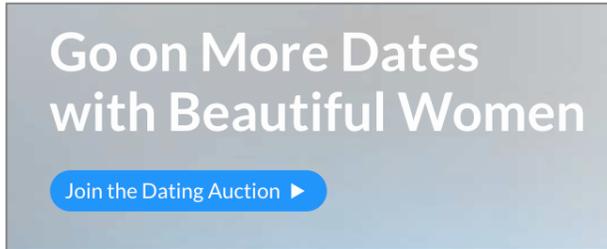


Figure 16: Detail from WhatsYourPrice.com.



Figure 17: Detail from Ohlala.com.

For-profit cuddling services are certainly not the only arena for creatively capitalizing on gendered and racialized forms of intimate labour. Against the backdrop of an ever-rising cost of living in urban centres and the continued erosion of stable employment, many people are necessarily finding ways of earning extra income through working multiple contracts, flexible labour, and precarious positions in the new “gig economy” (Florida 2012; Menéndez et al. 2007; Ross 2009; Vosko 2000). While young people and others facing labour precarity are increasingly relying on technological developments to facilitate work opportunities, young women are more specifically using them to renegotiate their terms of engagement with gendered forms of labour (Cranford, Vosko and Zekewich 2003a, 2003b; Gregg 2008). In particular, they are capitalizing on the popularity of online and digital platforms that facilitate participation in countless forms of sexual labour, fetish work, and, increasingly, non-sex-based forms of intimate labour as well. There are increasing calls of resistance—organized frequently online and through social media—for women, racialized people, and others who are marginalized within the work force to monetize previously “free” (i.e., unmonetized) interactions with men, as both a political act and a useful source of income.

For-profit economies have long existed around fetish dynamics of sugar baby–sugar daddy (a form of monetized age play) and findomme–pay pig (financial domination), but recent years

have ushered in an expanded range of sex-work-adjacent opportunities for young women and wealthy-enough men. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the past few years have seen an increase in the

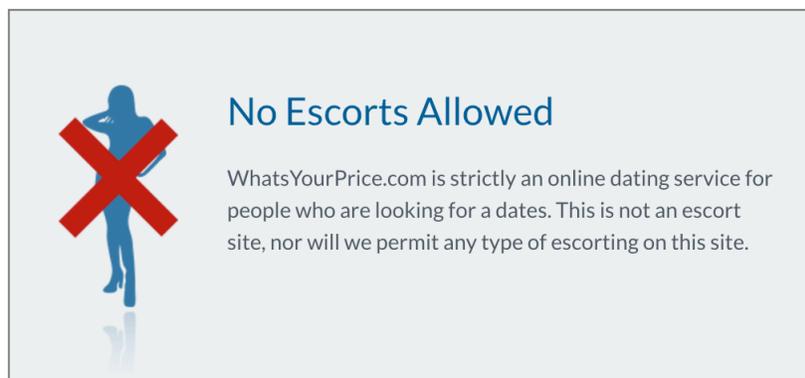


Figure 18: Detail from WhatsYourPrice.com.

development and launch of apps and websites that provide opportunities for paid dating—i.e., going out on dates in exchange for monetary compensation. These dates are not arranged with an explicit

assumption of sex, and most websites have disclaimers repudiating escort work or any illegal activity (Figure 18), but the specific details of what a “date” entails can be and are negotiated privately between payer and paid participants.

Currently, two of the largest and most popular paid dating services are WhatsYourPrice (accessible at WhatsYourPrice.com)—founded in the U.S. in 2011 by start up entrepreneur Brandon Wade—and Ohlala (accessible at Ohlala.com and through a corresponding mobile app)—launched first in Germany in 2015 and then in the U.S. in 2016 by co-founders Pia Poppenreiter and Torsten Stüber. Both of these services connect those who are looking to pay for dates with people who are looking to accept payment for dates. Both sites acknowledge a level of physical, emotional, and mental work involved in propositioning and meeting up with strangers for first dates, and each of them incorporates those realities into their marketing strategies. However, these are the bulk of their similarities, and the two services diverge sharply from there.

WhatsYourPrice focuses largely on the experiences of heterosexual men, boasting that they have more women than men signed up for their services and that the site is “a dating shortcut that

takes you from single to dating with one offer” (Figure 19; WhatsYourPrice.com). Conversely, Ohlala explicitly foregrounds the autonomy and agency of their female users. Their matching process avoids the catalogue model where male users scan a sea of female users’ profiles and

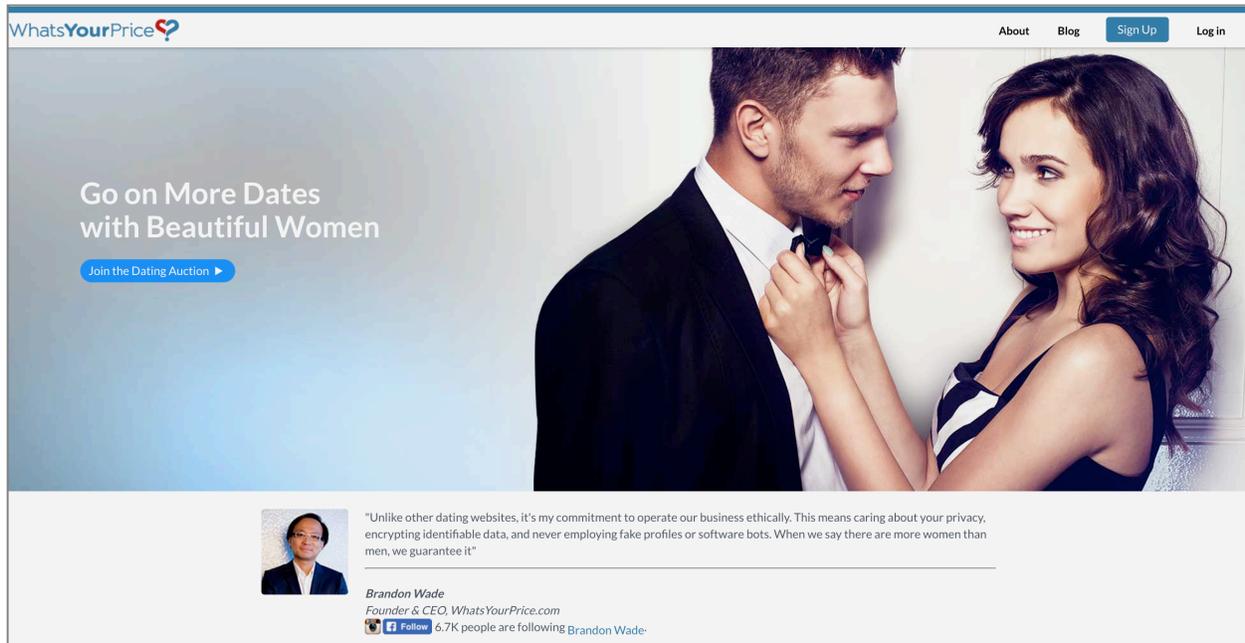


Figure 19: Landing page of WhatsYourPrice.com (Jan. 2017).

pick out the visuals they like best. Instead, Ohlala requires male users to first post requests for meet-ups that specify a timeframe and activities they desire before they have access to any female user’s profile (Figure 20). Ohlala’s blog explains their stance on this:

Women first see a man’s request before a man can ever view their profile, so the selection process is safe for women from the start. After that, women are free to directly say their expectations, and what happens is only a matter of *negotiation* and *free will* (“5 Reasons Why You Should Try Paid Dating (as a Woman),” emphasis in original).

Much of the English-language information provided on Ohlala focuses on the mutual satisfaction of men and women, but they maintain a notable emphasis on the experience of female users. Though their claims of being “safe for women from the start” might be overly optimistic, the fact that their marketing prioritizes the safety of

women is a marked difference from what is found on WhatsYourPrice.

These differing priorities perhaps reflect the backgrounds of the site developers and their positionalities. A description of Brandon Wade tells site visitors that “at 21 years old, Brandon Wade was a never-been-kissed geek” and so, after graduating from MIT and working for several

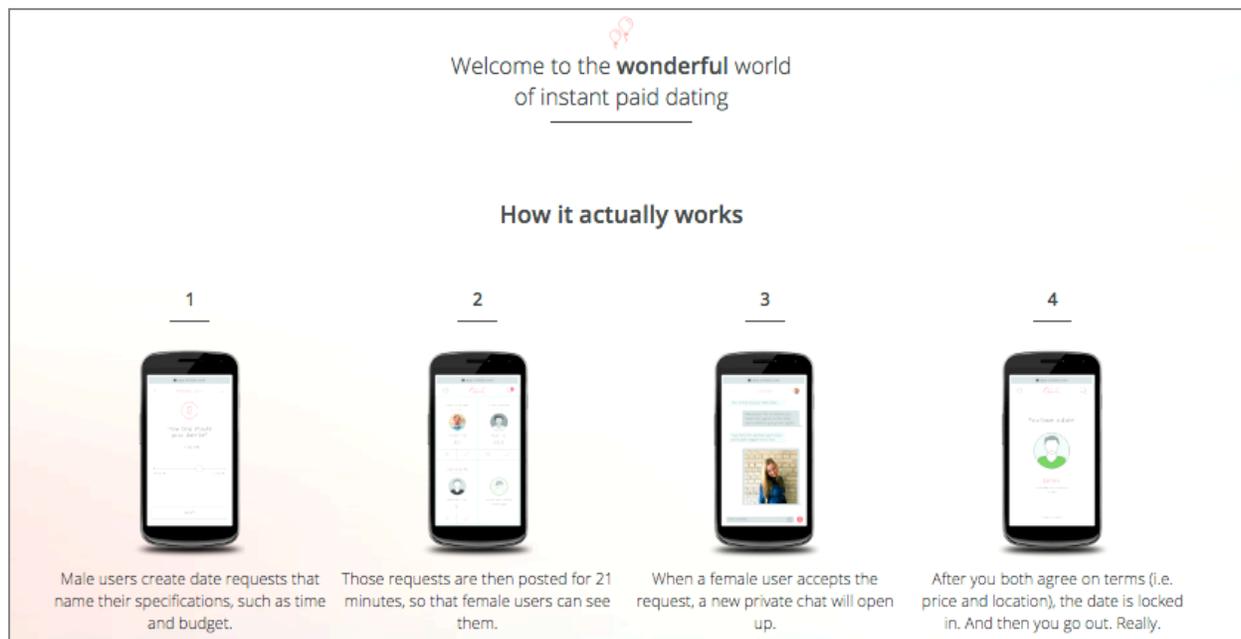


Figure 20: Detail from Ohlala.com (Jan. 2017).

fortune 500 companies, he created Seeking Arrangement—i.e., “the world’s largest Sugar Daddy dating website” (SeekingArrangement.com). From there, he went on to develop several other “niche dating sites,” including OpenMinded.com, which facilitates dating while in open relationships, MissTravel.com, which facilitates paid destination dates, and WhatsYourPrice, which “help[s] men like him” grab the initial attention of women who might not otherwise give them a chance (WhatsYourPrice.com, “About”). In a quite literal transference of this origin story onto its platform, WhatsYourPrice allows users to sign up as either “Generous” or “Attractive” (but never as both) and as either “Man” or “Woman” (but never as neither), though the vast majority of users are listed as either “Generous Men” or “Attractive Women.” This set of binary

taxonomies tells users that paying for dates is reflective of a character trait—*generosity*—but that being paid for one’s time requires only a particular set of appealing physical attributes. Wade frames this dynamic as natural and expected, and explains it through “dating economics”:

WhatsYourPrice.com is taking the science out of dating, because really it’s all about economics. Dating is about supply and demand, quality over quantity. We know what it takes to capture the attention of a beautiful girl, but after that first date, the rest is up to you (ibid.).

WhatsYourPrice vows to make dating “simple and more rewarding for everyone” (ibid.) by relying on this so-called generosity in a way that explicitly and ardently supports dominant hierarchies of heteronormative intimacy. Part of this support comes in the form of denying sex work and repudiating association with escorts. A statement from Wade tells site visitors,

WhatsYourPrice.com is the only patent pending auction dating system where you can offer beautiful girls cash for the chance to meet them on a first date. This however not an escort service, because you are dating normal girls and you are not[sic] paying for their time. Remember, it cost[sic] a girl both time and money to go on a first date – think makeup, outfit, time off work, baby sitting expenses (if she is a single mom), transportation, etc. By offering financial incentive, we are making it zero risk for any beautiful girl to give you a chance (WhatsYourPrice.com, “Date Beautiful Girls”).

The statement goes on to warn its generous users that even though finances may level the playing field enough to entice women to give them a first chance, unlike in the strictly-business arrangements of escorting, it will require work to convince attractive users to continue seeing them. Wade continues,

On the first date, it is entirely up to you to charm or seduce her with your wit, humor or amazing good looks and turn the first date into a second date and possibly a long term relationship. ... Do however be realistic. Romance and chemistry is an art. If you are not good looking, then at least be aware of that and have something else to offer -- be it your magnetic personality, financial generosity or excellent humor. Don’t expect a beautiful women[sic] who has plenty of choices to pick you if you simply have little to offer. Finding a beautiful girlfriend is a process of self improvement, and WhatsYourPrice.com is a great way to meet beautiful women, gain the confidence, gather feedback from your dates and try to improve yourself (ibid.).

This statement illuminates another layer to the economics of dating—users are not just paying for the opportunity to date beautiful women, but they are paying for the opportunity to “gather feedback from [their] dates” in the service of becoming more enticing as social and romantic partners. Wade’s statement paints a rather bleak picture of the male users of WhatsYourPrice, recognizing them as likely not very good-looking, lacking in confidence, and in need of improvement. This framing, however, also bridges the concept of dating economics with that of interpersonal labour, wherein paid users are also expected to train unattractive-yet-generous men to be better daters and, by extension, better people.

Ohlala presents yet another interpretation of the economics of dating. Rather than focus on a need to level the playing field with financial compensation, this service appeals to its user base through an urban sensibility of time scarcity, and it boasts a fast-turnaround on date negotiation that is economical and efficient for both parties. The site self-describes as “a mobile dating service that’s as on-the-go as you are” (Ohlala.com) and focuses on the convenience and efficiency of having an app that prioritizes near-instant dating; in the U.S. version, date requests remain active and visible to all female users in the immediate geographic area for only twenty-one minutes before they expire.²⁴ Because of this unique aspect, tech profiler *Engadget* describes the site as “a bit like a cross between Tinder and Uber” (Seppala 2016). According to Poppenreiter, this immediacy benefits both payers and payees, since neither party is expected to waste time and energy with a back-and-forth chat session that may take hours, days, or even weeks before a meet up is negotiated (Yoshida 2016).

Not incidentally, Poppenreiter is a former investment banker and holds a Masters in Business Ethics. She claims to have learned the appeal of cutting down on dating turnaround

²⁴ On the German version, date requests remain active for a leisurely 24 hours.

time from her first app development, PEPPR: a service that, unlike Ohlala, is essentially and explicitly a tool of connection for sexual escorts and clients. When PEPPR first launched in Berlin—where prostitution is legal—in 2014, Poppenreiter was hoping to make the process of soliciting clients easier and more efficient for sex workers (Trew 2016). The app saw reasonable success, but Poppenreiter was still unsatisfied and wanted to continue developing new products (ibid.). She has since cut ties with PEPPR and is now focusing her business energy on Ohlala, though some similarities in both the platform and functionality of the two remain.

With Ohlala’s recent expansion into the U.S. market, where sex work is resolutely *illegal*, the branding of their services has shifted significantly—muted tones now welcome



Figure 21: Advertisement for Ohlala, via Ohlala.com (Jan. 2017).

potential service users, emboldening them to “follow their curiosity” (Figure 21) and give paid dating a try. By using carefully coded language that evades the issue of sex on dates, Ohlala skirts

around the legal grey zone of exchanging money for (potential) sexual activity through a claim to plausible deniability. Poppenreiter has been asked about this issue on more than one occasion, but she holds strong in her answer: because she does not attend the dates of her clients, she has no way of knowing what they do or do not do after their interactions move

beyond the confines of the app (Trew 2016; Seppala 2016).

The official Ohlala blog also positions the draw of paid dating as being about time efficiency: “Time is a precious commodity, and people who want to pay to avoid the disappointment of being unable to find dates can use Ohlala” (Blog.Ohlala.com, “Just What Exactly Is ‘Paid Dating?’”). The company places itself alongside other, non-paid, dating apps—invoking the Tinder practice of “swiping” by referencing “swipetastrophes,” for example (ibid.)—to firmly encode itself as a dating service rather than as an escort app. But this approach also differs from WhatsYourPrice in that it manages to avoid the heteromasculine posturing of “getting girls” (see Pascoe 2007) that is pre-determined by the marketing of WhatsYourPrice.

Neither WhatsYourPrice nor Ohlala is solely reinforcing of hegemonic norms or of countercultural expectations, and perhaps that is a key point: as for-profit, capitalist endeavours, paid dating services must find creative and unique ways to monetize heteronormative dating codes, just as their largely-female roster of date providers attempt to negotiate decreased job security and rising costs of living. In order to be marketable and enticing to paying users, paid daters are encouraged to take on an identity that teases the line between playful innocence—appearing not too forward and not too “escorty”—and spirited sexiness in order to get high offers. A WhatsYourPrice blog post on “How to Receive \$500+ Dates” foregrounds the importance of *fun* in a profile and tells users that photos are the most effective way to express it: “Activity-based photos show personality and engage prospective dates. *No one wants to date a boring girl, show them your fun side!*” (WhatsYourPrice.com/Blog, “How to Receive \$500+ Dates”; emphasis in original). The blog post continues with advice on creating strong “About Me” sections, saying that the first paragraph should show

personality (which should be, necessarily, fun fun fun!): “This could be a fun, playful blurb about what you like to do for fun. In turn, this could include the places you would enjoy frequenting for a date. This is where you keep the reader interested and begging for more, more, more” (ibid.). These pieces of advice highlight the value of taking on the role of a tease, but one who is still approachable and one who is ultimately attainable.

Through a careful balance of commodification and authentic experience of connection and/or possibility, the practice of paid dating simultaneously solidifies and disrupts heteronormative gender scripts. Even as it relies on these normative codes as a foundation for business models, the act of paid dating blurs boundaries between paying for intimacy, paying for sex, paying for time, and/or paying for intimate labour. Paid dating differs from “the girlfriend experience” provided by escorts (or does it?), but it is still a practice that disrupts the taken-for-grantedness of feminized unpaid labour by insisting on payment for the labour of everyday activities.

[3.5]

Surrogate Partners

Unlike professional cuddling, which stages physically intimate encounters that are isolated from sex, and unlike paid dating, which stages everyday-intimate encounters that may or may not involve (or lead to) sex, sexual therapy provided through surrogate partnership stages another challenge to the false links between love, romance, and sex. Surrogate partnership centres sexual interactions that are necessarily isolated from other kinds of (emotional) intimacy. Sexual Surrogate Therapy (SST) was developed by Masters and Johnson (1970) as an experimental, and controversial, practice “recommended for individuals with traumatic brain injury and other neurologic disorders that significantly alter or compromise sexual functioning” (Rybarczyk

2011, 2281).²⁵ SST focuses largely on “relaxation techniques in intimate situations, effective communication, sensual and sexual touching, and social skills training” (ibid.), and the use of sexual surrogates has expanded beyond clients with traumatic brain injury and severe physical limitations to include those with other barriers to sex, such as anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress (Dauw 1988; Freckelton 2013; Weiderman 1998). Still, Masters and Johnson’s early research continues to inform contemporary models of sexual surrogacy. The International Professional Surrogates Association (IPSA), for example, explicitly names Masters and Johnson’s techniques as the foundation for their guiding principles and describes their approach in the following terms:

In [Surrogate Partner Therapy], a client, a therapist and a surrogate partner form a three-person therapeutic team. The surrogate participates with the client in structured and unstructured experiences that are designed to build client self-awareness and skills in the areas of physical and emotional intimacy. [...] As the days pass, clients find themselves becoming more relaxed, more open to feelings, and more comfortable with physical and emotional intimacy (IPSA n.d., “What Is Surrogate Partner Therapy?”).

Because of the therapeutic context, surrogate partnership relies on a strategically fabricated sense of emotional–physical distance, wherein physical therapy often accompanies a working-through of barriers to emotional intimacy in the client’s everyday life but simultaneously seeks to mediate any production of emotional intimacy within the surrogate–client relationship. This

²⁵ On their webpage, the International Professional Surrogates Association now identifies a wide range of clients and a wide range of motivating factors for people seeking surrogate therapy: “The problems that motivate clients to seek Surrogate Partner Therapy range from general social anxiety to specific sexual dysfunctions. Concerns for any gender might result from one of the following: problematic relationships, medical conditions, negative body image or physical disfigurement; sexual, physical or emotional abuse and/or trauma (rape or incest, for instance), confusion about sexual orientation, lack of social or sexual self-confidence. Some common sexual concerns for male clients involve dissatisfaction with orgasm, ejaculation, and/or erection difficulties. Female clients’ sexual issues might involve difficulties with orgasmic release or penetration. Clients of any gender may seek therapy to address problems relating to lack of experience, fear of intimacy, shame or anxiety regarding sex, low level of arousal, or lack of sexual desire” (SurrogateTherapy.org, “What Is Surrogate Partner Therapy?”).

structure raises a set of questions that echo others explored in this chapter thus far: Where can the line be drawn between physical intimacy and emotional intimacy? Between sex and performance? Or between presentation-of-self and experience-of-self? The goal of intimate companionship is so often narrated as something one *finds*, but what about the labour it takes to produce it? Returning to one of my key questions in Chapter Two, must intimacy be experienced authentically by both/all parties in order to be affectively impactful? And if so, how can we even measure an “authentic” experience of intimacy in the first place?

