QUEER INDIFFERENCE

QUEER INDIFFERENCE:
SOLITUDE, FILM, DREAMS

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Lay Abstract

This dissertation explores a series of limited and obscure relations marshalled under the concept of "indifference" to develop what I call a theory of queer indifference. By bringing concerns from queer theory about socially compulsive forms of inclusion and connection in conversation with philosophical concepts of indifference, this dissertation expands the political, ethical, and aesthetic potential of such ways of being to challenge existing relations of power. It argues that the dissident force of indifferent relations generates the queerly critical, imaginative, susceptible, and hospitable capacities inherent to doing justice. Experiences of solitude, film-viewing, and dreaming illustrate the social lure of indifferent relations as practices or embodiments that can be understood otherwise than as a source of deprivation. From the un-belonging spaces of solitude, to the film camera's technological gaze, to the unwitting intelligence of dreamlife, this dissertation examines the "space of shared-separation" between self and other, viewer and camera, and waking and sleeping selves as a type of existence that produces queer relations to social order and that nurtures creative orientations to indeterminate futures. The films *Brokeback Mountain* and *Last Address*, and the dream diaries of American artist and activist David Wojnarowicz, are the aesthetic core of this dissertation's investigation of and experimentation with ways of being that are queerly at odds with the way things are.

Abstract

This dissertation develops an existential-aesthetic theory of the subversive power and lure of limited and recessive forms of social intimacy that it calls queer indifference. By putting queer concerns with the normative politics of identity, visibility, and inter-relationality in conversation with philosophical concepts of indifference, it responds to expectations of the self-evident value of active bodies, personal recognition, and mutual experience for meaningful social political agency, and argues that recessive relations experienced and cultivated in the fortuitous spaces of "shared-separation" constitute a queerly-imagined rapport with alterity rather than being the source of social deprivation. Queer indifferences, I argue, effect their own ethical engagements beyond the self that are not reducible to readily legible connections to the social, while they may be continuous with such modes of connection. Drawing on a number of critical resources from queer theory, poststructuralist philosophy, film criticism, dream science, and the history of AIDS activism, this dissertation seeks to discover the generative impasses in perception, consciousness, and connection articulated by queer aesthetic media that make themselves seen and heard through the involutions of social legibility and recognition. In social postures such as solitude, techno-mediated encounters with cinematic worlds, and the creative automation of dreamlife, this dissertation locates aesthetic-ethical expressions of justice oriented towards the defiant persistence of queer life. Films such as *Brokeback Mountain* and *Last Address*, and the dream diaries of American artist and activist David Wojnarowicz, access and communicate a certain inaccessible and incommunicable core of self and intimate expression that elicits relations with the other in appearances of isolation or remoteness, and that generates creative and imaginative possibilities for justice ahead of indeterminate futures.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

The author of this thesis is the sole contributor.

Introduction: Queer Indifference

Relations are apertures. Widening and contracting, they adjust the clarity and blur of alterity. If things reside at a great distance, they may only come into view through the smallest of openings. Eyes narrow, gazing past what lies before them, to glimpse life lived in the space beyond. At the limitations of our vision we contract almost to the point of closure to relate to what lives on the margins of our faculties. What this study calls queer indifference names the *limits* of knowledge, attachment, visibility, and personality, not to highlight the negative facets of coexistence but to explore the dissident agency of recessive, suspended, inoperative, and opaque states and postures that become queer forms of agency. I imagine a queer entelechy of indifference as a radical potential in limited forms of relation to unmake normative social organization and produce new courses of action. Imagining indifference as otherwise than a privation permits serious considerations of the recursive intervals in the midst of identity and difference, positivity and negativity, that are more than contingent states of being and that provide a heterogeneous vocabulary for queer modes of dissidence that appear to the side of stark recalcitrance and direct action. While concepts of difference are more readily associated with queer politics and theory that describe diversity and alterity, I argue that indifference releases new possibilities for queer critique and offers a source of alternative relations towards alterity that preserve and generate deviant forms of non-recognition and non-spectatorship.