Some of these tensions are explored in Ben Lewin’s feature film *The Sessions* (2012; Figure 22). *The Sessions* is notable in that it is one of the only widely distributed feature films that centres a surrogate partner as a lead character, and it offers some tender insights into the intimate complexities of surrogacy work.²⁶ As a fictionalized version of true events, *The Sessions* follows thirty-eight year old protagonist Mark O’Brien as he loses his virginity to a sex surrogate. Having contracted polio in 1955 at the age of six, real-life O’Brien was paralyzed from the neck down and relied on an iron lung machine to help with his breathing. Aided by his acute sense of observational wit and humour, O’Brien went on to study English at UC Berkeley and was a journalist, poet, and disability rights activist until his death in 1999. In 1990, he published “On Seeing a Sex Surrogate,” an article about his experiences navigating sexuality, desire, and disability that included an account of his therapy sessions with surrogate Cheryl Cohen Green. *The Sessions* takes O’Brien’s article as inspiration and imagines in more detail the interactions between the characters of Mark and Cheryl. While the first half of the film centres

²⁶ An exception to this almost-total lack of representation is the independent film *She’s Lost Control* (dir. Anja Marquardt, 2014), which debuted at the Berlin International Film Festival and won the CICAIE International Confederation of Art Cinemas Award. Described as a “dark drama film,” *She’s Lost Control* sits in stark contrast to *The Sessions*. Following a surrogate who falls for her emotionally stunted male client, *She’s Lost Control* is a twisted psychological horror-
esque film that explores the dangers of “losing control” over professional intimate boundaries.

Mark's negotiation of sexual desire and disability, the latter part of the narrative follows Cheryl more closely: the audience is drawn into the complexity of her feelings about working with Mark and the labour of maintaining her professional emotional boundaries.

The film opens with a voiceover from Mark, who is immediately and decidedly humorous. Mark's position is accompanied by a healthy dose of well-earned cynicism regarding his lack of mobility and a never-ending stream of home care workers and personal attendants. Early in the film, Mark falls in love with one care worker who laughs at his jokes and asks personal questions about his life and desires. When Mark professes his love for her, however, she denies any mutual feelings and leaves his employment. When a new care worker, Vera, enters the picture, Mark is able to develop new kinds of intimate knowledge, and he accesses a different way of life. When Mark is asked to write a news piece on sex and disability, Vera accompanies him as he conduct interviews with several people with disabilities about their sex lives. It is only through this assignment that Mark realizes he may actually be able to have a mutually desired sexual relationship, and he starts to express interest in exploring that further. When he interviews a sex therapist, he learns about surrogate partnership and is



Figure 22: Poster advertisement for The Sessions.

referred to surrogate worker Cheryl.

Mark is initially hesitant to hire someone for sex, even a therapist, but he consults his priest, Father Brendan, about the moral aspects of it all. Mark expresses fear, but also excitement, at the prospect of consensual sexual activity with another human being—something previously unthought to him. He wonders aloud with Father Brendan about the morality of paying for sex, even in a therapeutic context. The exchange between the two men shows how Mark’s disability and “late-in-life” virginity becomes the impetus for justifying the ethics of fornication, in a move to ease both of their anxieties:

FATHER: How old are you?

MARK: Thirty-eight.

FATHER: Why exactly now?

MARK: I never had any spare cash before. That’s a major factor, and I’m probably getting close to my use-by date.

FATHER: And this is what you want my advice about? Fornication?

MARK: Your advice as a friend.

FATHER: And do I have the casting vote, so to speak?

MARK: Let’s say I value your advice just as much as I do the therapist’s.

FATHER: You’re serious, aren’t you?

MARK: I think sex is a serious matter. It’s one of the most persistent themes in the bible. So, is it possible for me to know a woman, in the biblical sense, and do I want to find out?

FATHER: And you want my opinion?

MARK: Please.

Father Brendan contemplates for a few moments. He looks up at the statue of Jesus, then makes a decision.

FATHER: I know in my heart that He’ll give you a free pass on this one. Go for it.

MARK: What?

FATHER: I said go for it.

MARK: Really?

FATHER: If you feel up to it. Do you feel up to it?

MARK: To tell the truth, I’m scared.

FATHER: Then we should pray.

Father Brendan and Mark pray together.

After this conversation, Mark ends up hiring Cheryl, and Vera facilitates the therapy sessions. When she first appears on screen, Cheryl is friendly but professional. She introduces

herself and sets out clear boundaries around therapist–client dynamics, informing Mark that there is a six-session limit to their therapy and that they will focus on awareness exercises and therapeutic interactions. Cheryl distances herself from other sex-based work almost immediately, within the first minute of their conversation: “Although the aim is for us to have sex, I’m not a prostitute.” She then qualifies her statement, saying, “I have nothing against prostitutes, but there’s a difference—we can talk about that later.” The main difference, according to her, is that sex workers aim to secure repeat business whereas surrogates want to help their clients move on to have sexual relationships with other people. Cheryl thus highlights that the *lack of* sustained or ongoing connection is a sign of success in a surrogate’s world, firmly positioning them within the realm of not-quite-sex-workers and challenging heteronormative standards of intimacy’s sustained longevity.

As the film progresses, the audience gains more insight into the emotional journey Cheryl experiences in working with Mark. In this regard, the narrative diverges from O’Brien’s account of true events and imagines Cheryl’s perspective through the fictional frame of the film. Even in her first session with Mark, Cheryl shows some vulnerability when she is unsure of how to approach Mark’s disability-related physical sensitivity. After Mark screams in pain when she moves his arm in an uncomfortable way, Cheryl excuses herself to the bathroom where she collects herself, though she returns after only a minute, calm and collected. Over time, as trust is built between the pair, Cheryl grows increasingly fond of Mark’s clever intellect and emotional warmth. She shares personal details about her life, which she previously stated she does not do with clients. After a couple of sessions, Mark becomes fixated on providing her with an experience of pleasure alongside his own, and though she initially deflects by re-centering his gratification as a client, she agrees to work on simultaneous orgasm. After only four sessions, she

has trouble holding true to her professional emotional boundaries and agrees to go for coffee with Mark outside of their session time.

Eventually, Cheryl's feelings for Mark grow to disrupt the intimacy of her marriage, her family life, and her professionalism; he becomes the site of her intimate undoing. In some respects this is a common narrative trope, where the disabled character compensates for their disability with witty humour and a "good attitude," not dissimilar to Brandon Wade's calls to mitigate unattractiveness with generosity on *WhatsYourPrice*. In this sense, the person with a disability mitigates their "failed" able-bodiedness with an achievement of "successful" heterosexual desire that meets most other standards of normative gender, race, and sexual expression (Barounis 2013; McRuer 2003; Wilkerson 2012). On the other hand, *The Sessions* breaks from stereotypical representations of people with disabilities as sexless, desireless, downtrodden, and unattractive (Clare 2003; Erickson 2007, 2013) by treating the intimacy between Mark and Cheryl as honest, legitimate, and deeply affecting. Sex scenes between the two are softly lit with warm colours, are accompanied by quiet piano music, and feature close up shots of faces and eyes, indicating a kind of intimacy that is unencumbered by performative versions of sexuality. The build up of sexual-emotional dichotomies in *The Sessions* and the subsequent collapsing of the boundaries between them signals a reformulation of intimate possibilities. In this case, the reformulation—once again—both serves to support and challenge dominant scripts, but it nonetheless disrupts coherent and simplistic narratives of how and where intimacy should and could be formed, under what circumstances, and with which bodies.

[3.6]

Monetized Magic

Though sexual surrogacy and professional cuddling may initially seem to be on opposite

ends of a physical–emotional spectrum, they may have more in common than is immediately apparent. Though casual cuddling is often associated with emotional intimacy, professional cuddling services rely instead on the benefits of physical closeness and human touch, not the emotional aspects. The physical and psychological benefits of touch, proximity, and care are central to the therapeutic effects of cuddle sessions offered by Jackie Samuel and The Snuggery. Similarly, surrogate partnership relies on physicality rather than emotional connection. In fact, it necessitates a mediation of emotional closeness within the surrogate–client relationship that brackets out intimacy beyond the physical. The character of Cheryl highlights this necessity when the success of her mediation is broken and emotional connection breaks through into her professional obligations.

Dominant understandings of intimacy dictate that it is held outside of capital; that is, we are not meant to monetize our intimate relations else we disrupt their natural formations and unfoldings. Similarly, we are not meant to expose the ways that many of us inhabit or perform intimacy for the purposes of a variety of paid engagements. These narrative defaults occlude the work that feminized and racialized people have been doing for centuries both by force and/or by will. It also downplays, denies, and devalues the emotion work that women and people of colour so often get stuck with. The naturalization of women as inherently more nurturing, caring, and maternal, as well as the naturalization of people of colour as being closer to nature, more spiritually attuned, and more conducive to the magical and emotional needs of others also creates the continued conditions for disproportionate rates of poverty and economic hardship. The feminized and racialized divisions of work and emotions make for a clear outcome: More work for less pay. More specifically, more emotionally taxing work for less pay.

In reading professional cuddling, paid dating, and sexual surrogacy alongside one another,

we can see how monetization does not, in fact, dictate the level of intimate or emotional connection people may or may not experience, and neither paying for nor being paid for the interaction prescribes one's intimate experience. The forms of not-quite-sex-work explored in this chapter are three examples of how people have entered into a complex negotiation with the gendered, sexed, and racialized imperatives of intimacy. As gestured to earlier in this chapter, Sara Ahmed (2010) has exposed the interconnected nature of affect, embodiment, subjectivity, and citizenship as she maps out the socio-cultural complexities of those who perform, produce, and are deemed worthy of "happiness" and/or "unhappiness." In a related exploration, Lauren Berlant (2011) has considered the uneven trajectories of "good life fantasies" as they map onto gendered, racialized, and sexed bodies. These socio-cultural analyses reveal that the designation of "proper" or "improper" affects—or *expressions of* affect—play a significant role in how societies see and engage with intimacy, understand intimacy, narrate intimacy, and, arguably, also how individuals may experience intimacy. The monetized practices I have contemplated in this chapter circulate in ways that expand intimate possibilities and produce more nuanced forms of intimate knowledge.

The silence around the regulation and persistent reiteration of intimate imperatives also provides an in-point for the negotiation of and creative engagement with intimate norms, which is often paramount to the experiences of those on the socio-sexual margins and those wishing to rethink intimate possibilities. As Berlant (2000) suggests, "rethinking intimacy calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects" (6-7). A key facet of intimacy, she explains, is that it typically requires one to "remain unproblematic"—certainly not to enjoy being a powerful healer or witch, a bitch, or a tease. When the fantastic

relations of hegemonic intimacy fail, we see general publics launching more hostile attempts at regulation and control.

In this chapter, I have shown how such hostilities organize the logics of reporting on *The Snuggery*, wherein attempts to delegitimize or minimize the potential impact of these affective encounters remain journalistically paramount. Similarly, I have discussed how the fantastic relations of intimacy function to organize the socio-cultural constructions behind the marketing of websites like *WhatsYourPrice* and *Ohlala*, and they impact the ways narrative film can represent sexual healers if they want their characters to be legible to a mass audience. If we wish to destabilize the supposedly self-evident coherent narratives of intimacy—one of my own core goals with this dissertation project—we must bring intimacy to the surface and engage with its complexity in attempts to resist normalizing constraints. While the production of affect cannot be simply controlled in a top-down manner, Sara Ahmed (2004) reminds us that it can be and is repeatedly harnessed, mobilized, and/or invoked in ways that are informed by racialized hierarchies of animacy and agency, and which are reinforced through structures of intimate privilege.

We have only to look to the recent U.S. presidential election to see another example of how these narratives continue to function in very real and material(ized) ways. Faced with the divisive strategies of Trump and the hatred and prejudice that is continually being reinforced through his staffers, critical thinkers/actors/dissenters must continue to develop creative strategies of resistance. Though none of the practices discussed in this chapter are ones solely of resistance, my broader project of reimagining intimate possibilities is critical in a time when the American president is hell-bent on making the world smaller, less united, and more angry.

The case studies of this chapter illuminate how Halberstam's (2010) notion of "failure" is

multifaceted and cannot always be easily measured: getting intimacy “wrong” in these contexts, within dominant narratives of romance and love, may actually be simultaneously getting it “right” in the context of hypercapitalism and commodity trading. The interconnected labours involved in the concomitant processes of producing intimacy, managing emotions, and healing psychosexual aspects of clients refashion intimate possibilities by resisting any one form of coherent approach. Perhaps, then, the intimate knowledges that are forged within the moments of encounter in professional cuddling, those curated through paid dating services, and those complexly negotiated by sexual surrogates and clients can be instructive for imagining spaces where we can all fail better, fail harder while casting a wider intimate net, and fail with more affective spark.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE GENEROUS REACH OF INTERSPECIES ALLIANCES.

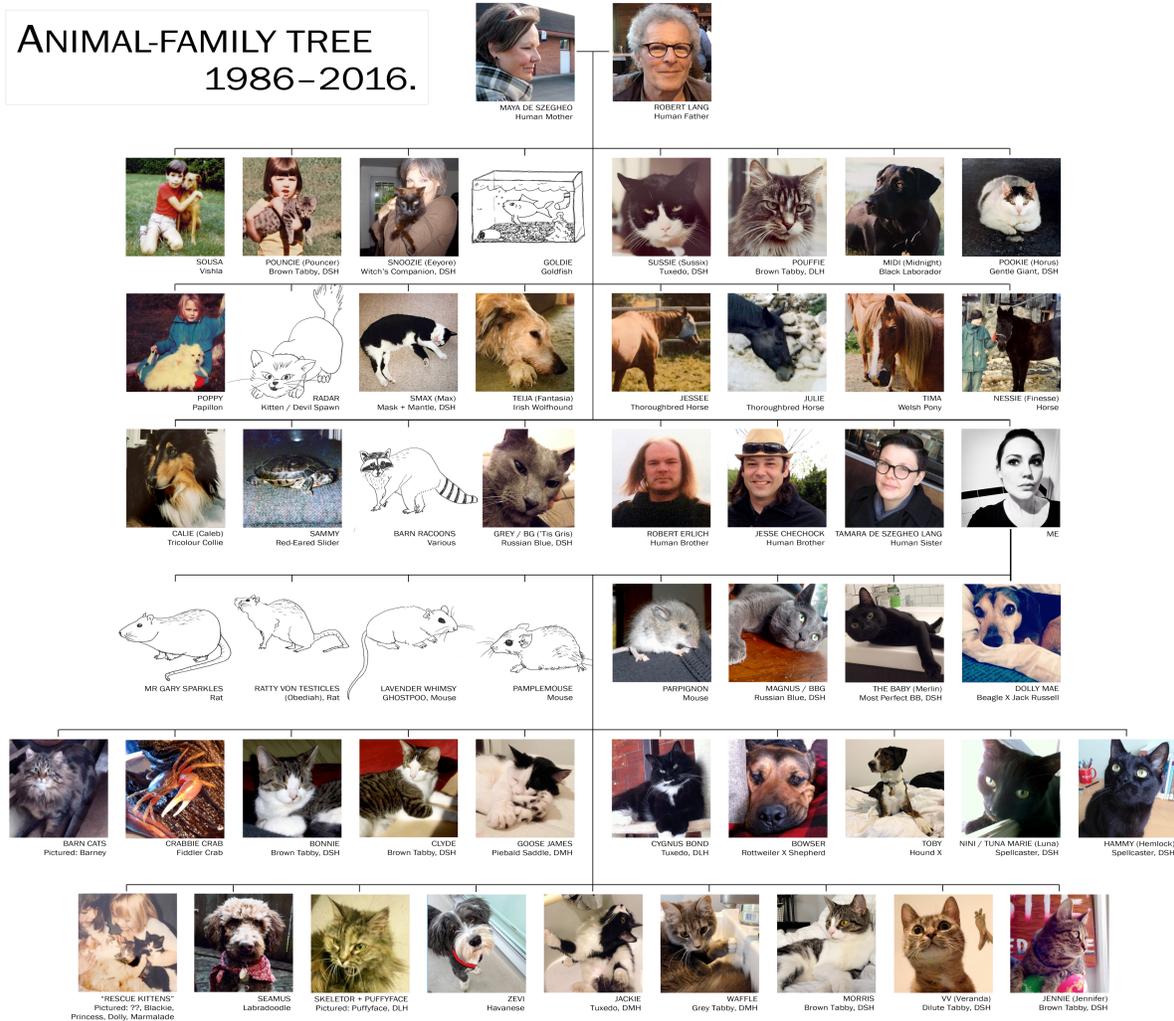


Figure 23: My Animal-Family Tree (2016), by Naomi de Szegheo-Lang.

[4.1]

Unhuman Affections

If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming *with*—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake.

— Donna Haraway (2008), 244.

I grew up alongside many animals. From rescue cats to rescue dogs, rescue horses and rescue turtles, we always seemed to have a full house. I remember one day in grade five when I was home sick, my dad rushed downstairs to tell my mom that a barn cat had gotten into the house and was curled up in my brother's room. My dad was bemused at how comfortable the cat had made himself, but my mom immediately saw through the ruse—this was no barn cat; my brother had been willingly sheltering him and hiding him from my parents. We found out later that my brother had been sneaking small amounts of food up to his room for weeks already in attempts to keep Horus (later affectionately nicknamed “Pookie”) well-housed and protected from his previous, neglectful, owners. The plan worked, and Pookie lived out the rest of his long and healthy life with us on the farm.

When I moved out on my own in my late teens, I continued the family tradition of animal companionship. I housed several temporary beasts, watching kittens for a few months while my friends moved out of town for the summer and taking care of the pet rats from my roommates' summer camp during the school year. After finishing my undergraduate degree and securing an office administrative position, it didn't take long for me to realize that I finally had the time and finances to support a pup of my own. I adopted a small, incredibly loving, and ever-present dog named Dolly Mae (Figure 24). We have been—thanks, in part, to her intense separation anxiety—bonded together ever since. Dolly ended up coming in to the office with me (thank goodness for flexible work environments), and over the course of the last nine years, she has also

helped me in the transition to supposed adulthood. I have never doubted the importance of



Figure 24: My littlest love, Ms. Dolly Mae.

nonhuman relations in developing my sense of self, even in times when they have taken a backseat to the fast-paced hustle of millennial life. The intimacies I have found with my nonhuman friends, as well as the human–human connections I have found through a shared love of animals, have been central to my own processes of building a strong intimate knowledge base. This chapter has emerged from my life-long valuing of

interactions with the various intelligences of nonhuman life, and it builds on previous chapters in service of diversifying intimate knowledge through an interruption of human exceptionalism. I take up the work of scholars who have long been theorizing human–nonhuman animal intimacies in order to complicate my appreciative, though previously unexamined, experiences of interspecies alliances.

Theorizing the Nonhuman

The figure of the nonhuman animal has long been taken up in feminist, queer, and postcolonial texts, though often incongruently, to explore the devaluing of all that is seen to be not-quite-human or not-yet-human. Current strains of posthumanist, queer, and trans-centered animal studies can be traced back to earlier works probing species-based hierarchies of human supremacy. Often cited as an early animal studies text, Thomas Nagel’s philosophical consideration of sensorial experience in “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974) queries our ability

as humans to move beyond existing human-centered structures of thinking and feeling and suggests that the human–animal divide is a fiction that impedes intellectual and empathic growth. Texts that have come out of the crux of women’s studies and animal activism over the past three decades (e.g., Adams 1990; Haraway 2003, 2008; Kemmerer 2011) stem from an understanding that the way a society engages with nonhuman animals is often telling of the way it engages with its marginalized human subjects. Many Indigenous peoples have steadily engaged the co-constitution of human and nonhuman forces, though these ontologies have gone largely unrecognized in the Western, non-Indigenous academy (TallBear 2011, 2015; Four Arrows et al. 2010). As Billy-Ray Belcourt (2015) argues, “animal domestication, speciesism, and other modern human-animal interactions are only possible because of and through the historic and ongoing erasure of Indigenous bodies and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion” (3). Meanwhile, postcolonial analyses (e.g., Fanon [1963] 2004; Few and Tortorici 2013; Gossett 2015; Mbembe 2003) magnify this position by drawing attention to histories of scientific racism, slavery, and white supremacy in nation-building projects that have positioned bodies of colour—in particular, Black and Indigenous bodies—as animalistic and less-than human, locating them as liminal subjects and excluding them from the human–animal binary altogether.

As with other normalized structures of privilege, ideas about the in/animacy of matter are largely taken for granted in settler colonial contexts, and they thus remain unmarked. We can, however, make visible their inner workings by drawing out the intricacies of moments where non-normative and disobedient structures of intimacy take hold. These moments interrupt the stronghold of normative operating logics and cleaves apart the tightly wound associations of intimacy, species hierarchies, and in/animate agencies. My personal relationships to and

constellations of intimacy have their foundations in my childhood environments as much as in interpersonal interactions: the thick and unending spider webs found in the barn rafters, the dappled sunlight flitting through the spruce trees on the hill, and the babbling brook weaving its way through the mud and stone-filled earth all inform my understandings of what it means to be intimately connected. Still, the stories I am most likely to share in casual conversation about my intimate engagements have been limited to those co-actors that have a brain, a body, and a pulse. There is an unwritten sense of intimate belonging and unbelonging imbedded here, too.

Along these lines, this chapter extends my discussion of intimate citizenship and affective belonging that was included in Chapter Two by thinking through ways that dominant, Western and Eurocentric hierarchies of matter impact understandings of so-called proper intimacy and dictate norms of human–nonhuman interaction. As previously discussed, the very foundation of citizenship rests on having access to dominant forms of recognition and legibility that are not available to—nor desired by—everyone. These legibilities become particularly intricate when we start to consider nonhuman actors alongside and within human constellations (e.g., Ahuja 2016; Kirksey 2014; Weston 2016). My own academic work in this field has been largely inspired by collections on interspecies and multispecies theorizing that have emerged more recently in queer- and trans- focused journals (e.g., Chen and Luciano for *GLQ* in 2015; Hayward and Weinstein for *TSQ* in 2015; Livingston and Puar for *Social Text* in 2011). The appeal of these texts lies in their critical foregrounding of ever-increasingly nuanced connections between wide-stemmed processes of feminization, racialization, ableism, criminalization, settler colonialism, and environmental devastation.

Proximate Lives

In this chapter, I tease out these networks through cases of broadly appealing yet

unexpected bonds witnessed (and documented) between interspecies friends. To elucidate the affective limitations of human–human relationship imperatives, I first look to popular news coverage of interspecies friendships—a seemingly never-ending stream of online vignettes dedicated to cross-species animal bonds, most often highlighting “unlikely pairings” between two or more nonhuman species that are otherwise assumed to be natural adversaries (e.g., cat and mouse, or tiger and goat). The unlikeliness of the intimacies found in these interspecies friendships is a decidedly palatable disruption to the intimate status quo, and it provides both conceptual and virtual space to much-needed possibilities for other kinds of unlikely affective connections to form as well. I draw on the work of Sianne Ngai (2010) and Allison Page (2017) to argue that, while these stories are frequently circulated as mindless distractions, the pleasant and often light-hearted “cuteness” of the accounts also performs a type of affective labour for the humans that consume them.

To further consider the affective interactions circulating between humans and nonhuman animals, I take up the beautiful and multilayered interspecies tale that is woven through the documentary film *Kedi* (dir. Ceyda Torun, 2017). Focusing on the interactions between human subjects and street cats in Istanbul, Turkey, *Kedi* follows seven feline subjects while interviewing some of the many humans who collectively care for—and, in turn, receive care from—the cats that make up a significant part of their socio-cultural worlds. The affective labour I discussed in Chapter Three circulates differently in this case, where the interactions are decidedly nonsexual but are also deeply intimate and co-constitutive. The street cats in Istanbul, as portrayed in *Kedi*, willingly and repeatedly approach their human counterparts for various interactions—resource procurement (e.g., food, medicine), play, companionship, and physical affection. There is some level of reciprocity and mutual symbiosis in this dynamic, to be sure, but there are also clear

networks of care that are freely developed through these interspecies interactions.

The familiarity of human-proximate animals is key in facilitating this type of affective transfer. As Donna Haraway argues in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), species proximity informs our human experiences of animal–human relations: the closer and more familiar we are with a nonhuman being or species, the more likely we are to project our own intimate desires onto them. Conversely, the more distance we have from a species, the more difficult it is for us to imagine building meaningful intimacy. The cats in *Kedi* are familiar enough in their daily travels to be relatable and appealing to a North American audience. Similarly, the video clips that are most frequently shared on social media include at least one animal that has been domesticated in Western cultures. Taking this into account, I engage an extended textual analysis of some YouTube videos and Instagram news feeds that, taken together, reinforce human proximity to domesticated animals and bring unfamiliar species closer to us in North America (for example, a recent infatuation with local Toronto capybaras at the High Park Zoo—see D’Amore 2017; King 2016; Villa 2017).

I contend that the main pedagogic value of examining interspecies friendships, through the ways they are sometimes improbable and unlikely, is actually held in more of an unlearning—a taking apart of neoliberal frameworks that promote individualistic models of scarcity and competition while replenishing them with expanded possibilities for multispecies connection and alliance. This chapter considers pop cultural representation and social media in the dissemination of intimate encounters with the nonhuman animal other. In so doing, I seek to examine the narratives of animacy that are filtered down into mass culture and where there might be cracks visible in the hegemonic order of things. Rather than take up children’s media (e.g., Disney films, animated TV shows, puppet theatre), which typically encourage more imagination and

interspecies play, I focus on adult-centered media forms: online media and documentary film.

The majority of primary sources I cite in this chapter have been published online to social media platforms (e.g., Instagram; YouTube) and popular news sites (e.g., *BoredPanda*; *BuzzFeed*; *Daily Mail*), which are supplemented by blogs and Tumblr sites (e.g., Bully Bloggers; Fuck Yeah Interspecies Friendships). The interspecies friendships that circulate on social media often tease their audiences with only surface-level information, while documentary productions offer more in-depth portraits of the interspecies relationships and extended networks of care. *Kedi*, for instance, offers up considerations of interspecies interactions both through feline character portraits and the human interpretations that give interpretive value to co-constituted, interspecies worlds. Taken together, these two examples spark a complex consideration of species-based hierarchies of intimacy and affection that, I argue, productively disrupts existing intimate imperatives and opens the mind to interspecies productions of intimate knowledge.

[4.2]

Unlikely Encounters

In the spring of 2014, my 91-year-old grandmother found a stray kitten on her porch. Hearing that I had recently been fostering cats, she asked me if I could help her care for it (Figure 25). She explained that she had immediately felt an affinity with the tiny creature and would love to keep him herself, but she is—in her words—“so very old” for such a young thing. When I

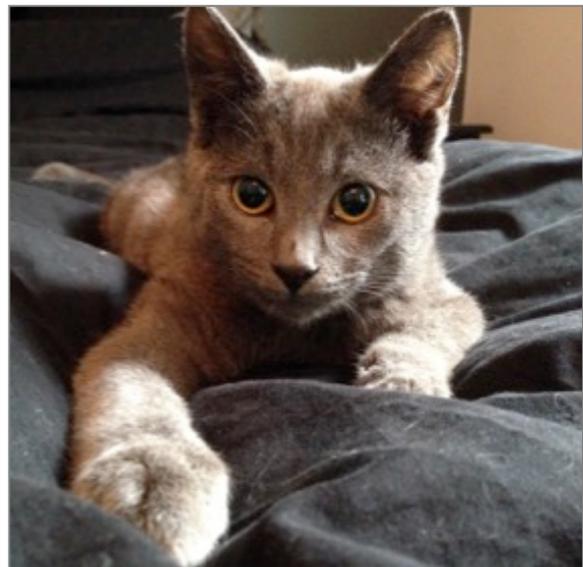


Figure 25: The 'firecracker' - BBG / Magnus.

went to meet my grandmother at the house she's been living in for over sixty years now, she offered me a cup of tea and asked me how my studies are going. Every time we have this conversation, I try to find a new way to explain what, exactly, I'm studying; terms like "queer affect" and "non-normative intimacies" don't translate particularly well through multiple generations, a host of political differences, and numerous Germanic languages. This time, though, I started telling her about a conference paper I was writing on interspecies friendships

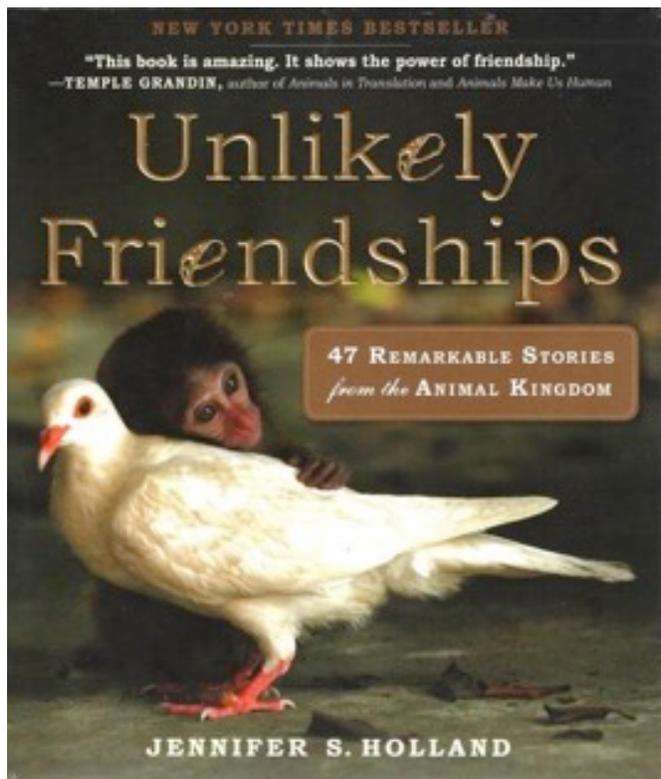


Figure 26: The 'goldmine' - Unlikely Friendships.

and the bonds humans find with, and through, animals. Immediately, her eyes lit up and she said, "I have something for you." She ambled away and returned a few minutes later with a small-format coffee table book, *Unlikely Friendships: 47 Remarkable Stories from the Animal Kingdom* (Figure 26; Holland 2011). My friends and I now lovingly refer to this as the day my grandmother gave me a goldmine of a book and a firecracker of a kitten.

Unlikely Friendships offers unexpected animal alliances as proof that "real friendship knows no bounds." As the jacket cover explains, "Sometimes a friendship is about need, as in the case of the blind Lab and her 'seeing-eye' cat. But sometimes it's just a lovely mystery. How else can one explain the story of Owen the hippo and Mzee the tortoise, two notoriously surly creatures who became bosom buddies?" The intrigue that is evoked by Holland might not seem



Figure 27: Kittens and Bushytail, via Daily Mail. Figure 28: Bella and Bubbles, via Bored Panda.

so mysterious to animal behaviourists, but not all pairings can be explained through biology and symbiotic processes. *Unlikely Friendships* is just one iteration of an increasingly-familiar set of stories that might be described as pop culture distractions, found more frequently now online than in hard copy format: the squirrel who nurses from a cat surrogate alongside his kitten siblings (Figure 27; *Daily Mail* 2012), the elephant and his best friend the black Labrador (Figure 28; Dovas 2014), the cat who strokes his pig friend to sleep (Eberkopf 2015), and other stories featuring the deep bonds of animal affections. And so it goes: *Species #1* meets *Species #2*, and they bond over something magical and seemingly unlikely. They befriend each other, maybe forming a somewhat “strange” alliance, and the whole internet *oohs* and *ahhs* in unison at the entertainingly unnatural behaviour. Far from being just another set of affective distractions though, I see the ever-expanding interest in such “unlikely friendships” as pointing to something as rich and diverse as the species that comprise them. The frequency with which stories like these are posted and reposted is indicative of a larger, common (if not collective) desire—a desire for models of intimacy that step outside of normative frameworks, that sidestep linear narratives of familial relations and blood-based kinship, and that again expand the range of possibilities for intimate connection.

How might animal friendships model alternate possibilities of human relating? Not

necessarily through anthropomorphic readings alone. Recalling Jack Halberstam's (2011) reference to a broad "queer quest" to live life differently, that this pursuit might take shape through an overlay of queerness onto the intimacies of nonhuman beings that sit in contrast to normative expectations of how humans form intimacy. The interspecies friendships that are widely circulated online serve to highlight various stress points within dominant structures of intimacy that limit, denounce, and constrain ways of being with each other. I contend that the popularity of internet videos featuring animals in unexpected bonds reflects a popular, though often unspoken, longing for alternatives to the narrow structures of feeling and relating that have been built up through heterosexist and neoliberal, human-centric modes of being.

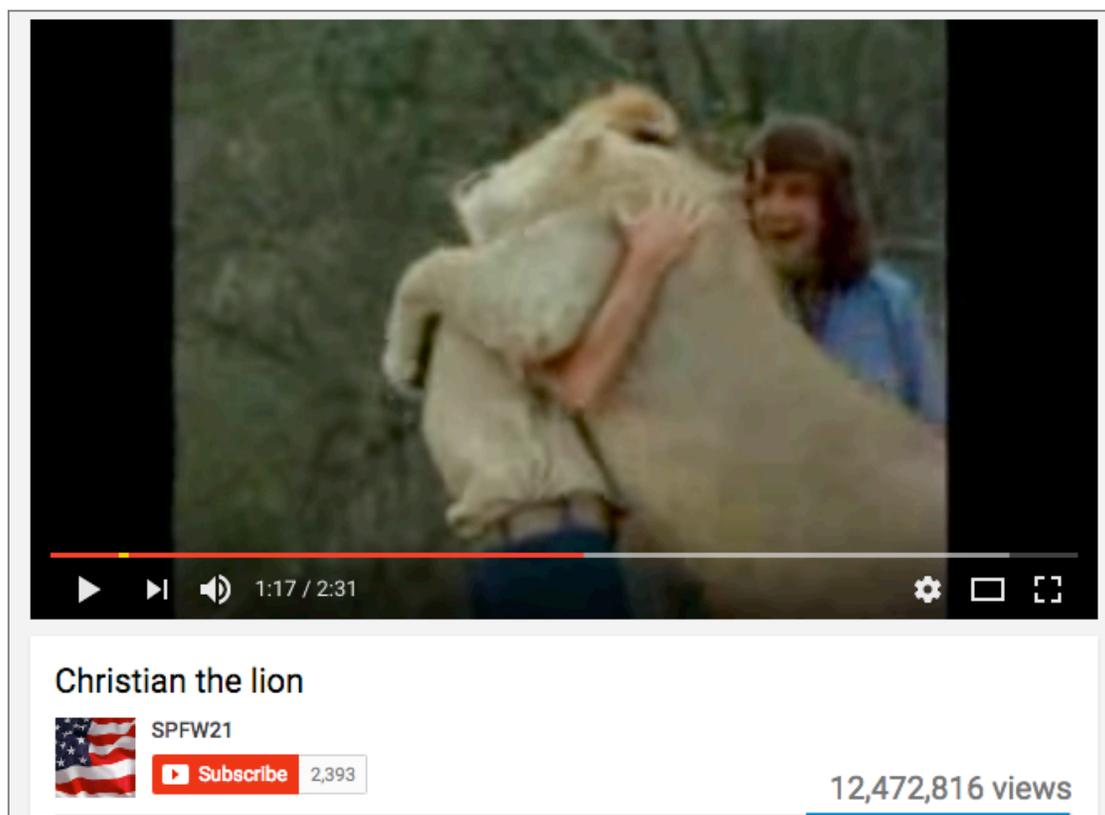


Figure 29: Screen grab of Christian the Lion in a heartfelt reunion, via YouTube.

Think, for example, about the popularity of the mega-viral YouTube video of Christian the Lion being reunited with the two humans who had cared for him in his cub years. Taken, out of

context, from the 1976 documentary *Christian The Lion: The Lion Who Thought He Was People* (dirs. McKenna and Travers), YouTube user SPFW21 revived a reunion clip through social media in 2008 (Figure 29). Wistfully re-edited and cut to a '90s rock ballad, the clip tells a tale of two men who rescued a lion cub named Christian when they saw him for sale at a department store. The men re-introduced the cub to the wild when he became too big for their flat, and wildlife specialists told them that they would not be remembered after a short time. Against all odds, when they went to visit Christian a year later, they were welcomed with open arms and large, loving paws in a heartfelt scene: the video documentation provides evidence that Christian unquestionably remembered them. The title card at the end of the YouTube clip reads “Love knows no limits and true friendship lasts a lifetime // Get back in touch with someone today.” Though the clip has since been critiqued by animal rescue organizations for encouraging irresponsible human intervention (e.g., Big Cat Rescue 2014), SPFW21’s video has well over 12 million views and recirculates periodically in the public sphere.

Contrary to the reductive sentiment of “true friendship lasts a lifetime,” I take up *friendship* as a more complex constellation of affective connection in this chapter. Understanding friendship within the realm of human–animal and animal–animal intimacies, I argue that interspecies affections simultaneously disrupt species-based hierarchies and queer human structures of intimacy by poking holes in the tightly knit fabric of neoliberal narratives. These affective exchanges exist not only in discursive and fantastical realms, but they also leak across into also in material, embodied ones. To further explore the material displays of affect, I take my cues from Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* (2004). In line with my own practice-based methodologies, Brennan’s book starts with the articulation of an impulse, a question from Brennan’s own curiosity: what is happening when we can point to the immaterial yet palpable

“feeling of a room”? She then moves into an extensive discussion of the circulation of affect, emotions, and energies between bodies and across groups of people. Brennan traces this transmission of affect through biological and physiological processes that are both intercorporeal and cross-corporeal. Brennan argues that the movement of affect between bodily borders is inherently disruptive to Eurocentric constructions of individual, emotionally contained subjects. Affects that spill out across the boundaries of human bodies—especially bodies that hold visible markers of race, class, and ability or disability—thus contain disruptive potential for existing biopolitical formations.

Following similar theoretical lines, Mel Chen (2012) considers how non-normative intimate attachments—and in particular, those between humans and animals and those between humans and objects that are normally understood to be “inanimate” (the latter of which is discussed further in Chapter Five)—might move beyond human individualisms and re-jig existing possibilities and modes of relation. Joining other affect scholars who trace the circulations and uncontainable qualities of affect (e.g., Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011; Muñoz 2009; Stewart 2007), Chen’s analysis resonates with Brennan’s in that an understanding of animacy hierarchies offers possible ways out of normative intimate structures. As Chen argues, animacy has the ability to “rewrite conditions of intimacy” (3) by troubling “ideologies, sentiments, and ontologies of race, humanness, and security” (17) and by allowing for a de-vesting in neoliberal individualism in favour of different forms of communal connection. The remainder of this chapter thus troubles the ideologies, sentiments, and ontologies of humanness and unhumanness and outlines two areas of popular culture where the co-constitutive aspects of human–animal alliances are made visible.

[4.3]

Virtual Unions

The disruption of autonomous human bodies that is referenced by Brennan and Chen is reiterated again and again in critical queer and trans- animal studies texts. It is well documented that, despite narratives of individualism and autonomous processing, bodies are always already colliding with one another and with countless other beings. Feminist science scholar Myra Hird's work (2002), for instance, teases out the ways that human and nonhuman beings are, in fact, engaged in constant exchange with one another through molecular processes, viral and bacterial infections, environmental interactions, and nonsexual reproduction within the body. Similarly, Eva Hayward (2014) uses the case of Premarin (a hormone compound that is extracted from horse urine and which is taken by many menopausal women and transwomen) to consider the trans-species exchanges that occur through medical interventions in various medicalized communities. Organ transplants (which are sometimes human-to-human, sometimes animal-to-human, and, in the near future, will likely be biohybrid-to-human²⁷) further disrupt the individual autonomy and self-reliance of human bodies. These understandings challenge and vastly expand what is generally thought to be common knowledge of science and bodies, and they call into question all sorts of narrative orderings. One of those key orderings is that of homosocial species allegiance and organization.

Scientific and technological developments most often occur behind the scenes of public access or comprehension, but they also leak into mass culture and reverberate through pop

²⁷ In July 2016, scientists announced they had successfully 3D-printed a biohybrid being at the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences at Harvard: an artificial ray with a thin, gold skeleton, a rubber body, and a thin coating of altered rat heart cells that 'flap' the ray's wings in response to light. Researchers insist that some of the greatest potentials of biohybrid creation lie in the possibility of 3D printing organs for transplants and/or in creating bionic body parts for those who have lost limbs to injury. To read more, see Park et al. (2016).

culture and popular representational practices. Though it may seem a stretch to compare a story of a biohybrid rubber ray (Park et al. 2016) with the friendship between a tiger and a goat (Siberian Times 2015), they are both part of a world envisioned otherwise—one mediated by, but also sitting in resistance to, the logics of human supremacy. In my observation, popular news coverage of interspecies relations is particularly common by way of three main formats: individually disseminated viral videos, compilations and “best of” listicles (list-filled articles), and more robust news stories that provide more detail about the story. When disseminated online through social media, each of these presentational formats serves as an understated testimonial form—a way of testifying to the existence, and therefore to the possibility, of seemingly impossible intimacies and of lives lived otherwise.

Viral Videos

With Facebook (FB) outlining new video objectives in 2014 (Facebook Business 2014) and releasing their livestream video service to the public in 2016 (Simo 2016), it may come as no surprise that users are sharing more and more moving image content on the site. In fact, Nicola Mendelsohn, the vice president of Facebook in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, recently predicted that video content may overtake all other posting formats on FB within the next few years (Zillman 2016). It may be even less surprising that a large portion of those videos feature easily consumable and somewhat trivial “life hack” food recipes,²⁸ rotund and wriggling babies, and outlandish cats. Adding to the wealth of animal featurettes posted elsewhere online, FB’s new video sharing capabilities both amplify YouTube hits and encourage users to create original

²⁸ The term “life hack” is used broadly, often to refer to any tip, trick, shortcut, or skill that will increase efficiency and/or productivity in everyday activities. This can range from building your own make-shift air conditioning unit out of a Styrofoam cooler and a bag of ice (HouseholdHacker 2014) to pre-packaging a week’s worth of salads in glass jars to eat healthy and save time on food preparation in the morning (Pinola 2011).

content through their site-specific platforms.

Most often sitting as stand-alone pieces, viral videos posted to sites like YouTube and FB tend to follow a shared aesthetic: short, snappy moments that illustrate their point within a timeline that puts the attention span of the MTV Generation to shame. Usually absent of voiceover narration, and sometimes including only a small sample of text on the screen (particularly convenient for consuming content silently in public spaces), these videos are clearly not invested in providing broader context or nuance. Rather, the video is left to speak for itself, and by the very nature of its format, it must speak quickly. That is one reason why “unlikely” interspecies encounters make such great fodder for the platform’s consumers: they materialize as both relatively inconsequential and incredibly cute.

Sianne Ngai (2010) argues that the assumed triviality of cuteness is not, in itself, trivial. In “Our Aesthetic Categories,” Ngai traces the history of “cute” as an aesthetic category and explains its relation to class, gender, labour, and capital: “Cute [...] emerg[ed] as a term of evaluation and a formally recognizable style in the nascent mass culture of the industrial nineteenth-century United States,” which consequently means it developed alongside “the ideological consolidation of the middle-class home as a female space organized around consumption” (951). She goes on to explain that various aesthetic categories, informed by and filtered through political and cultural lenses, are an important part of “the daily texture of social life” (952) and “can become a useful tool for the political evaluation of largescale cultural phenomena” (957).

The cultural phenomenon in this case includes the barrage of affects produced by overwhelming social, cultural, and political conditions. As contrapuntal material, cute animal videos become an opportunity to filter and contain excessive affects and anxieties. As Allison

Page (2017) argues, “the affective pull of cuteness—and cute animals in particular—offers a disruptive affective excess that provides a tool for coping with [...] the devastations of neoliberalism and its attendant social and political effects” (77). Viral videos of interspecies affections serve as supposedly self-evident substantiation of unlikely species pairings, cross-species models of mutual care. Insofar as this unlikely behaviour is documented, the videos act as a form of testimony to the possibilities of the unexpected, shaking up the routinized affective practices of consumers into novel feelings and responses that guide them away from the monotony of everyday life.

This unlikeliness of bonds and scenarios is exemplified through many YouTube channels, for example Moritz the minipig’s adventures with his pal Leonardo the cat. In one video, “Minipig Moritz Shows Ragdoll Cat Leonardo Some Street Skills” (Figure 30; Eberkopf 2015), Moritz is shown walking down a quiet residential sidewalk beside another, unnamed, pig and



Figure 30: Screen grab of Moritz and Leonardo, via YouTube.

Leonardo, who is firmly secured in a small harness. A rope binds the two creatures together from Leonardo's harness to Moritz's mouth. The companions trot along beside each other for almost two minutes before the clip ends, with still no end in sight for their stroll. Though there is obviously some human staging and guidance to this occasion—after all, the rope must have been secured and placed to facilitate the encounter—the three animals are peacefully co-existing and the human intervention is rendered unimportant.