Queer Indifference brings together an assemblage of American queer film and diaries that countermand expectations of transparency, revelation, and intimacy typically associated with cinema and life writing. Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), Ira Sachs's *Last Address* (2010), and David Wojnarowicz's dream diaries are the main texts through which I put queer concerns with the politics of difference, visibility, transparency, and personality in a working dialogue

with philosophical concepts of indifference and its cognate terms. These works are not inherently similar or contemporaneous. Lee's film is a cinematic hit, while Sachs's is an experimental short. The diaries predate both films by over a decade, and Wojnarowicz's accounts of his dreams provide both a written document and an ephemeral, unshared work (the dream) for analysis. What makes them queerly indifferent is not a quality of genre or form but a certain resistance in each work to the organizing functions of its own medium and to the cultural labour its representations can appear to perform. Lee and Sachs employ film's visibility to promote non-spectatorship, and Wojnarowicz's diaries feature a confession without a subject who confesses, which is to say a first-person text that does not assume a fixed subject as the source, nor as the product, of its revelations.

As queer aesthetic media, my selections can be understood as forms of "indirect action," which is to say resistance operating in the shadow of direct action, a term popularized during the 1990s to describe many strategies of AIDS activism, such as public funeral processions and road blockages. Indirect action, one way of considering the recalcitrant potential of indifference, implies forms of activity not governed by direction, organization, coherence, nor even intent, but instead obtain their force from oblique, abstract, and tacit activations. For Lisa Diedrich, indirect action is characterized by obscurities between cause and effect over time, what she calls a challenge to "hegemonic temporopolitical logic[s] of crisis" (221 n5). The gaps between the intent and its outcome or the desire and its fulfillment confound legible trajectories of action, as well as simplified relations between the individual and its history or its future. Inside these gaps is a rich field of unacknowledged forces and circuitous paths. Art is a substantial site of indirect action, and as I will show, indifferent relations are inherent to aesthetic experience. Art breaks apparent boundaries between where my subjectivity ends and the objective world begins,

exposing, says Tim Dean, "continuities of being that discourage our desire to master otherness by means of knowledge" (391). Artistic experiences dissolve the imperative to know that legislates so many aspects of our interactions. Aesthetic encounters with otherness provide new possibilities for relation, not via shared identity with the other, but *continuities* that reveal our shared existence. The films and diaries I treat are powerful solvents that disrupt relations to knowledge while forging continuities through the queer communities with which they are associated and drawing us together in the indeterminate spaces of existence.

In what follows I marshal a number of different theoretical frameworks and critical rhetorics in the service of developing a theory of queer indifference. Indifference has a long history in philosophical inquiries into the relationship between identity and difference, and cognates such as disinterest, neutrality, and apathy have generated expansive critiques in their own right of aesthetic encounters, affective being, and ethical and political responsibility. It is both a series of philosophical operations and casual states of being and thinking. Consequently, I treat several archives across critical theory related to visuality and visibility, political resistance, ethical conduct, and psychoanalysis. In this Introduction I first review concepts and usages of indifference as a philosophical operation and as states of being and thinking, and I situate indifference within queer theory history. In developing a theory of queer indifference, my aim is not to create a philology of indifference in queer theory, but to invoke indifference as an index of forms of agency that are queerly at odds with expectations of personal expression and action. I use indifference interchangeably with several synonyms, allowing it to stand for the numerous expressions of disinclination that appear in continental theory and queer criticism. As a concluding illustration of the queer work of indifference, I turn to Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* [1993] (2010) with a view to the recessive agency of stones and stoniness in that novel.

Feinberg's queer materialism shares with my main texts a commitment to kinships, politics, and materialities imagined through opaque, ephemeral, and indirect relations. *Stone Butch Blues* demonstrates that such relations do not demand arrest, but provide a space for imaginative exercise that permits transformation and unexpected queer trajectories of growth into the future. Throughout, I argue that indifference helps us to think about forms of thought, relation, and resistance that sustain queer life.

Indifference as Queer Theory

Dissident relations often emerge from "darkened spaces," says Michel Foucault, "which prevent the full visibility of things, men and truths" (*Power* 153). The refusal to make legibility the condition of relations between the self and the other, and indeed between the self and itself, obfuscates regimes of surveillance and management, including those forces that operate through self-regulation, that stabilize social relations. The imperative to know and to be known is particularly acute in the question of one's sexuality. The significance of sexual orientation to contemporary understandings of selfhood extends beyond the choice of a partner, personal preferences, and even cultural experience, because sexuality is never only about sex but, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues, "has been made expressive of the essence of both identity and knowledge" (*Epistemology* 26). In the importance of "coming out" and "naming your truth" for queers, the imperative to know is never neutral or exclusively freeing, but can be put to the service of violence, for example in the ways that, according to Nicolas De Villiers, "homophobia often insists on knowing rather than refusing to know about the sexuality of gay people" (3). And yet knowing can foreclose opportunities for resistance and expression that thrive under cover. As Judith Butler indicates, thinking with indifference may preserve relations of unknowability that

hold open the ongoing potential for queer life to thrive against the limits of expectation. In *Dispossession* (2013), the extended conversation between Butler and Athena Athanasiou, Butler offers, "I would not want to say that the regulation of gender is only or always in the service of regulating sexuality, or that regulation of sexuality has as its primary aim the stabilization of gender norms. That can sometimes be true, but it is surely as often the case that these two regulatory modes work at cross-purposes or in ways that prove to be relatively indifferent to one another" (45). What does it mean for regulations of gender and sexuality to be relatively *indifferent*? For one, it suggests that we cannot necessarily know in advance the result of any particular arrangement of disciplinary forces, nor can we be sure that regulative efforts will reap the result they seek. What Butler proposes is a non-paranoid reading that breaks up the apparent conspiratorial cooperation of regulatory modes, opening a space for "surprise," as Sedgwick calls it, and for incoherence.[1] The problem with claims to know in advance the design of regulatory modes is that it may foreclose efforts to theorize them as being incomplete, and even inoperable, in their conceptualization and deployment.

Definitions of indifference and indifferent include "relations between people and things" such as the "unbiased, impartial, disinterested, neutral; fair, just, even" ("Indifferent"). Indifference stands in both for the relation it names and for the judgement it evokes, which can be positive ("fair, even"), negative ("not good"), or neutral ("neither good nor bad") ("Indifferent"). Indifferent relations, in other words, include a range of suspended states of reserved judgement, and they also invite a universal suite of judgement upon them. These are

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[1] This refers to Sedgwick's explanations of the paranoid and reparative reading positions in her introduction to *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (1997). Paranoid styles of reading seek coherent, all-encompassing theory that explain in advance to guard against surprise and unknowns. See Sedgwick's introduction, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You."

relations between people and things that preserve distance between identifiable positions, such as bias, interest, and partiality. The synonyms are bound by the obstacles they pose for knowledge in their withdrawal from states of certitude, belief, feeling, opinion, and prejudice. Collectively, they evoke dialectical associations with what we may imagine to be non-relations or broken relations. They comprise antisocial tendencies, such as disinterest, impersonal orientations, such as impartiality, and weak or ambiguous positions, such as neutrality. Indifferences immobilize subjects of knowledge and refuse legibility, providing a provoking palette of relations without identification, positions without positionality, and alterities without difference. In other words, one who is indifferent occupies *a non-subjective orientation to knowledge*. This is not the same as having a lack of knowledge or making a claim to universal understanding. Impartiality and fairness, for example, are historically contingent insofar as they relate to standards of objectivity in judgement, but these definitions also index forms of thought and communication at odds with the transparent apprehension of the self.

Indifference, a concept I have allied with ones like opacity and neutrality, has an important history in continental philosophy since Immanuel Kant. For thinkers including GWF Hegel, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Butler, and Giorgio Agamben, indifference is an ineliminable catalyst in the movement and arrest of the dialectic. To a different extent, indifference appears in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot, Alain Badiou, and François Laruelle. According to William Watkin, three orders of indifference (or progressive concepts) structure modern Western understanding of relations between identity and difference (50). These culminate in the writings of Deleuze and Agamben, for whom indifference marks a structural limit of the dialectic of identity and difference (181-3). For Agamben, indifference and its cognate terms reveal the logical problem of the causal relationship between

conditioning terms, or what he names the common, and conditioned terms, or the propers. Think Being and beings. Laruelle also observes this logical problem, and his project of non-philosophy develops an alternative style of thinking to the "philosophies of difference" that come before.[2] But for Agamben, who still considers himself a philosopher, indifference indicates the suspensions or immobilities between oppositions. For example, the "zone of indistinction," perhaps the most prevalent appearance of Agamben's indifference, is a concept borrowed from Deleuze and famously describes the virtually present void at the centre of the human/animal distinction that establishes the condition of bare life, "a life that is separated and excluded from itself" (Agamben, *Open* 38). Between the human, for example, and the animal, is the human that is dehumanized while remaining human. Bare life is not an aspirational state, but it helps us to describe conditions of subjection that operate on a recursive unmaking of organizing concepts.