Decidedly nonsexual and ardently sociable, the interspecies animal friendships that are featured in many online videos serve to offset some of the isolation and precarity that characterize contemporary labour conditions, including the flexible labour and gig economies discussed in Chapter Three. Page (2017) contemplates these connections, writing,

At a moment when labor is precarious, policing is expansive, and mass extinction is occurring, seeking momentary relief via the tools most readily available to many of us—digital ones—makes sense as a way to cope with the conflation of work and leisure and the alienation and hyper-individualization of late capitalist life (98-99).

Viral animal clips become imbued with all kinds of “pure” affectations that are often associated with cuteness and play. The audience is left to wonder what unlikely encounters and breaks from monotony might be in their own future(s). While each video may rest in blissful simplicity, the plethora of examples that are readily available to anyone with an internet browser starts to provide a more complex picture of what happens when nonhuman beings come together in unanticipated or novel ways.

Compilations and Lists

In contrast to the one-off format of viral videos, compilation sites and “best of” lists (e.g., Fuck Yeah Interspecies Friendships; BuzzFeed Animals) expand intimate possibility through a reliance on *abundance*. In collecting several pieces of evidence in one place, these lists show a

multiplicity of interspecies friendships as proof that unlikely intimacies are, in fact, possible, and that humans are not alone in their sometimes-seemingly-impossible affections. As is typical of these compilations, BuzzFeed’s “The 21 Most Touching Interspecies Friendships You Never Thought Possible” (Marshall 2013) evokes all kinds of narrative possibilities, though it still does not offer any one full story of how or why these friendships came to be. Usually formatted as testimonial “teasers” told through numerous still images and/or GIFs, these compilation lists rely largely on the viewer’s imagination to fill in the *hows*, *whys*, and *wheres* of the context. Though they sometimes link to other news coverage or print books that offer more information (such as *Unlikely Friendships*), the focus becomes the plenitude of examples rather than on any one particular, scrutinisable detail.

Similarly, blog compilations and Tumblr sites rely on the abundance of material as content that serves to model unlikeliness and the unexpected as interruption into normative models of intimate connection. The Tumblr site Fuck Yeah Interspecies Friendships, for instance, catalogues photo after photo of animal duos, trios, or groups with little to no context of the original sources of the images. Similarly, the Tumblr hashtag #dogsandbabies removes the context or larger narrative from dogs and human baby cuddling up. Instead, these kinds of sites overwhelm the viewer with a flood of “exceptions” to the rule(s) of companionship, proving that the exception is perhaps not so exceptional after all. By poking holes in the stability of the human–animal binary and of hierarchies of animacy, this abundance again calls into question the existing logics of intimate structures and affective modalities.

News Stories

Of course, there are also many stories of interspecies relating that serve a primary purpose of either distracting audiences or reasserting normative understandings of “animal nature” rather

rather than challenging them. I remember vividly a time in my hometown where the local newspaper seemingly decided it had nothing left to report on. It was May of 2004, and despite the fact that ten new countries had just been admitted to the European Union, photos had recently surfaced of U.S. soldiers abusing detainees in Abu Ghraib, and the poster children of white privilege had freshly aired their last episode of *Friends*, the front page of our paper proudly declared the most pressing news of the week: “DUCKS CROSS ROAD, HOLD UP TRAFFIC” (Figure 31). The accompanying story assured us all that, although several humans faced a minor inconvenience for a brief period of time, nobody was hurt in the encounter and everyone eventually went about their day. It

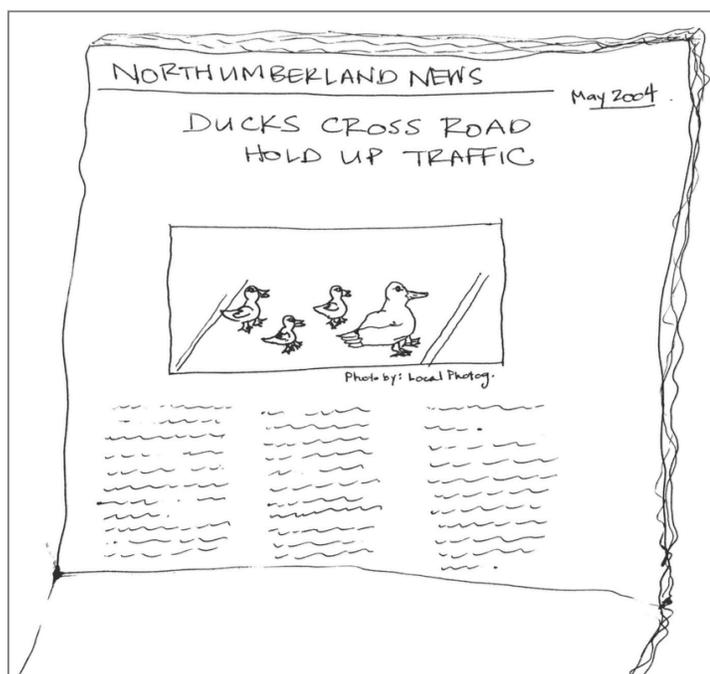


Figure 31: Artistic rendering of the Non-News incident.

was, to put it mildly, totally absurd. As an assertion of non-news, it was a clear “feel-good” piece that didn’t make me or my fellow Social Justice Club members feel very good at all.

Instances like this evidence the fact that sometimes stories about animals do act as generic filler, a break from heavy emotional news about war, disease, murder, and exploitation. Page (2017) describes this affective break as a form of *cruel relief*. Adapting the term from Berlant’s notion of *cruel optimism*, Page explains that the promotion and marketing of animal-centered video clips (for example, on *Huffington Post*’s “Cute Animals” thread) make links between the temporary relief of positive affects provided by animals and hypercapitalist labour practices. She

writes,

Cute animals offer respite from the drudgery of 9–5 both in the procrastination the videos offer and in the momentary pleasure derived from seeing a cute animal. Thus, they become a significant tool of maintaining labor precarity. [...] Workers will work more if they feel better (ibid., 98).

Even cruel relief, however, might hold affective value alongside its commodity capital. For better or worse, these kinds of stories simultaneously offer a form of testimonial for possibilities beyond the overwhelming human–human conflict that is so often featured in mainstream news outlets and, when combined with active community and political engagements in other realms, can provide a much-needed mental health break from political fatigue (see Feel Tank Chicago 2008). More robust narratives, even through “filler” stories, may help to develop the complexities of intimate connection. More effective, however, might be prolonged meditations on the nonhuman animals and nonhuman animal worlds that humans interact with. It is this approach that is taken up by the documentary film *Kedi*, which offers an intimate portrait of seven Turkish street cats and the extended human networks that help ensure they both survive and thrive in the urban centre of Istanbul.

[4.4]

Feline Fine

In the cheekily titled article “Do Cats Know They Rule YouTube?” Radha O’Meara (2014) explains that, of the entire “cute animal” video subgenre, cats occupy a particular force for uniting the internet. In O’Meara’s reading, the performance of cats is particularly appealing because of a widespread unselfconsciousness that cats inhabit: cat videos operate both as a break from the monotony of work-life and as imagined relief from highly surveilled public realms. The most popular cat videos tend to follow similar trajectories, offering short and snappy clips that

establish a state-of-calm followed by sudden and often comedic disruption by their cat subjects. O’Meara explains that, through this repetition, cat videos are “often appreciated for what they reveal about cats in general, rather than for each cat’s individuality” (n.p.). Sitting in contrast to this trend in populist internet videos, Ceyda Torun’s *Kedi* (2017; Figure 32), a documentary-film-slash-intimate-cat-portrait, offers insights into the individuality and personality filled lives of seven felines in Istanbul, Turkey.

The official U.S. trailer for *Kedi* presents its seven feline subjects in “Starring” roles, listing them off by name and human attribute—there is Sari, The Hustler; Bengü, The Lover; Psikopat, The Psycho; Deniz, The Social Butterfly; Aslan Parçası, The Hunter; Duman, The Gentleman; and Gamsız, The Player. But this anthropomorphic designation is part of the film’s

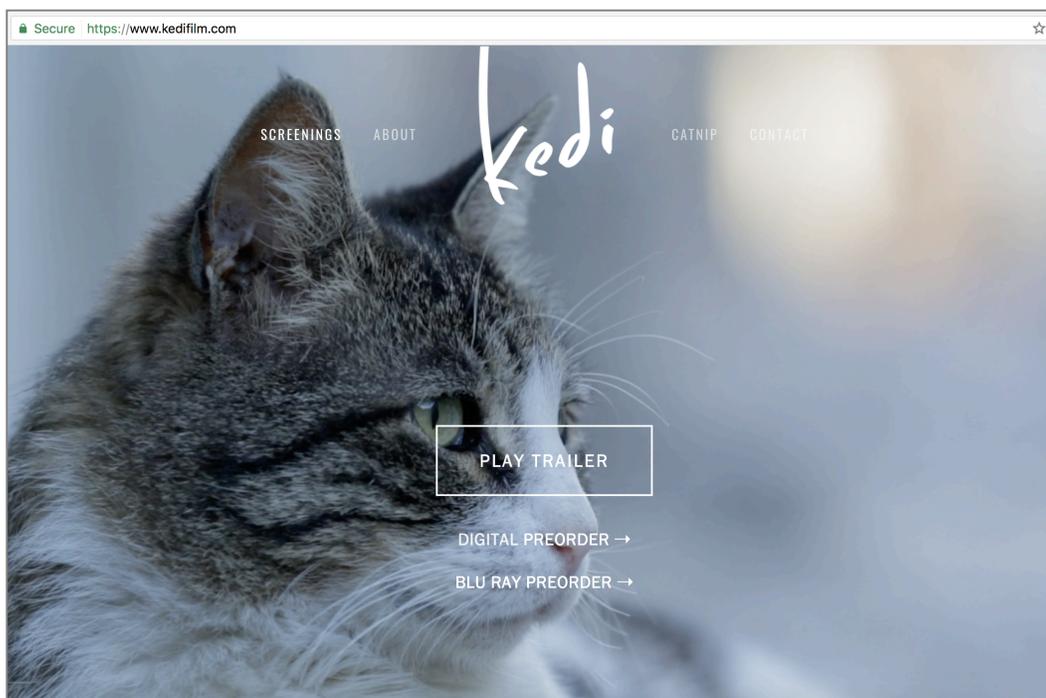


Figure 32: Landing page of KediFilm.com (April 2017).

marketing strategy, and the full-length work offers much more subtlety and complexity in its treatment. Rather than anthropomorphizing in a top-down way, simplistically turning cats into human substitutes, *Kedi* thoroughly engages the intimate world(s) of street cats by following

them through their urban networks. The extended meditation on the lives and interspecies networks of Istanbul that is offered by Torun makes visible the ways that urban centres are always already multispecies formations, even where and when humans continue to re-centre their own experiences above those of all other creatures.

Skillfully captured by Charlie Wuppermann, the cinematography of *Kedi* not only puts the viewer at the physical level of the cats, often traveling along the ground with them, but several scenes place viewers directly in the role of the cats themselves. In one scene, Aslan Parçası is shown hunting in the rain gutters/tunnels at night, and the audience is provided with the sharp night vision required to hunt alongside him. In another, viewers walk through the streets with the cats as if they are part of their clowder. By offering a different literal and figurative perspective, the film gestures to the integrally animal politics suggested by Brian Massumi (2014) in *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*. *Kedi* enacts the Massumian logic of *mutual inclusion*, wherein species differences are treated as co-existing and mutually reinforcing rather than as points of contention and distance. As Massumi explains, mutual inclusion “knows nothing of exclusive oppositions” and finds its strength through a combination of hybrid aesthetic gesture, creativity, and reflexivity (45-47).

While Massumi’s notion of mutual inclusion applies to all species of animals, cats are particular creatures with long histories of interaction with humans. O’Meara (2014) remarks,

A potent social and cultural symbol in mythology, art and popular culture, the historical and cultural significance of cats is complex, shifting and often contradictory. They have made their way across geographic, cultural and class boundaries, and been associated with the sacred and the occult, femininity and fertility, monstrosity and domesticity (n.p.).

A statement from Torun on the film’s English-language website echoes this understanding, explaining the particularities of the Turkish context: “Cats have been a part of the city for thousands of years, and so, everyone who grows up in Istanbul or lives in Istanbul has a story

about a cat. Stories that are memorable; sometimes scary, sometimes spiritual, but always very personal” (KediFilm.com, “About”). Human–feline relations are thus perhaps especially valuable illustrations of human–animal enactments of mutual inclusion and intimate exchange. Woven through *Kedi*’s stunning visuals and minimalist soundtrack are several recurring themes. The human subjects in the film often circle back to speaking about cats in relation to spirituality and God, freedom of will/action, and deep affective healing. The feline subjects become a mirror for human desire, spirituality, and anxiety while they also work to heal the psychological and emotional wounds of the humans they interact with.

Drawing on Lorraine Plourde’s (2014) study of cat cafés in Japan, I interpret these healing acts as forms of immaterial labour that are performed by felines. Plourde argues that the labour of cats produces “sensations of healing, relaxation, and calm” in humans that are exemplary of interspecies “social and affective networks” (116). For Plourde, cats are “both healing, calming objects and affective laborers” (119). This is reflected in *Kedi*, where humans narrate their experiences of interacting with cats as being founded on mutual care and support, but with material benefits. One woman explains that she has very deep childhood wounds that she can only withstand through her process of caring for the neighbourhood cats—the act of cooking and distributing over twenty pounds of chicken a day, and the subsequent satisfaction this woman receives from the ritual, is part of her recovery. Another man explains that, after he had a nervous breakdown, he could no longer stand to interact with other humans—he found solace in the company of cats, and even long after his recovery from that event he feels indebted to them for their steadfast company.

The human–feline relationships in *Kedi* are most often based on humans offering material

labour in exchange for the immaterial, affective labour provided by the cats.²⁹ This dynamic is densely layered in that the human subjects are offering survival resources in exchange for emotional ones in return, which begs complex questions of agency for nonhuman animals and whether they can freely choose their human associates when they are, at least partially, relying on them for sustenance. This question is not so different from the concerns that are invoked by human–human survival relations, and I would argue that even if there is a certain level of (co-)dependency in the interactions, it does not necessarily remove all forms of agency from either party.

Kedi positions the cats as actively choosing which humans they will frequent for food, for medicine or physical aid, and for pampering affection. What is particularly striking is the fact that the cats do not always approach the same humans for all resources, indicating some active awareness of the kinds of exchanges they might expect with each human. The cats in *Kedi* are noteworthy in that they are not domesticated and their human associates do not ever keep them inside; they roam freely between the streets and domestic shelter. They are, however, sociable, not feral, and so they blend the worlds of wild and tame. In this context, the questions of dependency and agency are slightly different than in considerations of “pet ownership” as it is understood in many places in North America, and they are even different than those found in relationships between humans and their companion animals. The cats in *Kedi* are shown hunting and nourishing their feline families, proving that they *can* and *do* provide for themselves, but they supplement their daily catch with human offerings. Torun’s documentary invites us to think

²⁹ In *Multitude*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) explain that “affective labor always directly constructs a relationship” (47), wherein immaterial labour is always and necessarily interconnected to material forms of labour. In this case, it is the cats who perform immaterial, affective labour and humans who perform the material labour associated with maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship.

about broader interactions between species, including what animals can teach us about politics, what humans can learn from integrative ontologies, and what conversations can be sparked through allegorical human–animal musings.

[4.5]

Unholy Matrimony

In addition to acting as launch pads for considering human reliance on other animals, interspecies bonds are frequently employed in political parody and as queer statement in order to illuminate and make hypervisible some of the absurdities of our human-centric existence. Proposed through a dialogic exchange between queer theory greats Lisa Duggan and José Muñoz, the *Freedom to Marry Our Pets Society Page* is one such example that further highlights the political-affective work that can be accomplished by and through interspecies relations.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Freedom to Marry Our Pets

In July of 2009, Lisa Duggan and José Muñoz published a friendly dialogic exchange to the Bully Bloggers blog, entitled “*Freedom to Marry Our Pets or What’s Wrong with the Gays Today?*” A defiantly cranky critique of ongoing rights-based campaigns for same-sex marriage in the U.S., their exchange

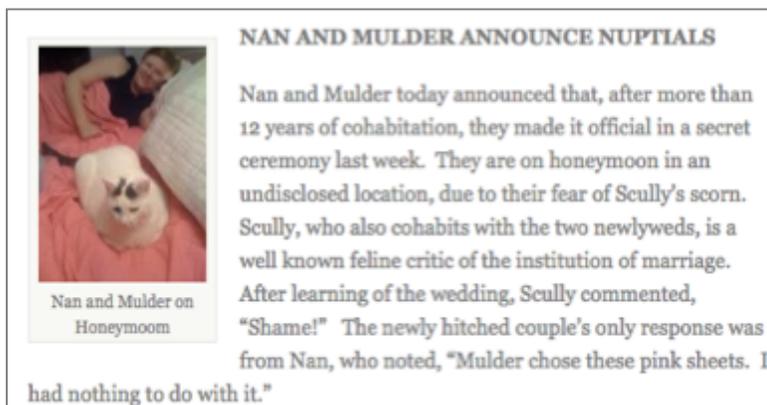


Figure 33: Nan Hunter and Mulder on FtMOP.

laments the loss of a radical queer politic, which, rather than seeking state approval, has actively resisted state involvement in sex and private life. Despite their shared dissent, Muñoz suggested

to Duggan, “Let’s roll with the pro-marriage gays for a minute,” before continuing, “If marriage is the way you can be sure that our bonds count in the world then I might as well be married to my princess of a bulldog Dulce” (n.p.). Duggan concurred, writing, “If we want the state to legitimate our deepest love and intimate relationships, I’m with you on Freedom to Marry Our Pets! Love Makes a Family, José!” (ibid.).

Hitting on major cultural flashpoints such as the “slippery-slope” rhetoric invoked by the conservative right, Bully Bloggers followed up by launching the *Freedom to Marry Our Pets Society Page (FtMOP)* (Bully Bloggers 2009), which invites people to announce their wedding engagements to beloved animal companions. Ranging from long-term courtships to whirlwind

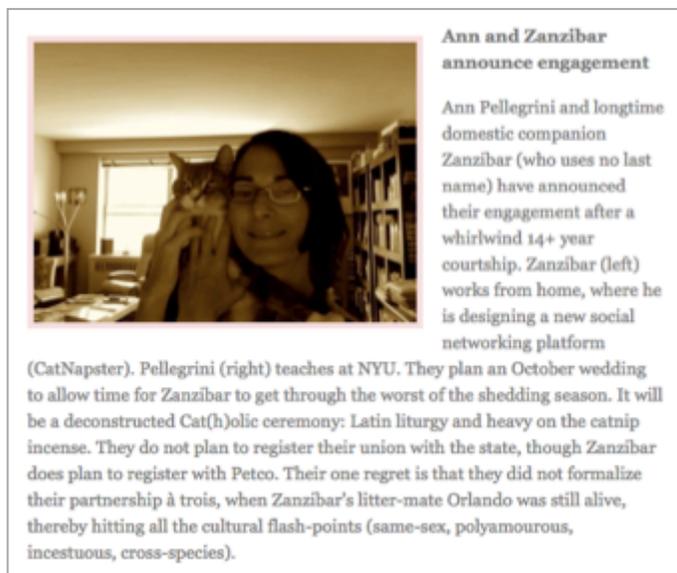


Figure 34: Ann Pellegrini and Zanzibar on FtMOP.

love affairs, critical theorists on this webpage have come on board to fly in the face of so-called proper (read: human-human, state- and socially-sanctioned) intimacies. Nan Hunter (Figure 33) is shown blissfully lying in bed with housecat Mulder, though the text of their announcement invokes the

off-camera presence of a third,

disapproving, co-habitator, who is reportedly an avid critic of marriage. Meanwhile, Ann Pellegrini (Figure 34) is pictured smiling, pressed cheek-to-cheek with her feline love, Zanzibar, who appears to be rolling his eyes at the public display of affection. Each entry offers an imaginative consideration of what it might look like to marry one’s pet (or the pet of a friend or acquaintance). As a whole, *FtMOP* is comprised of same-sex, multispecies, polyamorous,

intergenerational, incestuous, and multi-household relationships. It humourously interrupts the legal and social marginalization of non-normative intimacies while infusing each entry with broader concerns of social justice and critical queer activism.

In some ways, the fact that participants have chosen domestic animals as their intimate others is irrelevant—since, arguably, any number of nonhuman love objects could have made a similar theoretical point—see, for instance, Carmelita Tropicana’s declared love for and commitment to her iPhone (Figure

35). In other ways though, the presence of pets is absolutely central to the construction of a

queer commentary that actively



Figure 35: Carmelita Tropicana and iPhone on FtMOP.

dissents from normatively intimate structures. The domesticated animal is a close counterpart and frequent complement to human kinship structures, and it is invoked as a not-quite-human yet still relatable figure. Unlike relationships with nonhuman, non-animal objects, intimacies formed with domesticated animals—overstated as they may be on *FtMOP*—serve as a productive foil for marginalized human–human intimate connections, precisely because they are at least somewhat pertinent to the majority of North American human subjects.

Illuminating links between the sexual and legal regulation of formalized versus non-formalized relationships and the limits of so-called free expressions of intimacy and desire, the exchanges on *FtMOP* challenge the widespread neoliberal structurings of romantic and sexual life. As dominant relationship models continue to re-assert idealized notions of natural monogamy, insular couplehood, and domestic bliss, *FtMOP* makes visible the explicit links between our personal intimacies and state regulations of intimate life. Animals that share

household resources with humans are necessarily co-dependent, and those in close living quarters inevitably exchange bodily fluids, bacteria, and affective energy. This means that, even more so than Thomas Nagel's bat, cats and dogs are familiar enough to readers to raise germane questions about queer (in this instance meaning non-normative and/or dissenting) relations. As I argue in Chapter Two, the requirements for social, sexual, and affective citizenship depend on an engagement with intimacy that forecloses alternate structures or engagements with private–public realms, non-reproductive sexualities, and, I will add now, nonhuman beings. *FtMOP* prompts us to consider how the requirements for “appropriately-livable” sexual lives seemingly have less to do with sex itself and more to do with maintaining proper expressions of—or, at least, appearances of—intimacy.