Queer theory's emergence from post-structuralist philosophy and grassroots activism came with an inheritance of the writings on identity and difference, generalities and particulars, that coincides with queer activists' and thinkers' own concerns about identities and differences, ways of being and embodied realities. Their interest in marginal forms of sexuality and gender and in antinormative and antihomophobic critique has produced an expansive body of criticism and art devoted precisely to the discursive suspensions of binary oppositions and uncounted existences in the interstices of recognition. Queer critique often explains its own departure from

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[2] Laruelle groups the philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida under the sign of "philosophies of difference," in which he identifies a genetic invariant common to each that he names Philosophical Decision. Throughout his oeuvre, but specifically grounded in his book, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy* [1986], his analyses of these philosophies are the basis for an alternative "non-Decisional" style of thought he calls "non-philosophy," in which Laruelle "dismantle[s] systematically the gesture of 'Difference,' the articulation of its universal moments, the 'syntax' of this invariant and its real conditions of existence" (xiii-xiv). Employed by Laruelle as a cancelling operation, indifference describes the non-philosophical relation between "the One" and the philosophies of difference (12). For an extended explanation of the role of indifference in non-philosophy, see Laruelle's *Philosophies of Difference* (2010), pp. 1-21.

gay and lesbian studies largely by its resistance to identity politics and to the politics of difference.[3] Its longstanding interest in oppositional terms and in-between states is reflected in the binary-breaking work of indifference, while queer theory also expands with the challenge to ask how indifferent states constitute their own queerly imagined politics, ethics, and aesthetics. Thinking with indifference turns our attention towards domains of indistinction, suspension, and immobility that mark the non-existence of the structural divides that prop up discourse and that help explain deviant modes of being.

Madhavi Menon's *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (2015) is the first book-length attempt to establish indifference as a queer method for disrupting the organizing authority of difference. Indifference to difference, which Menon identifies with Badiousian universalism, addresses the valorization of difference as the ground of political and social ontologies (for example, multiculturalism) and seeks to neutralize the determinative force of particularity without revoking particularities as lived realities. Like many of the thinkers above she exposes the circularity of conditioning and conditioned terms, showing how conditioned particularities become the constituting basis for the conditions thought to found them. Menon's remedy is a revolutionizing indifference reformed as the universal, not identified with traditional universalism but with a "queer universalism" activated by the errant movement of desire. The universal dismantles the tautology of identity and difference not by erasure but by "undoing causality" (Menon 16), thereby aiming "universalism's fury" (11) at the *relation* between terms. It is important to note that she does not select the universal over the particular to represent

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[3] See Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1996), which provides an extensive critical and historical explanation of queer theory's emergence. While the precise relationship between gay and lesbian studies and queer theory is unfixed and unfolds over a complex history, queer theory typically exemplifies "a more mediated relation to categories of identification" (77), a position linked to its legacy of twentieth-century poststructuralist theory, for which identity is seen to be "provisional and contingent" (77-8).

indifference, but that after “the insistence on emptying the universal, [she] is less tempted by the rush to then fill that emptiness” (6). What remains is an uncontained universal emptied of content. The argument is profoundly influenced by Badiou, for whom differences can be transcended by “benevolence with regard to customs and opinions [that] presents itself as an indifference that tolerates differences” (qtd. in Menon 12). At stake for Menon in an indifference to difference is lived reality, which is the site at which indifference and universalism coincide and express their force. Indifference's lived experience, which is to say, what activates the instability, deviancy, and mobility that signposts lived reality's indifference to difference, is desire. “[W]e are all marked,” she says, “by a superabundance of desire ... that desubjectivizes all categories of identity grounded in sexual specificity” (17). Thus, the excess of desire, its irrepressible power to traverse the particularity and generality of life, is its indifference to us: “Desire is universally indifferent and this indifferent desire marks us all” (17).