Ultimately, I view *FtMOP* as a project that is not truthfully about interspecies love at all, but is instead one that mobilizes human–animal “wedding announcements” as a way of challenging intimate hierarchies that privilege human–human sexual pairings over other types of meaningful affective bonds. Queer opposition to same-sex marriage has long articulated that marriage as an economic institution is inherently unequal no matter who can legally marry whom; achieving real equality should mean that the privileges and benefits afforded to married couples should be available to *all* people, regardless of marital or relational status (Audre Lorde Project 2000; Conrad 2014; Nair 2015a, 2015b; Spade 2013). Additionally, the mainstream push for gay marriage has been critiqued as supporting state-sanctioned racism, classism, anti-transness, and the Prison Industrial Complex (Arkles 2013; Bailey et al. 2008; Chavez 2015; Kandaswamy 2008; White 2013). *FtMOP* contributes to this rhetoric by subverting the homonationalist organizing of non-profit organizations leading the fight for same-sex marriage

in the U.S.³⁰ and by insisting upon the political and personal viability of human intimacy with nonhuman beings. Much like the film *Kedi*, the *Freedom To Marry Our Pets* webpage thus moves us to consider types of intimate bonds that are not arranged exclusively around state recognition and legitimization, and to consider relationship structures that do not comply with human-centered intimate imperatives.

While *FtMOP* stands as a strategy to invoke political conversation, these pronouncements of interspecies affection hardly reflect intent for follow-through in legal or ceremonial realms. In this sense, the project stands as a poignant parodic challenge to normative, and specifically homonormative, modes of relation by pushing the queer absurdity of normative and formalized relationship structures more generally. Admittedly, the *Freedom to Marry Our Pets* project fails to account for those who occupy space outside of these dominant structures in a more sustained way (for example, objectum-sexual people, discussed further in Chapter Five). In the next chapter, I extend these conversations by asking, how might we appreciate tongue-in-cheek strategies like that of *FtMOP* while simultaneously valuing humans who challenge normative models through their daily-lived experiences of intimate relations, whether by choice or by desiring circumstance? And what might be productively learned from inhabiting, or even from thinking seriously about a project of re-valuing, these kinds of intimate alternatives?

[4.6]

Animal Siblings and Furry Familiars

When I was nine years old, my mother went to a retreat in upstate New York—a place to commune with nature and to talk to nonhuman animals. When she returned, she told my sister

³⁰ The non-profit organizations Freedom to Marry (freedomtomarry.org) and Love Makes a Family (lmfamily.org, no longer active) are two that are called out specifically by Duggan and Muñoz in their exchange.

and me about her experiences interacting with a colony of honeybees. Over the course of her days in the countryside, she said, she had had multiple conversations with the bees and had listened intently to their messages.³¹ It was life altering for her, and it shifted her understandings of how to speak, how to listen, and how to be open to different forms of knowledge. I took in her reflections with a youthful receptivity that made total sense to me; after all, I was in the midst of growing up on a plot of land that I shared with a dozen animal companions—to whom I related more as siblings than anything else—and a series of forest trails I walked habitually as if they were long lost friends. Through my mother's search for her own dissenting knowledges, I learned that *listening* is a process that exists far beyond the ears, and that *conversation* can look and feel many different ways, with many different kinds of beings. I have carried these understandings through my own life and have always instinctively had conversations with the all forms of lively matter around me. I am indebted to their energies, their particular needs, and their urgent offerings. I have also learned a lot from reflecting upon what nonhuman animals and environmental landscapes can show us both about ourselves and about broader human structures.

Even as I approach my case studies cautiously, I believe that increased visibility of non-dominant intimacies does important work in modeling possibility. Growing up, I had my mother's apiary insights and the wisdom of other Baby Boomer neo-hippies to help guide my own views and intimate permissions for crossing species lines of communication. I grew up knowing intellectually, though admittedly not materially, that my half-brother, twelve years my senior, came from a line of Indigenous family members whose land in Parry Sound was ravaged

³¹ As I was writing out this story, I stumbled upon a publication that documented the workshop event and my mother's role in it. My mother knew nothing about the article, though her name is listed in full as a contributor. As I went back through my files, I could no longer find the reference I could swear I diligently recorded, and I can no longer locate it online. A curious mystery!

by colonial expansion and environmental devastation. I lived around my father's documentary films that bridged the transformative capacities of music, art, and environmental justice. I learned that even my grandparents had sought expansive knowledges, engaging in occult happenings with their eclectic group of friends—an experience that was likely fueled by some level of exoticism and appropriation, but which resulted in a broadening of knowledge-based possibilities nonetheless.

As I was assembling *My Animal-Family Tree*, included at the beginning of this chapter, I engaged in a lengthy process of remembrance, memorialization, and revisionist history. I realized that, though I was able to recall most of the creatures I grew up with (pictured in the top section of images), I needed to cross-reference and consult with my sister and parents to fill in some of the blanks. Even animals I have adopted as “my own” (pictured in the second section), ones I have fostered or lived with (pictured in the third section), and/or those I cared for during significant times in my life (pictured in the bottom section) have sometimes eluded my memory—here, roommates and friends have stepped in to fill the voids in my recollection. Moreover, once I had completed the list of names and moved to collecting images, I was limited by technologies of photography (print images versus high-quality digital images versus iPhone snapshots, for instance), personal archiving practices, and digitization methods, which all inevitably impacted what made it into the final assembly. Sometimes the most memorable images could not be adequately translated, and so they were necessarily replaced by my second or third choices.

For as long as I can remember, I have experienced nonsexual but deeply intimate relationships with my animal siblings, treating them as confidants and sounding boards, companions and protectors. Now, as an adult, I have taken on more of a parental role with my

animal charges, but our relationships remain otherwise largely the same. The ways in which I perform labour for them in meeting their physical and emotional needs is not lost on me, but neither is the way in which they perform affective and material labour for me in turn. Our “intimate co-dependency,” to borrow Haraway’s phrasing, is another articulation of affective exchanges that remain unmarked and go largely unnoticed in my everyday life. The interspecies friendships and object-oriented loves explored in this chapter offer vital opportunities to mark un/expected patterns of intimate relation in service of more expansive opportunities.

In December of 2016, BBG / Baby Grey / Magnus, the kitten entrusted to me by my grandmother, was caught by a fox on my parents’ farm. The tracks my parents found in the snow suggest a tender and heartbreaking end to a lovely feline confidante they had since taken in as their own. The scenario was devastating for us all; however, it also served to remind us of the nonhuman-focused networks that continue to thrive despite the emotional attachments we may form with our animal companions. The fifth and final chapter of this dissertation moves from the intimacies we form and hold onto (and those we sometimes actively resist) to those affective bonds we lose, grieve, and must learn reckon with. By centering the immaterial affects that circulate around concretized, material objects, I conclude my study of intimacy in the cultural landscape by meditating on loss, mourning, and complex processes of intimate haunting.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE HAUNTED OBJECTS OF OUR AFFECTION.

[5.1]

Intimate Hauntings

The home I grew up in is, inarguably, haunted. Whenever I visit, I find myself talking to ghosts: of my former self, of the objects that were so familiar to me in my youth, of the landscapes that played host to my isolation and dissociative states. When I walk down the main floor hallway, bathed in light that streams through the seldom-used front door, I somehow still catch a glimpse of a cat that died long ago and hear the clicking of toenails of a nonexistent dog tapping on the hardwood floors. I also find myself enacting old patterns as if I have been transported through time, as if I am sixteen, fifteen, twelve, six years old again. I still find myself stopping on the landing every single time I climb the stairs in the dark of night, asking permission to pass from some inexplicable and unseeable energy that rests there between me and my childhood bedroom. These sensations were once so familiar, reliably part of my daily routine. Now, they are leftover residue from lives past.

In the mid-1980s and 1990s (the “heyday” of my youth), there was a renewed obsession in

the public sphere with studying “broken homes” and the potential fallout for children caught in relationship crossfires.³² Divorce was supposedly on the rise again, many parents were remarrying, and the trials and tribulations of blended families were favourite topics of ’90s Hollywood movies. I grew up in a blended family, but I didn’t see my experiences reflected with much accuracy. In many ways, I also grew up in a broken home—replete with broken communications, broken confidence, and broken life trajectories—but my home was one that never fully broke apart. My parents’ marriage somehow stayed intact, for better or worse. I was surrounded by cultural messages that told me “sticking it out” was always preferable, better for the kids if not for the adults, but the take-away lesson *I* learned is that longevity is not always—or should not always be—the goal marker of relationship success. The ways we learn to navigate the sometimes-rocky terrain of intimate connections can make or break us. Intimacy crops up in unlikely places. It often fails us where and when we need it most. We sometimes lose out, miss out, and get turned around on the path to intimate relating. But to dismiss these components as being outside of intimacy formation would be to dismiss the very heart of the matter.

Likewise, I would be remiss if I wrote a whole dissertation on the topic of intimacy without giving due attention to its flipsides and/or accomplices: Departure. Grief. Loss. Haunting. Intimate ghosts may sometimes be uncomfortable, frightening even, but they can also be instructive if we know how to listen. Specters and apparitions can teach us the deepest lessons about ourselves, about our intimate relations, and also about our place in the social worlds that surround us. Whether through culturally informed relationships, individual experiences, or supernatural beliefs, the haunting ebb and flow of present–absent relations is central to this

³² For summary review and meta-analysis of academic scholarship on the impact of “broken homes” and changing family structures, see, for example, Acs and Nelson (2004); Amato and Keith (1991); Nielson (1993); Wells and Rankin (1991).

chapter, which explores the affective terrains of object relations.

This chapter extends the discussions of species hierarchies in Chapter Four as it moves further out on the human–nonhuman spectrum. Diverging from the focus on animal companions in the previous chapter, I take a further step back on the animacy scale to consider a range of intimate connections that humans form with nonhuman matter, including but not limited to human-made *objects*. Here, I consider the immaterial affects that circulate in and around physical objects. Though objects are most often discussed as inanimate masses, attributed to technological advancements and/or feats of human innovation, they frequently establish worlds and ecosystems of their own, rife with transformed physical landscapes, human–plant–animal interactions, and a host of associated affects. Material landscapes and environmental factors shape the physical conditions of intimacy, and humans both interact with and depend on natural materials such as stones, dirt, water, minerals, and plants on a daily basis. Consequently, any theoretically sound analysis of intimacy must acknowledge the role of various nonhuman forces in the building of intimate worlds.

These connections are taken up at length by a variety of texts sitting at the crux of interspecies relations and queer affect (e.g., Chaudhuri and Hughes 2014; Hayward 2014; Hird 2002), particularly by those situated within feminist new materialisms (e.g., Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Haraway 2003, 2008), feminist studies of the Anthropocene (e.g., Grusin 2017; Weston 2017), and Object-Oriented Ontology (e.g., Behar 2016; Brown 2001; Harman 2002, 2010; Morton 2011). Drawing on these three fields of study, I reflect on the ways that deep-seated ideas about the (un)liveliness of nonhuman matter come to organize our intimate worlds, building hierarchies that structure the *wheres* and *whens* and *with-whoms* of intimate connection. In so doing, this chapter toggles between thinking the object as object-thing

and thinking the object as affective vehicle.

To address the role of physical objects in our intimate interactions, focusing on those that are human-made and material in nature, I first look to the emotionally intimate and sometimes-sexual connections that objectum-sexual (OS) humans form with material objects. Objectum-sexuality—human attraction to and romantic connection with objects (e.g., cars, bridges, and buildings)—is often understood to be an intimate error, a sign of neuro-atypicality or of antisocial behaviour (Marsh 2010). Through an analysis of the documentary *Strangelove: Married to the Eiffel Tower* (dir. Agnieszka Piotrowska, 2008) and media response to OS spokesperson Erika Eiffel, I consider the role of sex-negative and pleasure-phobic narratives of “morality” and “normality” that influence the contemporary regulation of intimate structures. I contemplate how disruptions into normative understandings of intimacy occur when we complicate or remove the foundational markers of accepted and acceptable intimate relationality (e.g., mutually consenting, adult-centred, human-focused)—for example, when a human falls in love with a human-made object. Within this conversation, I meditate on the ways in which increased understanding and acceptance of objectum-sexuality is being achieved (albeit slowly and perhaps problematically) through liberal frameworks of acceptance and normalization.

Considering not only the active relationships between OS people and their object-lovers but also the breakups between them, I draw parallels between breaking up with literal/physical objects and breaking up with other objects of affection. What affects are left “in the wake” (Sharpe 2016) once the object(s) of our affection have departed? How might we cope with the pangs of longing, the muddled ambivalences, and/or the rushing sense of relief we might feel once they have left our lives? In considering these questions, and to further bridge the physical object with its affective invocations, I turn to my final case study: the Museum of Broken

Relationships (Brokenships.com). This online museum and traveling gallery show is built on the recognition that objects frequently serve not only as reminders of ex-partners in a cerebral and logical sense, but also through the invocation of sensorial memories that come to haunt us in more sustained and persistent ways. Through the structure of the online museum, which provides photographs of objects and anonymized stories of heartbreak and love lost, the objects come to represent a very personal and individual haunting while also representing a communal longing, defined by both its public display and proximity to other objects.

In analyzing these aspects of the Museum of Broken Relationships, I return to Avery F. Gordon's pivotal text *Ghostly Matters* (2008) to ask how hauntings of a personal and intimate nature play into the broader social event. Objects regularly become imbued with affects that can point us to bigger and broader questions of the social. Suffused with the echoes of foreclosed possibility, the "abandoned" objects in the Museum and on Brokenships.com haunt the humans that come into contact with them because they juxtapose the spark of (im)possibility with the open wound of affective experience. Engaging with Gordon's formulation of present-absent life worlds, this chapter culminates in a reflection of how the abandoned objects of our past relationships create affective bridges between the past and the present, between the private and the public, and between the personal and the social.

Considered as a whole, this chapter places object desire within a range of circulating affects that resist end goals or outcome-based insinuations of sexual reproduction and normative intimate attachments. The role of the object is varied as it becomes imbued with hopes, dreams, and desires (both sexual and not, as well as those desires that are difficult to place in only one of those categories) and as it becomes haunted by social relations, generational trauma, and/or state violences. With these socio-affective circulations in mind, we can see how objects lend

themselves to simultaneous processes of thinking *with*, thinking *through*, and thinking *alongside* intimate relations.

[5.2]

Object Theories

Despite their often-innocuous presence, objects have social worlds. This is a deceptively simple statement with a reliably complex structure of support behind it. The sociality of objects is well documented throughout the humanities and social sciences, especially within new materialisms, studies of the Anthropocene, and Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). Each of these frameworks challenges the wide-reaching arms of human exceptionalism and strives to collapse the dualisms of culture/matter, nature/culture, and human/nonhuman. Feminist interventions bring these rich fields together with histories of feminist theorizing by posing questions about how gendered politics, racialized hierarchies, critical disabilities, and class-based relations interact with ecological and environmental matter, technological advancements, and broad-based conceptual shifts about life/nonlife. In order to contextualize my analyses of Erika Eiffel and the Museum of Broken Relationships in this chapter, I begin by offering a rudimentary overview of the three fields mentioned above.

New Materialisms

Feminist new materialism, alternately operating under the terms *material feminism*, *neo-materialism*, and *renewed materialisms* (among others), extends existing conversations within feminist philosophy and critical science studies in its quest to unsettle the culture/matter

distinction.³³ As Myra J. Hird (2009) explains, feminist new materialism “is not convinced that culture either entirely produces and/or contains materiality or that culture and matter are isolated domains” (331), but rather it recognizes the necessarily muddled interactions between the two realms. Over the past few decades, queer theory and feminist cultural studies have largely focused on paradigms that explain phenomena through social constructionist models, but new materialist frameworks have more to say about the material interactions that occur beneath and alongside these well-established social scripts. According to Rosi Braidotti (2016), feminist new materialisms mark “a new alliance between the ‘two cultures’ of the humanities and sciences” (n.p.) by shifting foundational assumptions about the place of humans in the world: new materialist approaches thus make it “impossible to separate ecological degradation from human activity, social interaction and mental habits” since “it all hangs eco-sophically together” (ibid.).

Along these lines, and speaking to the animacy hierarchies discussed in Chapter Four, Donna Haraway’s (2008) concept of *naturecultures* collapses binary notions of a pure natural world contrasted against human-produced cultures, instead focusing on the interdependent circulations that permeate conceptual borders. In employing a *naturecultural epistemology* (also termed “material–semiotic” epistemology), Haraway simultaneously attends to the problems of anthropomorphizing; she argues against the temptation to make humans out of nonhuman

³³ The term “material feminism” is perhaps misleading in this context since it has a propensity to invoke a more familiar use of the concept, which centres the lived material conditions of women and is often linked to Marxist feminist or political economy approaches. Myra J. Hird (2009) clarifies the key distinctions in her article “Feminist Engagements With Matter.” She writes, “The more familiar ‘material feminism’ [...] is concerned with women’s material living conditions—labor, reproduction, political access, health, education, and intimacy—structured through class, race, ethnicity, age, nation, ableism, heteronormativity, and so on. These analyses, in broad brushstroke, draw attention to the often mundane, repetitive, and tedious activities of daily life” (329). She continues to explain that “these analyses tend not to engage with affective physicality or human–nonhuman encounters and relations. What distinguishes emerging analyses of material feminism [...] is a keen interest in *engagements with matter*” (329-330).

companions or to paper human kinship structures overtop of nonhuman beings, instead weaving together a series of complex interspecies encounters that show humans and nonhumans thinking, moving, listening, and feeling with and alongside one another.³⁴ This type of approach is, arguably, taken up through the social and interpersonal intimacies featured in the film *Kedi*, discussed in the previous chapter, and can simultaneously be seen in the object relations discussed below in this chapter.

Exploring these types of multispecies assemblages, Jane Bennett's influential work *Vibrant Matter* (2010) stages a political intervention that insists on the agency of nonhuman forces, both animal and environmental. Bennett's notion of *vital materiality* lays a foundation for reexamining the ways that animacy is assumed and/or attributed across material lines and insists that "vitality is shared by *all* things" and not just by humans and nonhuman animals (89). In this formulation, Bennett lays the epistemological groundwork for recognizing intimate networks that do not necessarily adhere to human-human forms of sociality, ones that are comprised of the interactions between supposedly inanimate objects as well as ones that are made up of human-object relations.

These epistemological challenges are similarly developed through the metaphysical work of Karen Barad, who takes up matter across this planet and beyond. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad (2007) favours the term *entanglements* as she works to decenter human individuation and traces multispecies and cross-matter intimacies. As she explains, "to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but

³⁴ In *Staying With the Trouble*, Donna Haraway (2016) expands her discussion of feminist new materialism by moving to propose an epoch she names the *Chthulucene*, a "kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (2). For Haraway, the "mixed assemblages" of human and nonhuman kin may offer new responses to the horrors of the Anthropocene (discussed below) and the Capitalocene (i.e., an era marked by hypercapitalism and neoliberal destruction).

to lack an independent, self-contained existence” (ix). Continuing, she writes, “individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (ibid.). Barad’s ideas of *intra-relating* and *intra-action* gesture to necessarily co-constituted—or *entangled*—processes of becoming, and are set off against the more commonly used *inter-action* whereby two (or more) ontologically separate beings first form an individuated self and *then* encounter one another. Barad explains that, in her analysis, the primary unit of being is not “independent objects with inherent boundaries,” but is instead a relational product of objects and things and humans and nonhuman species all intra-acting in complex entanglements (139).³⁵

These multilayered entanglements are a key tenet of feminist new materialist frameworks, which recognize the inherent and necessary dependencies between human and nonhuman matter. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, these interspecies dependencies remain largely unacknowledged in dominant ideologies, and humans are made out to be the exceptional vessels of agency, animacy, and vitality. Synchronously, however, marginalized humans are often objectified, commodified, and attributed with value only as laborers or as bearers of broader social tensions. Feminist ecocriticisms and queer ecologies frameworks (e.g., Gaard 1993, 1997; Mies and Shiva 2014; Plumwood 2001; Marsh 2011; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010) have made significant contributions to understanding these processes as ones that are in alignment with the exploitation, manipulation, and extraction of resources from the earth. These

³⁵ While the flowing and deterritorialized movements of this approach may call to mind Deleuze’s bodies without organs, there are several key differences between Deleuze’s *assemblages* and Barad’s *entanglements*. Perhaps most relevant to my discussion here is that for Deleuze, materiality and material objects get caught up in the assemblage but have no independent agency of their own. On the other hand, Barad understands the agency of objects to be a crucial component of their intra-actions with humans and other beings. For an in-depth comparative analysis of the philosophies of Deleuze and Barad, see Serge F. Hein (2016), “The New Materialism in Qualitative Inquiry.”

analyses expose how human–nonhuman intra-actions concomitantly structure queer and marginalized intimacies as much as they do widespread socialities.

Studies of the Anthropocene

Utilizing more recently developed language, studies of the Anthropocene consider shifting conditions of intimacy that are emerging under never-ending resource extraction and the devastation of ecological matter. The Anthropocene refers to a proposed geological epoch that signals a period of significant human intervention into the earth’s ecology, geology, and ecosystems. Put forward by geoscientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000, the term has seen more substantial engagement in recent years. Though the exact start date of the epoch is still being debated (see Braje and Erlandson 2013; Colebrook and Weinsten 2015; Foley et al. 2013; Schneiderman 2017; Smith and Zeder 2013), the concept of the Anthropocene describes the time that is now, wherein humans exist alongside nonhuman actors on a planet that is on the brink of ecological collapse. This collapse is recognized as resulting from human-made (and largely man-made) disasters. As Gerrard, Handwerk and Wilke (2014) explain, the Anthropocene was “originally defined as the age in which humanity came to have an impact upon long-term geological processes”—differently attributed to the beginning of agricultural processes, the onset of the Industrial Revolution, or the mid-twentieth century—but now the term “stresses that our species has become a crucially significant factor in potentially cataclysmic climatological and biogeographical changes” (149). Studies of the Anthropocene thus take up the complex interactions between the natural, human, and technological realms while acknowledging the grim consequences of human supremacy and anthropocentrism.

Given the ecological focus of the concept, it is unsurprising that studies of the Anthropocene tend to echo and extend feminist ecocriticisms and queer ecologies frameworks,

though works coming out of the more conservative fields of geology, planetary ecology, and geo-engineering do not necessarily know of and/or acknowledge the interdisciplinary work being done through feminist science studies, postcolonial studies, queer theory, Indigenous feminisms, and disability studies.³⁶ Yet overall, theorizing that takes up the social, political, ecological, and ethical implications of the Anthropocene covers broad ground in both academic and industry spheres. Noel Castree (2014), for example, writes that the “manifold implications” of the concept of the Anthropocene “invite weighty discussions between people who might otherwise not communicate often or at all—for instance, CEOs and deep ecologists, nature poets and environmental lawyers, ethicists and celebrity environmentalists” (235). Add to this mix the conversations that have been happening across a range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and there are perhaps even more unlikely conversations being sparked.

Recent texts in queer theory, affect theory, feminist philosophy, and cultural studies have similarly gravitated to the concept of the Anthropocene and its related inquiries, turning it into a new “buzzword” (e.g., Colebrook and Weinsten 2015; Haraway 2015, 2016; Grusin 2017; Nelson and Braun 2017). Yet even as they employ the term, scholars within these fields are simultaneously wary of adopting it wholeheartedly, since many of the key questions that organize studies of the Anthropocene have long been articulated in feminist thought using different linguistic categories. Even the key debates around the proposed epoch, which include where and when to demarcate the start of this period of overwhelming human intervention, risk re-centering humans in general and male humans in particular with regards to impact on the earth’s ecosystems (Schneiderman 2017). As Clare Colebrook and Jami Weinsten (2015) argue,

³⁶ These works include ones being published in some of the larger science magazines and industry journals, including *Science*, *Nature*, *Geoforum*, and *Ambio*. See, for example, Dalby (2013), Seidl et al. (2013), Steffan et al. (2011), Waters et al. (2016), Zalasiewicz et al. (2017).

debates over whether the epoch should be made official or when the “golden spike” (i.e., starting point) should be placed detract from other critical philosophical, ethical, and social concerns of our time. They write,

By asking when the Anthropocene began, we revive a modified version of the time of man; once again, man is placed as *the* agent of history, albeit unwittingly, and he can look back upon and assess the past of his own making (168).

So what then can the term offer feminism, and/or what can feminism offer the term? Asking these very questions and exploring what it means to deploy the terms “Anthropocene” and “feminism” together, Richard Grusin’s (2017) edited collection *Anthropocene Feminism* intervenes in studies of the Anthropocene that have been ignoring these histories of feminist and queer theorizing. In considering the human impacts on environmental and naturecultural worlds, Grusin writes that the fact that “the concept of the Anthropocene has [...] been implicit in feminism and queer theory” over the past few decades has been “largely ignored, or, worse, erased, by the masculine authority of an institutional scientific discourse that now seeks to name our current historical moment in the Anthropocene” (viii). It is for this reason that my own analysis in this chapter explicitly and conscientiously foregrounds the work of queer and feminist scholars. Through varied theoretical lenses, the authors in Grusin’s collection reclaim and extend queer and feminist histories of thinking to push conversations forward about the earth, human–nonhuman relations, in/animate matter, and environmental devastation. In so doing, they open a whole new path forward for the consideration of multispecies intra-actions, including the human–nonhuman object relations I consider in this chapter. In service of nonanthropocentric thinking, Karen Barad (2011) contends that thinking humans as the prime and privileged site of technological, social, and intimate developments is illogical:

human exceptionalism and other anthropocentrisms are odd scaffoldings on which to build a theory that is specifically intended to account for matters of

abjection and the differential construction of the human, especially when gradations of humanness, including inhumanness, are often constituted in relation to nonhumans (122).

Barad's consideration of human exceptionalism and processes of objectification lends itself to thinking object-oriented philosophies, including object-oriented ontology, an epistemological framework that is in line with the goals of new materialisms and studies of the Anthropocene but takes a somewhat novel approach.

Object-Oriented Ontologies

Within object-oriented ontology (OOO), all things, including but not limited to humans, machines, animals, plants, rocks, children's toys, coffee cups, food, trash, atoms, molecules, ideas, icebergs, and the sky are understood to be co-existing, intermingling *objects*. This conceptual shift is, again, made in service of de-privileging human experience and doing away with animate–inanimate hierarchies of matter and being. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, there is significant crossover between OOO, new materialisms, and studies of the Anthropocene. Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" (2001), often cited as a foundational text of OOO, names new materialism as he explicates how a theoretical paradigm that prioritizes the study of *things* raises questions that "ask not whether things are but what work they perform" (7). He proposes that this approach may "precipitate a new materialism that takes objects for granted only in order to grant them their potency—to show how they organize our private and public affection" (ibid.). Whereas *objects* have "codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful," *things* are much more elusive (4). A *thing*, he explains, in actuality names not a contained material object but a "subject–object relation," since we often only see the "thingness" of an object when it ceases to function for us. Objects become recognizable as things only "when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been

arrested, however momentarily” (ibid.)—e.g., when the crop dies, the toy breaks, or the iceberg melts into a nearby floodplain.

This description of where and when we confront the thingness of objects borrows from Martin Heidegger’s concept of the *broken tool* to describe how this type of disruption in function allows a thing to be seen for what it is (see also Harman 2002, 2010). In elucidating this connection, Steven Shaviro (2011) explains, “When a tool, or a thing, fails to function as expected, then the excess of its being is suddenly revealed to us” (n.p.). It is this excess of being that draws our attention to the thingness of an object that may have gone previously unnoticed or may have been previously taken for granted. In breaking from its expected role, a tool is asserting agency by interrupting human-centered performance. The idea that all things exist only insofar as they come into contact with or impact human relations is referred to as *correlationalism*, something that is resisted emphatically by OOO. Timothy Morton (2011) contends that though OOO “shares obvious affinities with ecocriticism and ecophilosophy” in this regard, it simultaneously enables a “ruthless rejection of the concept of Nature, in part because Nature is correlationalist” (164). This challenge risks going down a deeply deconstructionist philosophical path, but even with its more basic criticism of anthropocentric worldings, much of OOO fails to recognize the gendered implication of its foundations; accepting the fact that tools and other objects must be *useful* in order to be *valuable* is, concomitantly, accepting masculinist, racialized, and capitalist priorities.

In a critique of such androcentric underpinnings of OOO, Rebekah Sheldon (2015) explains that the framework has been unconvincing for many feminist theorists due to its “cannily unknowing usurpation of the energies of feminist thought” (204) and its failure to acknowledge and incorporate histories of feminist theorizing in meaningful ways. According to

Morton (2011), “OOO is a relatively ‘flat ontology’, which means that hallucinations and the idea of purple are also objects, though perhaps not the same kind as toilets and ozone” (165). But what of humans who have, by and large, been treated as objects all along? Feminist critiques beg the question: What does it mean to claim a flat ontology where all things are equivalently objects when some things—including some humans—are objectified more than others? Particularly when intersectional feminism has long been engaging with the lack of agency for objectified and marginalized people, what does a framework named “object-oriented ontology” really bring to the analytic fore? These questions act as the starting point for Katherine Behar’s (2016) critique in the collection *Object-Oriented Feminism*, an important intervention into the often masculinist and white theorizing of OOO.

Though she sets out a fairly damning critique of existing work within the field, Behar also sees much potential in the foundations of OOO. In particular, she appreciates the nonanthropocentric stance taken by OOO and its co-conspirator speculative realism, which positions the world as “a pluralist population of objects” where “humans are objects no more privileged than any other” (Behar 2016, 5). This positioning allows for a break from many other theories of subjecthood, which are fundamentally dependent on the logic of phallogentrism (see Grosz 1990; Irigaray 1985a, 1985b, 1993; Rose 1995a, 1995b). Along with other key thinkers in the field, Behar builds on these aspects to develop a specifically and overtly feminist response: Object-Oriented Feminism, or “OOF.” In Behar’s (2016) formulation,

OOF originated as a feminist intervention into philosophical discourses [...] that take objects, things, stuff, and matter as primary. It seeks to capitalize perhaps somewhat parasitically on the contributions of that thought while twisting it toward more agential, political, embodied terrain. Object-oriented feminism turns the position of philosophy inside out to study objects while being an object oneself. Such self-implication allows OOF to develop three important aspects of feminist thinking in the philosophy of things: politics, in which OOF engages with histories of treating certain humans (women, people

of color, and the poor) as objects; erotics, in which OOF employs humor to foment unseemly entanglements between things; and ethics, in which OOF refuses to make grand philosophical claims, instead staking a modest ethical position that arrives at being ‘in the right’ even if it means being ‘wrong’ (3).

By challenging the logics of phallogocentric object/subject binaries, OOF offers a critical engagement with the realities of multilayered human oppression as well as with the consequences of seeing some matter as “inanimate” or as “less lively” than its privileged counterparts. This approach again decentralizes human experience and refuses human supremacist and anthropocentric orderings of relational intimacy. It also blurs dualistic understandings of nature/culture, including binary conceptualizations of human/animal, organic/inorganic, technology/nature, and human/ecology.

The two cases I take up in this chapter similarly collapse some of these binaries as I consider intimate–affective worlds that are formed with, through, and around objects. The affective attachments and intimate histories that humans instill into objects can make things into extensions of human-intimate worlds. The Museum of Broken Relationships, for example, understands these complex processes and puts them on display through a combination of object exhibition and written interpretation through storytelling. Objects are, however, connected differently to the intimate worlds of humans through their relationships with objectum-sexuals. When Erika Eiffel first came to media prominence for speaking out about the intimate and romantic relationship she had with the Eiffel Tower, her story was immediately met with a combination of dismissal, aversion, ridicule, and outright denial. These responses are emblematic of the intimate lockdown that comes along with anthropocentric and human-centered world orders, and they illustrate the extent to which it is taken for granted that objects, particularly human-constructed objects, do not and cannot have agency of their own.

[5.3]

Intimate Objects

If objects and things have social worlds, we can see how they necessarily have intimate worlds as well. There are plenty of examples of relationships that operate outside of normative structures and intimate imperatives of human–human sociality, if one knows where to look—or what to look for. Take, for example, childhood staples of “imaginary” best friends (which we might understand to be simultaneously a coping mechanism, an exercise of imagination, and/or a form of ever-present, self-directed energy) and toy animal tea parties. Imbuing matter that is usually considered inanimate with a quality of life is often excused, and sometimes even encouraged, among young people, but it is later dismissed as being a sign of stunted growth or of deeper mental pathology if it persists into adulthood. These in/animate assumptions collude with ongoing colonial and Eurocentric violences (discussed, for example, in Chapter Three), silencing so many other forms of knowledge production. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, non-dominant forms of intimacy that act as models of possibility³⁷ are consistently devalued, trivialized, or made to be impossible. Though they are unevenly implemented, colonial legacies

³⁷ In the current cultural moment, “possibility model” is a term invoked largely by trans and POC communities—in particular, by trans actor and activist Laverne Cox—to indicate a person or circumstance that models a way of living life differently or, in some cases, that models a way of living at all. Through Cox has spoken publicly about this term in a wide variety of contexts, her most prominent invocation appeared in an interview with Katie Couric on “Katie” (Cox 2014). The possibilities referenced here include living in ways that break away from the standard homophobic, transphobic, white supremacist assumptions that trans women of colour are destined to die, or that queer and trans youth are bound to misery and suicide. In this sense, the public conversations that are being had around possibility models resonate with José Muñoz’s extensive work on queer communities of colour, performance, and the death drive, particularly through his theorizing of disidentifications (1999), queer utopias (2009), and the “brown commons” (2000). They also resonate with some aspects of Afrofuturism, as presented by James Bliss (2015), Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman (2011), and Alexis P. Grums (2011). While my use of a similar term—“models of possibility”—differs in both content and context, I am indebted to Cox, Muñoz, and others for offering language to articulate these difficult and omnipresent narratives of queer and trans subjects.

persist and are imposed on bodies of all kinds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, cisgender and trans, desiring and non-desiring of animate or inanimate matter. The latter is perhaps most evident when examining the popular news reporting on objectum-sexuality.

The details of objectophilic relationships vary depending on the specific object and person who are connecting with one another: object relations are sometimes experienced as sexual, sometimes as nonsexual but still romantic, but they are almost always characterized as profoundly intimate. OS people, as with a variety of other desiring subjects, may be either monogamous or non-monogamous and may structure their relationships in a myriad of different ways. Importantly, those who publicly identify with OS—sometimes taking on an identity of *objectophile*—frame their desires as expressions of their sexuality or sexual “orientation” and are clear in distinguishing these desires from object-based fetishes or kinks.³⁸ According to personal accounts published through online sources like the Objectum-Sexuality Internationale website (Objectum-Sexuality.org), objectum-sexuals are trying to make sense of and live out their sexual and intimate lives within the same dominant human–human focused relationship models as everyone else. Though a liberal claim to normalcy is evoked in these narrations, and though OS is not characterized by an explicit attempt to be subversive, the hostile and reactionary response to objectophilia and those who identify with objectum-sexuality clearly demarcate OS as another decidedly “improper” intimacy, one most often rejected as invalid and upheld as categorically impossible. Amber Jamilla Musser (2013) skilfully argues that the possible reinforcement of neoliberal citizenship and normative discourses on intimacy are subverted through the ways that

³⁸ The sources consulted for this chapter are restricted to narrative accounts of objectum-sexuality that circulate in public domains. These include the OS Internationale website, a variety of online articles and interviews, and the documentary films referenced. Thus, the views presented in this article may or may not be representative of larger communities of OS people. They do, however, reflect what has appeared in public venues to date at the time of this writing.

OS relationships simultaneously queer love, sex, and capitalism: By de-centering penetration, genitals, and phallic engagements, Musser explains, OS sexual intimacy relies instead on energetic exchanges, sensation, and spirituality. Similarly, Musser argues, the way that OS viewpoints—which frequently invoke notions of animism—refuse the use-value of objects and rely instead on their intimate value disrupts capitalist logics of worth. Finally, the media narratives around OS diversity the range of imaginable intimate structures while they simultaneously reveal the ways in which fields of intimate possibility are continually locked down and managed within dominant realms.

In Chapter Four, I discussed some of these intimate regulations as I drew on Donna Haraway's (2008) framing of species proximity as a key predictor in how likely humans would be to accept the validity of a particular interspecies relationship. The familiarity (and frequent anthropomorphizing) of domesticated animals makes them some of the most probable co-constituents. In casual conversation about my dissertation, I have found that the "interspecies friendships" pitch often receives the most interested engagement—along with the most personal photo sharing ("look at my adorable cat/dog/bunny/goat!"). However, as my analysis moves into less familiar territory, examining, for example, the intimately unproximate matter of buildings and fences, I have to work harder to keep my audience interested. People seem to be captivated by the challenge this topic offers to the status quo, yet they refuse to accept that inanimate matter could have agency of its own. As Kath Weston (2017) succinctly observes, "Everybody wants to rethink animacy, but almost no one wants to be an animist" (26).

As objects stand in for a type of "species" here, I consider the ways that affective responses like disgust (often expressed through ridicule and wholesale rejection) are mobilized in online coverage of objectum-sexuals. In so doing, I parse out the stronghold of binary notions of

animate/inanimate matter and trace their impact on the legibility of noncompliant, human–nonhuman intimacies. By centering forms of intimacy that are routinely made out to be impossible, unthinkable, or affectively strange by popular media and other forms of cultural commentary, this chapter seeks to carve out further discursive and material space: space that allows for critical models of possibility to emerge—possibilities for living life differently from that which is expected, for being with each other in new or unanticipated ways, and for finding, creating, and/or maintaining intimate bonds that interrupt the existing stronghold of normative affects.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Erika Eiffel, The Woman Who Married the Eiffel Tower



Figure 36: Still of Erika Eiffel in Strangelove (2008).

In 2008, an observational news-doc called *Strangelove: Married to the Eiffel Tower* (dir. Agnieszka Piotrowska) became one of the first representations of objectum-sexuality to hit mainstream culture, airing on Channel 5 in the UK. *Strangelove* follows self-identified objectum-sexuals Erika Eiffel and Amy Wolf as they navigate their love of nonhuman, non-animal entities.

The documentary explains that objectum-sexuals “fall in love with objects, not human beings,” and that they communicate with their beloved objects via telepathy and energetic exchange. Eiffel is, somewhat famously now, the woman who married the Eiffel Tower in a private, extra-legal ceremony in 2007. Her commitment ceremony was documented in *Strangelove* (Figure 36) and drew attention to objectum-sexuality as a previously unimagined intimate structure. At the time of filming, Eiffel also had ongoing relationships with an archery bow named Lance, the Berlin Wall, the Golden Gate Bridge, and a fence in Leiden, Sweden. Wolf, too, is drawn to objects both large and small, and at the time of filming was in love with a fairground ride called 1001 Nacht, a small banister in her bedroom, the Empire State Building, and a church rail at her local congregation.

While in some regards *Strangelove* is empathetic and generous with its subjects, highlighting their emotional thrills and struggles, it is simultaneously sensationalist and highly reductive. In her position as director and main camera operator, Piotrowska pushes her subjects to speak about the sexual aspects of OS relationships, repeatedly asking about the mechanics of their intimate encounters. Even when another OS interviewee, Eija-Ritta, explicitly pushes back on this line of questioning, Piotrowska persists. At the end of the first segment, the voiceover poses the anthropological and voyeuristic set of questions, “Who are the objectum-sexuals? Why are their passions so intense? And why do they prefer the coldness of concrete to the warmth of a human body?” The segments that follow focus on Wolf’s possible Asperger’s diagnosis and the histories of trauma and abuse in both Wolf’s and Eiffel’s early lives, offering potential explanations (as if they are required) for their current object-oriented affections. Both Wolf and Eiffel maintain that they have always felt romantically oriented towards objects, regardless of any potential traumas or abuse, and they see their OS identities being as natural as any other

form of sexual desire.

A closer look at online news stories and video interviews featuring Eiffel makes it clear that public discourses surrounding objectum-sexuality continue to raise questions about whether human–inanimate object relations are legible, only to anxiously dismiss them as nothing more than comical fodder. After the release of *Strangelove*, Erika Eiffel started a press tour to speak further about the misinformation and misconceptions she felt were proliferated by the film. She gave several interviews about OS, appeared on primetime television and in popular news sources, and spoke publicly about her own experiences of intimacy in her past and current relationships.³⁹ In particular, Eiffel spoke out against the sensationalist and unnecessary sexualization of the film’s subjects. She expressed her dismay at the treatment of intimate moments of Wolf and herself touching, caressing, and kissing their love objects. In attempts to correct the record, Eiffel even took to posting in online comments sections, and responded personally to an article titled “Objectum Sexuality: When Relationships With Inanimate Objects Become Intimate” (Morrissey 2009). Her response read as follows:

ShabaliniFedotenko Tracie Egan Morrissey

2/10/09 11:12pm

Hello,

I am the woman in love with the Eiffel Tower. I tried to comment via my Facebook account to assure everyone I am indeed who I say but it did not allow.

I expected all of the comments above and will not argue that it is difficult to comprehend someone being in love with an object. For me, I have always been this way... and it would be easy for me to be offended because this is what is right for me... But I can say with all honesty, I am used to it...

Believe me, I am the first to realize I am different from mainstream minus the comments that pound home that fact... and while it’s easy to criticize and say that I must be some fruit cake... I would not change who I am because as one very positive person noted, I am not hurting anyone... my love of objects has propelled me to becoming a 3x world

³⁹ Eiffel is widely cited as having been on *The Tyra Show* and *Good Morning America*, among others. See, for example, Awde (2012) and Hofmann (n.d.).

champion^[40] so as I see it, objectum-sexuality is not hurting others, nor me either.

This documentary is a horrible representation of my object love and only sensationalized the sexual aspect. I want to set the record straight... I DID NOT consummate with the Eiffel Tower. I hope you all realize paparazzi television when you see it. That was false narration of my intentions. I was supposed to see the final cut BEFORE it aired. Had I known the director would discredit my feelings for the Eiffel Tower by portraying me as though I was doing more than simply sitting across a steel gusset plate... I won't go there but know that we are at serious odds for throwing me out to the wolves while she makes money off my naivety to her tactics to get me talk about sex.

I am not publicly open as the other woman presented. I honestly regret that I ever believed the director would present objectum sexuality it in a sensitive manner.

Most sadly, taking part in that film has severely driven a wedge in my relationship with the Eiffel Tower. Time has yet to heal the damage caused by the insensitivity I suffered throughout months of filming and the false portrayal of me consummating with the Eiffel Tower.

Nor did I like being rendered as a traumatized woman seeking control simply because I do not have any diagnosis such as Asperger's Syndrome to explain my love of objects. Some things cannot be explained.

Many women have been through far worse in their lives and they are not OS. I am not OS because I had horrible events in my life. I am simply an OS person who had horrible things happen in my life. I have always been OS. It's this difference that I find important for people to understand.

Kind regards, Erika Naisho Eiffel

Please visit the objectum-sexuality dot org website

Strangelove is far from the only reductive piece of media that takes up OS. Article after article posted to online news sources ridicule those who have found love or significant relationships with objects. From headlines like “The Ride of Her Life: A Woman Marries a Roller Coaster” (Newsome n.d.) to “Oooh, A New Fetish: Women Who Love Large Objects” (Robertson 2009) and “Woman With Objects Fetish Marries Eiffel Tower” (Simpson 2008; Figure 37), it is clear that objectum-sexuality has been almost gleefully misrecognized in the

⁴⁰ In *Strangelove*, Eiffel discusses her relationship with her archery bow and first object love(r), Lance. Together, Eiffel and Lance won several world championships before their connection started waning and Eiffel's archery career began suffering. Eiffel credits her three-time success to the intense bond and romantic partnership the two once had with one another.

media and misrepresented in general publics more broadly. In fact, objectophilia is seen to be so impossible that it is (practically) unimaginable outside of the realm of joke or parody. Being in love with the Eiffel Tower—or any other supposedly inanimate object, for that matter—is pathologically suspicious as emotionally limited, asocial, and affectively strange.⁴¹

Employing a nonanthropogenic analysis of interspecies desire, David Huebert (2015) develops the concept of *species panic*, a state that often arises when humans encounter erotic—or even potentially erotic—experiences with nonhuman beings, thus interrupting their single-species focused sexual world ordering. In Huebert’s formulation, species panic is “an anxiety felt when one’s species status is under threat” by the boundary collapse of interspecies encounters (245). Though Huebert is writing about human



Figure 37: Eiffel featured in The Telegraph (2008).

relationships with other animate species, I argue that this can also explain the types of anxious responses that are characteristic of news reporting on OS. In this case, species panic moves beyond the bestial into the realm of metals, plastics, organic materials, and human-made structures. Species panic is intimately connected to cultural ideas of animacy, since both

⁴¹ I use the term “pathologically suspicious” here, rather than “pathological,” to highlight the fact that OS is frequently conflated with object-based fetishes and other pathological diagnoses though it is not, in and of itself, listed in the DSM-V or under other official classifications of pathology.

“conceptually arrange human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority” (Chen 2012, 13). The twin concepts of animacy and species panic are thus key, though often unspoken, parts of world orderings; any intimate structure that challenges these hierarchies poses a destabilizing threat to the totalizing dominance of patriarchal logics. In response, and almost without fail, we see the emergence of a cultural backlash that reasserts the boundaries of hierarchical animacy categories. The frenzied reaction against Eiffel’s stubborn insistence that animacy exists in everything, including supposedly inanimate objects, illuminates telling boundary work around the “proper” role of intimacy in domestinnormative, mononormative, human-supremacist and hetero-focused worlds.

Unpacking the narratives around OS becomes that much more complicated as it becomes clear that Eiffel not only identifies as objectum-sexual, but also as an “animist”—one who has “always felt everything around [her] possesses a sentience, possesses a soul or energy, a flow, a force” (Eiffel, quoted in Spahic 2013). This explicit invocation of animacy offers an invitation to think about objectum-sexuality further through new materialist concepts of vitality and material agency, which provide inroads for considering affective animacy through the in/animate affections present in OS relationships. An “animist worldview,” per Eiffel’s description, clearly challenges the dominant hierarchies of animacy that firmly demarcate bounds between human, nonhuman animal, and non-animal matter. Eiffel’s invocation of animism describes her romantic and sexual desires and calls for a re-description and re-visioning of intimate possibilities. The intimacies lived out by Eiffel and other objectum-sexuals model non-normative forms of affective connection, and they frequently evoke panicked affective responses from those encountering this type of unfamiliar, or interpretively “strange,” non-normativity. Both the modeling of possibility and the elicitation of panic are equally, though differently, telling.

With Eiffel and other OS desiring subjects, the disruption of normative understandings of intimacy run particularly deep: whereas the challenge of Jackie Samuel’s professional cuddling services (discussed in Chapter Three) draws heavily on the language of *human* need and *human* nature, and while they capitalize on feminized care work, OS relationships tend to sidestep these framings altogether by moving the conversation away from physical interactions and towards cross-“species” exchanges of energy. The affective and emotional connections of human–object relationships call into question some of the most foundational assumptions of intimate normalcy, including that sexual intimacy is formed between humans, or that (only) nonsexual intimacy exists between humans and domesticated animals.

Presenting OS in online news coverage through mockery and disavowal reasserts these dominant orderings of animacy—and the majoritarian understandings of where a human might find intimacy—confirming Chen’s (2012) claim that, “the inanimate and animate are both subject to the biopolitical hand” (193). As part of this hierarchical boundary work, Eiffel has faced violent linguistic assaults for her outspokenness and media visibility. Still, she has continued to be an advocate for objectum-sexuals. Due in part to Eiffel’s labour, it would appear that spokespeople for the recognition of OS have made some headway in terms of public visibility, and their stories are slowly becoming more nuanced in the media. This indicates that, gradually, the representation of objectum-sexuality may be diversifying.

At this point in time, I am left wondering what this potential shift in discourse might indicate. What, if anything, is it that is changing through more diverse representations, and what purpose does this incorporation of OS into dominant spheres serve? Perhaps expanding discussions of same-sex marriage and other non-heteronormative sexualities has led the way to a discursive legitimation of other marginalized relations and intimate structures of attachment—as

long as they remain marriage-like. I wonder also how further analysis that is attentive to animacy hierarchies might consider OS as an anti-normative, non-dominant challenge to structures of intimacy, even as existing narratives of OS centre, and sometimes appeal to, liberalist acceptance into the realm of normalcy in the form of proclamations that “we’re just like anybody else (...almost).” Musser (2013) considers similar questions as she explores how OS people often frame objects as being “both like and unlike humans” (n.p.). Drawing on narratives of sameness, she argues, allows OS people a claim to neoliberal citizenry both for themselves and for their object lovers. However, we must not lose the question, “what does it mean for humans to imagine themselves as objects?” (ibid.). Here, I would draw attention back to some of the feminist and queer of colour critiques of OOO: when so many marginalized human subjects are still treated as objects due to their race/racialization, dis/ability, and other dehumanized traits, what does it mean for humans to electively draw on a narrative of sameness with human-made objects? Perhaps this question requires more insight into OS people themselves, and perhaps it requires more experiential evidence before lines can be drawn.

To this end, shifting discourses around OS relationships may prove valuable. More recent publications and stories about OS take a notably different tone from those published just a few years ago, offering more acceptance of objectum-sexuality as a legitimate orientation from the get-go and relying on objectum-sexuals themselves to provide the majority of the narrative about their sexual and intimate relations. More recent coverage features a wider variety of OS speaking subjects. For example, a man named Nathaniel, who is in love with his car, was featured in a segment of TLC’s *My Strange Addiction* (2012), and Carol Santa Fe from San Diego, California, recently went public on Anderson Cooper (2012) about her 36-year long love affair with a San Diego train station (Boult 2017; Mann 2017; Sheppard 2017). Eiffel has also continued to speak

out. In 2012, the *Globe and Mail* published an interview with Eiffel (Boesveld), and in 2015, Vice.com featured a sympathetic story titled “Heartbreak is Hard, Even When Your Lover is the Eiffel Tower” (Frizzell).⁴² The Vice.com article details the relationship strain Eiffel experienced due to the fallout from *Strangelove*’s coverage of her marriage to the Eiffel Tower. She is quoted as saying,

The greatest heartbreak I ever experienced was due to the media. [...] A year after my commitment ceremony with the Eiffel Tower, a British documentary maker approached me saying they wanted to cover it. I thought she was kind, but she kept pushing the sexual aspect of it (Frizzell 2015, n.p.).

Eiffel explained that the staff at the Tower saw the film and wanted “nothing to do with [her]” (ibid.). Expressing the painful loss that ensued, Eiffel details, “I don’t even know how to articulate a heartbreak like that. It just wrecked me” (ibid.).

This underscores the fact that there is an element of personal and political risk involved in “going public” as an OS person. When considering that the open and visible parts of OS communities are still quite small in numbers, the *who* of who is speaking matters. Who is granted authority to speak about objectum-sexuality, and who is not? Who can risk being visible as part of the OS community in the first place? Who is recognized as being an authority on the subject of their own experience? And who is recognized as a speaking subject at all? Eiffel contrasts her animist identity with Western anthropocentric viewpoints—she cites Japanese Shinto culture and other non-Western spiritual beliefs as having more integrated bases and animist practices. She claims, “The only places where I have problems are the USA, England, and Australia. It’s the puritanical basis of the way people think in those countries that’s made me suffer a great deal”

⁴² The original title of this article was “Breaking Up With the Eiffel Tower – How Heartbreak is No Less ‘Real’ for Objectum Sexuels.” At some point between January 2015 and May of 2017 (my last date of access), the title was updated. The article provides no explanation for the change.

(Frizzell 2015, n.p.). Because of the intimate lockdown that relegates intimacy to human–human relationships, she says, “I’ve lost jobs, I’ve lost family, and I lost my greatest love” (ibid.). And yet, Eiffel has had the opportunity to tell her story on a far bigger platform than other OS people. Even as she invokes the impact of colonialism and Anglo-Eurocentrism on the reception/cultural possibility of OS, Eiffel makes use of her position as a White and Western, English-speaking subject to further visibility of OS people.

The complex interlacing of racialization, biopolitics, and affective attachments in these narratives relegates certain bodies to limited speaking roles and undoubtedly impacts who is able and willing to speak publicly about their private attachments. Though representations of OS appear to be expanding, the reactions to accounts of OS continue to be dominated by scoffing, de-valuing, and denying the legitimacy of object–human relationships. Accordingly, any apparent shifts towards greater acceptance should be approached with justifiable caution. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of knowledge embedded in Eiffel’s words. The love and loss that she references echoes the ebb and flow of all relationships, whether they are formed between humans, humans and nonhuman animals, nonhumans and nonhumans, or humans and objects. The intricacy of intimate constellations cannot be distilled down to any one structure, and they exist along a continuum of present bodies and absent lingerings. This haunted and haunting path is traced in my final case study of this dissertation, the Museum of Broken Relationships (MoBR). Through the display of physical objects set alongside narrative stories, the MoBR drudges up painful experiences and turns them into art exhibits that provide space for individual-yet-communal workings-through.

[5.4]

Remnants

Three glass beakers sit on an open shelf that straddles the kitchen and living room of my one-bedroom apartment (Figure 38). To household visitors, they may seem like mere decorative objects, hipster adornments to my newly renovated abode, but to me they signal much more.



Figure 38: Three beakers, personal collection.

Scene I. December.

We are five months into an all-consuming relationship and he is away for two weeks on a film shoot. Phone reception is sparse. The days are long. He spends six nights trekking through the Thar Desert on camelback and camping in the vast, near-total darkness. When he returns, he tells me he loves me and gives me a large glass beaker full of the finest, most

beautiful buff-coloured sand. He tells me that as he lay on the dunes at night, staring up at the most expansive sky and running his fingers through that sand, he would think of me. He tells me that he cannot wait for us to have our own adventures, together; that he knows our relationship is as expansive as that sky.

Scene II. February.

We have both been working way too hard, but we are on our way to Costa Rica for a romantic getaway. We are staying 500m away from the Jaguar Sanctuary, which I am especially excited about, and we are still madly in love. We have recently vowed to build a collection of sand-filled beakers from all of the beaches we visit together. At the end of our trip, we fill two plastic water bottles with the glistening black sand that frames the ocean, and when we return home—to what is now our shared home—we station two new objects beside that first sandy symbol of our future life together.

Scene III. July.

We spend his birthday drinking champagne with friends on a strikingly varied pebble beach in the U.K., and between lackadaisical gameplay we start up a collection of rocks—the ones that, rather arbitrarily, “feel the best to us.” We alternate between picking them up looks-first, with our eyes open, and picking them out with our eyes closed, intuiting by feel alone. I watch him closely as he stares up at the clear blue sky, absently fingering the contents of the beach, and I know that he is no longer thinking of me; his mind is with someone new. Despite this, I bring the collection of pebbles home, set it up in a small tumbler and put it up on the shelf next to the rest of the beakers. When he moves out, I send him away with one jar of the black sand. I need for him to carry the weight of the time we had spent together in the sun.

As many others can inevitably attest, the attachment I have to these objects is not a unique experience—objects often take on enhanced meaning as they become associated with loved ones or momentous life occasions. Through these associations, they become imbued with affects far beyond the usual scope of their being. Even when relationships end—whether by breakup, death, migration, or mundane life circumstances—objects tend to remain stubbornly infused with affective worlds, and they haunt us with their echoes of foreclosed possibility.

This stubborn connection between affects and objects was the inspiration for the Museum of Broken Relationships (MoBR), which is full of stories much like my own: affect-laden moments of intimate encounter told through a series of tangible objects, ones that contain the affective traces of love lost, broken, or dismembered. Museum originators Olinka Vištica and Dražen Grubišić were inspired by their own breakup. When the artist duo ended their romantic relationship, they



Figure 39: Logo, MoBR Zagreb, via Brokenships.com.

found themselves unable to let go of certain objects that had become meaningful throughout their partnership (Lam 2016). Their object-related woes led them first to ask friend for submissions, then to put out a broader call, and then to curate the first iteration of the MoBR: an exhibition of objects that held deep emotional meaning in the relationships of their former owners (*Economist* 2010).

Originally mounted as a temporary show in Zagreb in 2006, the MoBR has since grown



Figure 40: A Stiletto Shoe, via Brokenships.com.

exponentially—they now have a permanent home in Zagreb (opened October 2010), a second permanent location in Los Angeles (opened June 2016), several touring shows that pop up periodically around the world, and a website, hosted at Brokenships.com. The website includes a virtual display of objects and stories as well as a “confessionals” section, where users are encouraged to “share a break-up story, lock it away if [they] need to take [their] time, or simply pin a break-up on the global map of broken hearts” (Brokenships.com, “Shared Breakups”). All stories are anonymous, though physical donations do require a consent form that contains the donor’s full name and signature for legal purposes (Brokenships.com, “FAQ”).

In my consideration of the Museum of Broken Relationships, I return to the assertion that objects have, and create, intimate worlds. As I have traced out so far in this chapter, the intimacies that are created among objects and through object relations are central to world orderings. In both their virtual and physical spaces, the MoBR uses a combination of text and visual display to translate the affective worlds of objects. By tracing elements of the social through singular narratives as well as through curated collections of stories that are set alongside

one another, the MoBR stages a social world of its own by uniting contributors and visitors through experiences of loss, grief, mourning, and reprieve. Each mounting of the physical exhibit has been met with deep interest; no matter where it is unveiled, news stories and testimonials indicate that viewers have been touched in deeply affective and affecting ways. While this might speak to the way the Museum acts as an emotional bridge—commonality found across geographic and cultural lines—it is also instructive in thinking through the circuitous flows of intimacy.

The careful way each object is displayed, set alongside text that tells an intimate story about its affective past (seen in Figure 40), constructs a haunting kind of space, a public exhibition that is “both universal and deeply personal” and which is often described in reviews as being somehow deeply human (Stevenson 2016). The virtual space of *Brokenships.com* allows individual exposure to these affective sites, but the physical exhibits offer a different kind of engagement to visitors—the material environment highlights the agency of objects by exposing ways in which they can become much bigger than themselves when placed in a multi-object collection (seen in Figure 41). The accompanying narratives, human-created and human-curated, are certainly necessary components to the atmosphere of the MoBR, but the interactions between object-story and human-story underscore the fact that objects frequently contain and transfer affective vitality. Journalist Alison Stevenson (2016) reflects on her visceral experience of walking through the LA location’s inaugural exhibition, hit with the weight of the collection but also by its therapeutic potential:

After snaking through the museum and reading the stories of real people being discarded and clinging to the objects that were left behind, I was on the verge of a panic attack. I mean this literally: My heart started racing, and I struggled to keep myself from breaking down and crying right in the middle of the museum. [...] I left the Museum of Broken Relationships feeling like I’d just left a therapy session (n.p.).

This is just one account of the resounding impact of the MoBR. It is clear in these experiences that objects do not only facilitate global networks through commodity capital via movement across time, space, and culture (see Appadurai 1986), but they carry affective weight



Figure 41: Zagreb display, via Brokenships.com. Press kit photo by Mare Milin.

as well. Humans, of course, imbue objects with all kinds of significance—we demand that objects perform for us in particular ways, holding our hopes and dreams, our frustrations, our fears, and our failures. All the while, we rely on them to maintain our livelihoods, through everything from farming equipment to cars to coffee cups to computers and cell phones. I am also returning here to Heidegger’s formulation of the tool-as-thing and to Steven Shaviro’s (2011) claim that the broken tool scenario reveals an “excess of being.” The MoBR further reveals how humans largely take the functioning tool for granted, seeing it as an extension of human ingenuity or as evidence of human superiority over other beings. It is only when tools

stop working for us, when their functionality is interrupted, that their “thingness” is revealed and we suddenly become aware that they are made up of distinct, nonhuman matter.

The MoBR adds another layer of object relations to this discussion, necessitating an account of the intimate and affective worlds of objects rather than simply the functional ones. When an object *technically* continues to function—e.g., when the tractor still pulls the till or the cup still holds the coffee—but the affective imbuelement is no longer held intact in the same way, what can we make of it then? What part of an object lives on when, for example, a song once made us smile despite ourselves but now recalls only a painful loss? Or when a piece of art used to remind us of why we moved to the city or switched career paths, but now we see only failure and, again, that nasty foreclosed possibility? These are some vital questions raised by the MoBR.

In these scenarios, we are perhaps talking less about broken tools and more about *inconsistent* ones. The inconsistency of objects likewise reveals an “excess of being,” wherein it becomes impossible to ignore the fact that, while objects circulate in human worlds all the time, the relationship is not usually one of mutual caring: everyday objects do not generally care about us or our fragile human feelings, even though they impact us. An exception to this lack of mutuality is found in the case of OS relationships, as discussed above. Still, the circulation of objects—through both our use-oriented relationships and our affective ones—reveals a human reliance and dependence on nonhuman matter at the same time as it offers an intricate way into the realm of human sociality. Objects, even when they are still technically—physically—present, can haunt us.

In some ways, the objects at MoBR double as spectres of themselves, haunting visitors with an affective life that extends far beyond their physical presence. In the Western academy, one of the most well-known and oft-cited study of ghosts and haunting is Avery F. Gordon’s

Ghostly Matters. Published first in 1997 and re-released in 2008, *Ghostly Matters* takes up the absent-presences that linger when “home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view” (2008, xvi). In Gordon’s formulation, haunting is always a “part of our social world,” and it is thus a key analytic in everything from understanding systemic oppressions to healing from historical trauma and creating more just social relations moving forward (27).

A key contribution of *Ghostly Matters* is the way it takes seriously the knowledge imparted by ghosts and the way it is attuned to the lessons of ghostly presences. The ghostly figure, for Gordon, “is one way [...] we are notified that what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us” (xvi). Gordon concludes then that if we are to grapple with the complex and messy realities of social life, “we must learn how to identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts, must learn how to make contact with what is without doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling” (23). It should be noted that the way Gordon frames ghosts as unsettling presences and as frightening apparitions is largely a Western and Eurocentric interpretation of spectral encounters. As Eiffel has invoked in some of her interviews, referenced above, many non-Western spiritual cultures—including various Indigenous cultures, Latin American cultures, and East Asian cultures—acknowledge spirits, ghosts, and tricksters as ever-present parts of the social (Blanes and Santo 2015; TallBear 2011). Nevertheless, Gordon is highly adept at tracing the way that ghosts are an integrated, though often ignored or invisibilized, part of everyday life that mark something which is out of place, “glitchy,” or still unresolved. In Gordon’s words, “by nature [ghosts] are haunting reminders of lingering trouble” (xix).

The present-absent body that I am theorizing in relation to the MoBR is, admittedly, not the same as the one taken up by Gordon; here, the object's presence comes to stand in for its absent human counterpart as the object comes to signal the absent human body—or, at least, the intimacy that was found through and with that body—and so the affective terrain remains just as haunted. The objects and stories that are displayed at the MoBR are carefully selected by project curators out of dozens, hundreds, or sometimes thousands, of public submissions (Stevenson 2016). While



Figure 42: Wedding Dress In a Jar, via IG @brokenshipsla.

some of the objects are curious and interesting in their own right (for example, the wedding dress that has been stuffed deep inside a pickle jar—Figure 42—and the “porcelain figurine of a fat, skeleton couch-potato”—Figure 43), the exhibit as a whole would be relatively meaningless without the narratives that are donated alongside the objects. Many of the texts feature an air of wistfulness, of longing, perhaps even a feeling of melancholy and angst. While object donors would not necessarily consider themselves to be writers or poets, the snippets of loves and lives past form a comprehensive—if inconsistent—ambiance.

The Museum itself is premised on the affective impact of past relationships. In fact, the entrance wall of the MoBR's Zagreb location openly asserts: “Our societies acknowledge marriages, funerals, and even graduation farewells, but deny us any formal recognition of the

demise of a relationship, despite its strong emotional effect” (Brokenships.com). Although the

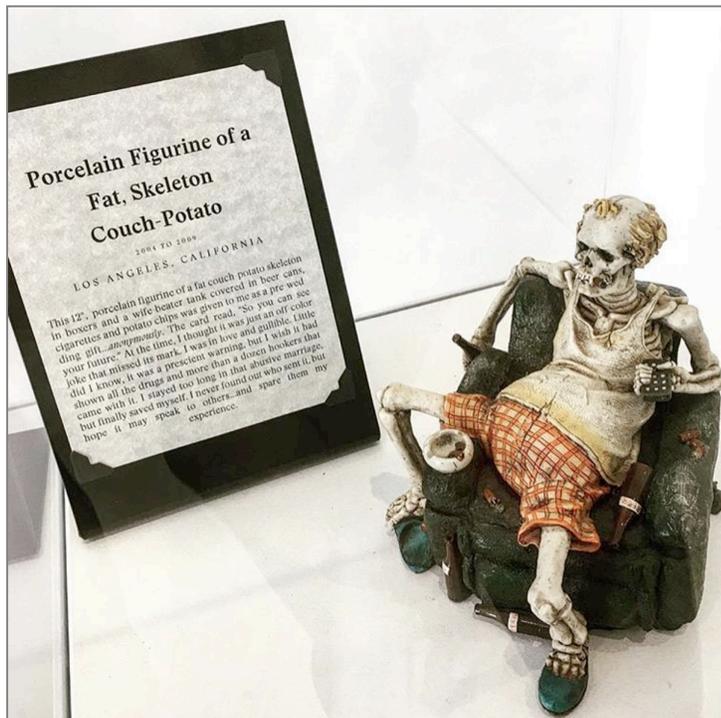


Figure 43: Porcelain Figurine, via IG @brokenshipsla.

Museum’s name declares these relationships to be “broken,” they could have just as easily been named “lost,” “severed,” “dissolved,” “unfulfilled” or “never-realized.” Though many of the objects displayed had been held onto for many years prior to their donation, the MoBR resists an easy sell of framing their contributors as being melancholic hoarders. Instead, the Museum models

a kind of grey area between Freudian notions of *mourning* and *melancholia*.

Freud first offered his theories on mourning and melancholia in 1917. In short, Freud understood these two states as being binaristic responses to loss. In simplified definitions, mourning was seen to be a healthy relation to loss wherein one recognized the material, emotional, and psychic injuries to one’s self and was subsequently able to move through their grief in appropriate ways. Melancholia, on the other hand, was seen to be the failure of mourning, where a person was unable to recognize what had been lost and was therefore unable to move beyond the psychic damage. According to early Freudian explanations, the melancholic person becomes stuck in cyclical patterns of behaviour because they cannot necessarily recognize their loss *as* a loss—or cannot recognize what, exactly, has been lost—which places them in a position where they are unable to work through the necessary steps on the path to

healing.⁴³ In these formulations, mourning became the sole and necessary goal, signalling a working through that offers the possibility of moving on to other kinds of relationships—ostensibly better ones. This does not mean that the pain of loss necessarily goes away, but it is made to be more livable; mourning is thus seen to be ideal, and in fact, according to Freud, it is the only non-pathological way of coping with loss.

Because melancholia has traditionally been framed as pathological, the melancholic person has also historically been denied an attribution of productive value. Still, many contemporary theorists—particularly those in realms of critical race studies, queer of colour critique, disability studies, and trauma studies—have challenged the notion that melancholy is a necessarily unproductive or ineffective way to deal with grief and to approach various intimate attachments. For example, scholars such as Anne Cheng (2000), Sara Ahmed (2010), and David Eng (2010) have taken up melancholia in relation to race and queerness to suggest that we might understand a melancholic incorporation of loss into the self (or, perhaps more accurately, both into individual and community selves) as ethically important and as politically productive.

In the Afterword to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Eng and Kazanjian 2003), Judith Butler explores the notion that loss can lead to a *melancholic agency*, which is characterized both by a “place of no belonging” and a simultaneous offering of “belonging [...] through a common sense of loss” (468). While she is sure to add that this “does not mean that all these losses are the same” (ibid.), she explores how loss can suture communities together. She explains,

Loss becomes a condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of community itself. [...] [In this case,] where belonging is possible, then pathos is not negated, but it turns

⁴³ Though Freud eventually started to think about melancholia as being ontological (see *Ego and the Id*, [1923] 1990), thereby lending himself to theories around particular experiences of being, he did not change his view that mourning is the only “proper” way to heal.

out to be oddly fecund, paradoxically productive (ibid.).

This is to say that we might see melancholia not as a problematic state of stuckness, but rather, we might recognize a situated position of melancholy as a way of negotiating survival through very real circumstances of pain and trauma. Particularly in cases where trauma and injury are ongoing and persistent, it is important to find ways of living on while refusing to repudiate or deny painful histories and seeking to simply “leave them behind.” The linear assertions of the progress-based notion that we must get to a place of *moving on* and *letting go* in order to live fruitful lives fails to account for the long-seeded histories of oppression and marginalization that also spark individual and community action.

In the case of the Museum of Broken Relationships, these painful histories are brought from the individual to the social and back again. There is rarely—if ever—an open acknowledgement within the stories at the MoBR of ongoing, persistent, and systemic trauma. While these dynamics may have been at play in some of the former relationships, these elements tend not to be highlighted. Yet the repetitiveness and collapsing of feelings of loss, remorse, release, revenge, relief, and other complicated and sometimes conflicting feelings that are felt at the end of a relationship similarly allow for a “paradoxically productive” result. The entrance wall of the Zagreb museum even gestures to this, suggesting, “unlike ‘destructive’ self-help instructions for recovery from grief and loss, the Museum offers the chance to overcome an emotional collapse through creation; by contributing to the Museum’s collection” (Brokenships.com)

Even though the relationships memorialized by the objects at the MoBR are ostensibly over, the affective connections that bind them to their owners are most definitely not. These affects seem to leak out beyond the objects and touch museum visitors who come into contact with them. Stories at the MoBR tend not to detail concrete losses or events that occurred, but

instead they invoke affective scenes that encourage a kind of melancholic investment from visitors. Though the narratives that are commonly exhibited by the MoBR are characterized by lingering and haunting affects, there is also an air of appreciation for either the relationship and/or the lessons learned from it—there is a reparative quality in many of the stories, even those that are also slightly vindictive (e.g., *The Toaster of Vindication*, whose note reads matter-of-factly, “When I moved out, and across the country, I took the toaster. That’ll show you. How are you going to toast anything now?”). Unlike other breakup-centered projects that might be

organized around more coherent emotions like anger, retribution, resolution, or repair,⁴⁴ the MoBR allows for a multitude of intimate worlds and emotions to come to light alongside one another. The MoBR avoids prescriptive engagements with loss and remembrance; some stories are almost unspeakably sad (e.g., *Promise Ring*, Figure 44, that reads simply, “We were just two kids who couldn’t keep a

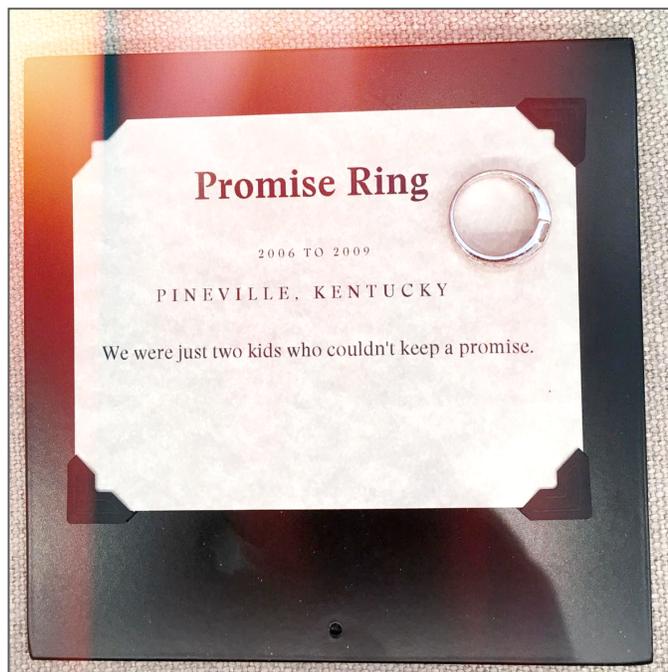


Figure 44: *Promise Ring*, via IG @brokenshipsla.

promise.”), while others, like the toaster,

convey a cheeky, self-aware pettiness. Others still are told with a reflective tenderness that is neither sad nor joyful but is instead imbued simply with a removed sort of omniscient description.

⁴⁴ See, for example, the website that has been likened to an “e-bay for breakups,” *Never Liked It Anyway* (NeverLikedItAnyway.com), the book project *It Was Over When You Said What* (Josefsson and Alsop 2006), and Michèle Pearson Clarke’s photo project *It’s Good to Be Needed* (2013, discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation).

As a collection of stories, the narratives at the MoBR seem to haunt museum visitors who also find themselves dredging up their own intimate losses. This process exemplifies how, in Gordon's words, "being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (8). In the case of the MoBR, transformative recognition takes shape through bridging one person's losses with another's. The interactive affective transfer creates an intimate kind of network that binds strangers together, ones who will likely never actually meet face to face but who are nonetheless brought into a common network of intimate relations. Much like the inter/outer workings of communities formed through feminist porn, as discussed in Chapter Two, this linking extends beyond the physical space of the museum or the platform of the virtual, beyond the realm of the personal, and is incorporated into broader structures of relation.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon makes a case for thinking through "the difference it makes to start with the marginal, with what we normally exclude or banish, or, more commonly, with what we never even notice" (24-25). In this chapter, I am borrowing Gordon's frame to explore the social on a different scale, moving from the individual to the social (Gordon's move) and then pulling it back again into the personal—all the while finding interpersonal affinities or affiliations that are formed through that process. I am interested in parsing out what it might mean to think through the objects we tend not to notice and the affects we most want to banish from our lives. As a project and a repository, the Museum of Broken Relationships resists the urge to bury supposedly ugly, unwanted, messy, and painful realities and brings them to the fore. The MoBR simultaneously embraces the hard and haunting aspects of physical objects while allowing them to live on beyond themselves and their original human-centered purposes. In

many ways, I see it as a reparative project that salvages melancholic attachments by offering an alternative way forward, where objects and stories can live on in meditative glory, parting from their original human hosts but extending their futures by haunting all others who encounter them along the way. Like the text on the entrance wall of the Zagreb Museum states, there may be an alternative way forward, where one is not stuck in a pathological cycle of melancholy but where one learns to “overcome emotional collapse through creation.” The MoBR is not a project about mourning and moving on, but it is one where donors learn both to let go and reckon with their emotional wounds. Within the context of the MoBR, humans are able to explore and express another layer of complex personhood through object relations. In Gordon’s formulation, this complex existence means that “the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society’s problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward” (4). The MoBR offers an emotional *Both/And* instead of an *Either/Or*, where imaginations are both faced with the loss that is immediately available and are reaching toward a different kind of productive future—one that resists linear formations of intimacy, love, grief, and loss, and allows for the intricate and uneven ride of relationships to shine through.

EPILOGUE.

INTIMATE OTHERS AND AFFECTIVE INTELLIGENCE.

The research, writing, and personal exploration that has gone into this dissertation has been, transparently, a partial attempt to make sense of my own intimacy issues and the scripts I have internalized about relationships and romantic attraction. Throughout the research process, I revisited the messages I had folded in my own life/story, and I have placed those messages in conversation with theory, art, and popular culture to critically analyze their origins, their complications, and their failings for the kinds of worldmaking I purport to invest in. In this sense, I have undertaken a project that places the personal alongside the voices, experiences, and intimate encounters of many other individual and collective wisdoms. This project has also brought me to new contemplations regarding the complexity of structural privileges, hierarchies, and ideals of attachment and detachment that circulate in amongst the everyday.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that diversifying intimate knowledge—particularly through reframing the range of practices and connections that are valued as “intimate” experiences—is a critical aspect of expanding possibilities for living intimate lives outside of, in opposition to, or in conscientious negotiation with dominant narratives of relation.

Dominant scripts of intimacy impact us all differently, as do our social, cultural, and intellectual positionings. My own formative years in learning about intimacy left me with several (perhaps misguided) lessons that I carry with me to this day, no matter how much critical analysis or scholarly knowledge I have at my disposal. It is impossible—and quite frankly, unappealing—to attempt to provide a complete account of intimate relating or of intimate representation in any one project. It is my hope that through a sustained examination of the few case studies and narrative scenes presented in this dissertation, I have started to unravel some of the deeply held and strongly regulated (im)possibilities of intimacy and intimate relating that have been built up through many, not-always-so-different stories of encountering our intimate selves and intimate others.

In Chapter One, I have laid out a conceptual framework for how to approach my research, developing a mixed-methods and hybrid practice of practice-based affective research. I proposed an amalgamation of feminist discourse analysis, autoethnography, queer affect as methodology, and practice-based research that would allow me as researcher to feel my way through the research, to find my research objects as the project progressed, and to engage in critical reflexivity through life writing and narrative scenes. As I discussed briefly in Chapter One, the resulting proposal for practice-based affective research (PBAR) was both a success and a generative failure. The demands of the university for doctoral dissertations, especially in terms of the required format, content, and structure, made it difficult to present a non-traditional project located outside of fine arts departments. On another level, the vulnerability required to make myself affectively visible in the research at times felt easier than at others, and I faced added ambivalence when thinking about my dissertation—and related personal writing—being readily available online to anyone with a library login and the right search terms.

Upon further reflection, I still believe PBAR has much to offer as both a political and methodological affiliation, but the specific forms of output would have to be altered to better merge the goals of PBAR with the project at hand. I envision future work to perhaps be comprised of multiple elements, with written output being only one form of expression among many. Journaling, scrapbooking, and/or art-based components may enhance the experience of PBAR, but I also believe that including fewer words and/or explicit theorizations of the work may allow affective facets of the research to evolve in a more fruitful way.

As I was working through my final edits on this dissertation, I started having vivid dreams about all of my ex-lovers. Night after night, I would fall into restless sleep and travel through the alternate realities of my intimacy-fuelled dreamlands. I re-experienced angry spats, created new obstacles, rekindled love affairs, and was offered painful reminders of what my life was like when my romantic relationships were strong, happy, and healthy. Each morning, I woke up feeling fuzzyheaded and confused about what time and place I found myself in. This process was, admittedly, not the most creative path my subconscious could have taken, yet sure enough, my past partners appeared one by one, like ghosts in *A Christmas Carol*, offering haunting reflection and little comfort in waking life.

Aside from being an obvious reaction to work-related anxiety and impending life change, this string of dreams also served as a reminder of how drastically my personal contexts and intimate relationships have changed over the course of my writing. I have started, and ended, multiple romantic and sexual relationships. My chief investments have moved from romantic partnerships and caretaking roles to deeply fulfilling, mutually inclusive, life-sustaining friendships with human and nonhuman animals alike. I have strived to focus more explicitly on

collective and collaborative processes, contesting models of scarcity and competitive reaction, especially in the face of the divisive strategies of contemporary North American politics.

Chapter Two considers the role of community formation as a form of resistance by enlisting the complex and ambivalent intimacies that are formed in and through feminist porn and Toronto's Feminist Porn Awards (2006–2015). One strength of the communities I have seen form through and around feminist porn is the idiosyncrasy that exists among them. A diversity of politics, bodies, beliefs, and representational tactics can only make a politicized project stronger, even if it ultimately means a project like the Feminist Porn Awards participates in its own demise. My own intimate collaborations inform this chapter most heavily, with my brief time as a porn performer acting as a launch pad to consider state-sanctioned forms of sexual regulation and socio-political parameters of intimate citizenship. In the experimental writing piece that is co-authored with N. Maxwell Lander, I explore these issues in relation to intimate imperatives within and outside of feminist porn communities, focusing on the debates about artistic practices, “authenticity” in porn films, and feminist forms of engagement with sexual representation.

A labour rights framework informs the politics of Chapter Two, and I carry this core belief through the rest of my body chapters. Chapter Three directly addresses discourses of paid and unpaid labour as I trace histories of gendered and racialized forms of intimate labour before looking at contemporary practices that capitalize on these sexist and racist dynamics. By analyzing news coverage of Jackie Samuel's professional cuddling business *The Snuggery*, the functionality of paid dating sites *WhatsYourPrice* and *Ohlala*, and the representation of sexual surrogacy in Ben Lewin's narrative film *The Sessions*, I locate monetized forms of intimate exchange within the realities of precarious labour and late capitalism. By grouping these various

practices under the term *not-quite-sex-work*, I stress the hypocrisies and inconsistencies that are inherent within existing hierarchies of intimacy.

The theoretical and affective journey I have undertaken through my studies of feminist porn, intimate labour, interspecies alliances, and object encounters has underscored the need to examine the borders of not just intimacies in general, but of human–unhuman intimacies in particular. Human supremacy is the foundation upon which all other relations are formed, and it is also what has led us to the ecologically damaged and defiantly individualist world in which we currently live. In Chapter Four, I deconstruct some of the conventions that uphold human/animal dualisms and interrupt the stability of distinct categories of being that would place humans at the top of moral, technological, and socio-affective hierarchies. By looking at the popularity of online photos and videos that feature interspecies friendships, I examine the affective labour that is performed by animals as they become both distracting entertainment and the bearers of our (human) emotional burdens. I then look to Ceyda Torun’s documentary film *Kedi*, wherein she offers an alternative framing of the co-constitutive possibilities of interspecies relations through the networks of care and mutual inclusion expressed by humans and street cats in Istanbul, Turkey.

In recent years, queer affect theorists have increasingly turned to intersectional combinations of animal studies, posthuman studies, postcolonial studies, and environmental studies to consider multispecies networks that resist anthropocentric framings of biopolitics, necropolitics, colonialism, and citizenship.⁴⁵ These innovative and groundbreaking works offer constructive responses to the horrific impacts of the Anthropocene (a geological epoch that is

⁴⁵ See, for instance, the book series ANIMA from Duke University Press, co-edited by Mel Chen and Jasbir Puar, which so far includes Neel Ahuja’s *Bioinsecurities* (2016), Kath Weston’s *Animate Planet* (2017), Jasbir Puar’s *The Right To Maim* (2017), and Kyla Schuller’s *The Biopolitics of Feeling* (2017).

outlined in Chapter Five), which include enormous environmental destruction and strained political relations in the face of troubling circumstances. In Chapter Five, I draw wisdom from feminist new materialisms, studies of the Anthropocene, and object-oriented ontologies to further disrupt the logics of anthropocentrism and human supremacy. In considering the move from intimate formations to intimate losses, I examine intimate interactions between humans and nonhuman, non-animal matter. By first taking up news coverage of Erika Eiffel, a woman who identifies as objectum-sexual and has romantic relationships with human-made objects, and then looking at the affects that circulate at the Museum of Broken Relationships, a publicly-sourced project that consists of two on-site galleries and a virtual repository located at Brokenships.com, I consider the complex processes whereby humans imbue objects with affective worlds that extend beyond the thing itself, and/or where objects may in fact take on affective lives of their own.

In *Staying With the Trouble*, Donna Haraway (2016) reframes these conversations as being central inquiries of a new epoch—one that is even more recent than the Anthropocene—which she terms the *Chthulucene*: a “kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (2). With this book, Haraway looks to science fiction, speculative fabulation, and science fact to present ways of making kin that may address the grim realities of a world that is on the brink of ecological collapse. For Haraway, these realities necessitate “mixed assemblages” of human and nonhuman “oddkin” which may, in fact, offer refuge from the failing world order. Haraway’s work is a natural addition to my own formulations and will no doubt offer inspiration for my future research; for the time being, however, I take Haraway’s intervention about embracing the value of “oddkin” as one that supports my own argument regarding the significance—and indeed, perhaps the lifesaving

possibilities—of diversified forms of intimacy.

The shifts I have experienced over the course of my writing have of course not just been personal ones; the world as a whole has changed a lot since 2010, and broader social, political, and technological circumstances have also transformed in major ways. Digital technologies have made leaps and bounds over the past years, with robots, androids, and artificial intelligence (AI) developing practical and intimate capacities that have, until recently, existed only in science fiction narratives.⁴⁶ Androids in particular have become a topic of public concern, with many conversations centering the capacity of robotic technologies to reflect and/or mimic human emotions. There are many conceivable explanations for this increase in popular interest, but one interpretation is that the possibilities and limitations for androids to mimic human affect, emotion, and expressions point to an anxious desire to distinguish what qualities make humans uniquely human. Even with all the developments in technological function, affect remains the boundary between human and robotic entities, the line that has not yet been crossed. In my casual observation, there is a level of trepidation and dis-ease that haunts public response to robotic advancements, even as there is also a fair bit of excitement and eager adoption of smart technologies and artificial intelligence “light.”

⁴⁶ Worldwide, AI and robotic technologies have been increasingly implemented in service and care work. For example, in March 2017, Japanese travel company H.I.S. opened its second robot-run hotel, where robots do everything from check guests into the hotel and transport their bags to process the in-room requests of guests (Kikuchi 2017). Japan has also been incorporating robotic caregivers into their eldercare since the early 2010s (Tarantola 2017), and in fact, *Business Insider* reported in 2015 that one third of the Japanese government’s budget was allocated to developing these types of “carebots” (Muoio 2015). Of course, robots are also being used in the sex industry – in February 2017, a much-debated sex doll brothel opened in Spain (see Rodriguez 2017). Meanwhile, scientific and medical realms have also been capitalizing on new digital technologies – in September 2017, a Chinese-developed robot performed the first automated dental implant (see Lui 2017).

Some of the discomfort I have detected is likely sparked by the disquieting effect of what Freud ([1919] 2001) identified as *the uncanny (unheimlich)*—an experience of something as being strangely familiar and consequently unsettling. When Masahiro Mori (2012) took up Freud’s notion of the uncanny, he proposed the image of the “uncanny valley,” a concept used to note his hypothesis that a human’s reaction to humanlike robots (androids) would first approach empathy and then quickly switch to revulsion as the robot mimicked but ultimately failed to achieve human likeness. In a more skeptical interpretation, public reaction may also be one that reignites colonial desires for dominance and control, as per Homi Bhabha’s (1984) framing of colonial mimicry and mimesis. Within the context of orientalist desire, Bhabha writes, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (126, emphasis in original). It would seem that some of this colonial desire has been transposed from enslaved human bodies onto android technologies. The anxiety about robot sentience, which has long been considered but hasn’t yet been achieved, ignites heated debates about labour ethics and moral codes of human use of androids. In 2016, Hong Kong designer Ricky Ma announced that he had built a humanoid robot from scratch that could respond to commands and create detailed facial expressions like smiling, winking, and moving eyebrows (Wu 2016). The robot closely resembles celebrity Scarlett Johansson, and the story drew public attention for the ethical questions it raised about creating literal objects in the likeness of specific human women (Glaser 2016).

In reflecting on “The Future of Affect Studies,” Patricia Clough (2010) identifies a seismic shift in the relationship between the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. Clough recognizes that there is more interaction and dialogue between the three historically distinct approaches to scholarship, and she contemplates the potential reasons for this shift:

It would seem that what we are facing is the necessity to rethink the relationship of the social science, the humanities and the sciences of the 19th and early 20th centuries, a relationship that for so long has informed what we take matter to be, what we take bodily forms of life to be, what we take technology to be, what we take sociality and subjectivity to be – or not to be (223).

For Clough, the turn to affect raises important interventions in existing theoretical, epistemological, and methodological debates, “so that thought can become resonant with the current condition of generativity in a neoliberal political economy, unhinged from what goes by the tag of ‘a logic of capital’” (229). With this statement, Clough is again speaking to the importance of diverse forms of knowledge production in order to resist neoliberal logics and disrupt the status quo that is damaging for so many beings on this earth, human and nonhuman.

As with early formulations of “queer” in queer theory, my mobilization of “affect” is a non-identitarian—not to be confused with a necessarily *anti*-identitarian—category of analysis (see Berlant and Warner 1995; Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 2005; Halley and Parker 2011; Jagose 1996; Wiegman 2012). Thus, for me, affect can speak to connections that are formed through shared experiences of feeling or sensing in a way that identity-based politics do not often foreground. Attending to affect, in this project, is fueled by a turn away from identities and towards identifications that are based on lived and felt experience, on affective resonances of violence and oppression, and that occur through the shifting relations of affective affinities. Following affective circulations and processes of intimate exchange has been critical to the framing of this dissertation, which interrogates the production of intimate knowledge in an attempt to expand the range of intimate possibilities that are available to us all.

The intimate knowledge we hold and the intimate experiences we are allowed to inhabit and/or articulate structure our interactions. My own intimate relations were far more complex and multilayered than the language of the town I grew up in would or could feasibly articulate, and so both my actual and desired intimacies took a backseat and were delayed for more

expansive conditions. In my mind, other people have always been unpredictable, and mostly inconvenient. Yet the intimate assemblages I have formed have been crucial for my own survival and the survival of so many of my “oddkin.” My central interest for this dissertation, then, lies not in creating a story of intimate redemption, but rather in thinking through the ways that normative linear constructions of intimate relation remain precarious even as they are built up to seem impenetrable. Though the various case studies of this dissertation, I have contemplated what political, affective, and interpersonal possibilities might be unlocked by reinterpreting dominant scripts of intimacy, including narratives about how and where intimacy can be located, who can find intimate connection with who or what, how intimacy should be performed/be made visible, and why intimacy matters to processes of queer worldmaking. The answers I have found may not be distilled down to one or two succinct statements; instead, they are woven into the pages of this dissertation, into the affects invoked in the research process, and in the interactive and intra-active collaborations that may be sparked in the future.

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