Menon's intervention is truly unique and her remediation of philosophical (as well as anti-philosophical and non-philosophical) indifference for a renewed queer critique clarifies the limitations and potential violence of a queer politics organized around subjective differences. Hers is a project in which I am evidently invested and from which I have benefited. The problem, however, with claims for indifference made in the name of lived reality and benevolence is that they risk making personal experience and volition the basis for knowledge and action. Menon's infinitely mobile indifference meets a rather hard limit in the individual's own structuring dispositions. For Badiou, the ability to transcend difference is “locate[d] ... squarely in the self” (12), and even if the self, Menon follows up, “becomes indifferent to itself” (12), indifference ends up as “a decision that each of us makes to exit a fantasy of identitarian coherence” (22). Not to mention the fact that such decisions are conditioned by socio-economic realities, what Pierre

Bourdieu calls one’s class *habitus*,[4] this critique also limits considerations of indifference's resonances with the inhuman and the impersonal. Menon's argument picks up on the aspect of indifference that is the disinclination to choose between particulars, while ultimately it conditions that suspensive state as a self-issued, and even an elitist, license.

Analogies of travel represent the key benefits of Menon's approach, in which indifference “allows us to travel without asking for a visa to authenticate the legality of our desire” (15), and facilitates a range of movement within the self and among others. Her opening example is a conversation at the border, and the proper orientation to differences is always to traverse them. What is missing from indifference's peripatetic rewards is the sense of immobility and suspension so integral to the strange lure of indifferent states. The conversation at the border, for example, does not threaten Menon with any impasse in her travels. As the thinkers above suggest, indifference indexes the *suspension* of the dialectic's movement between arrest and transcendence. Suspension is not synonymous with arrest but marks the suspension of arrest, the suspension of suspension, as Agamben argues at the end of *The Open:* “To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean ... to risk ourselves in this emptiness, the *suspension of suspension* [my emphasis]” (92). It is often the dwelling rather than the traversal of suspensive states that is most intolerable to thought, the impasse and not the pass. The freedom of indifference, its radical potential, includes the true depth of these intermundia, the free-falling they grant and the abstention from movement.

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[4] Bourdieu proposes habits and patterns of class conditioning he calls *habitus,* “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structuring structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, principals which generate and organize practices and representations … Objectively ‘regulated’ and regular without being in any way the product of obedience to rules” (445). *Habitus* describes hegemonic forces working through individuals and communities often expressed as elements of personality, especially taste. They are non-coercive, and yet reinforce class divisions and dynamics of subjugation. Making a “decision” to exit a fantasy of identitarianism involves a series of privileges that flow from a particular *habitus* that naturalizes personal dispositions, tolerances, and desires as individual, original, and volitional.

Menon's intervention reflects queer theory's onward engagement with new philosophical influence – Badiou, Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett, Katerina Kolozova, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, Laruelle[5] – as well as, perhaps more profoundly, a weariness towards queerness and queer theory among thinkers. Queer work produced under the banners of "post-queer theory" and "after queer theory" reflects a moment when an indifference to all things queer approximates the affective and political *habitus* within queer studies. In *After Sex: On Writing Since Queer Theory* (2012), Janet Halley and Andrew Parker point to news that "if not already passé, [queer theory] was rapidly approaching its expiration date" (1). Publishing practices reflect this rumour, for example, Duke University's decision to end its "Series Q" in 2012; David V. Ruffolo's *Post-Queer Politics* (2009); James Penney's *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics* (2013); and Tyler Bradway and E. L. McCallum's recent edited collection *After Queer Studies* (2019). Post-continental and new materialist interventions in queer studies also tend to locate themselves after, for example Michael O'Rourke's "The Afterlives of Queer Theory" (2017). These works are diverse and do not all pronounce queer theory's death, but after reciting them I can hear José Esteban Muñoz's words ringing in my ears: "We can understand queerness itself as being filled with the intention to be lost" (*Cruising Utopia* 72). While the language naming this exhaustion now embraces the posthumous, we would be remiss to suggest that the desire to transcend queer theory is new. In 1993, only three years after she coined the term "queer theory," Theresa De

[5] These thinkers, although quite diverse among themselves, are often associated with new materialism, which has found increasing expression in queer studies. Morton's "Queer Ecology" (2010) and Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matters* (2010) provide a renewed focus on the agencies of objects, while Michael O'Rourke explores the value of Laruelle's "non-philosophy" for what he calls post-continental queer theory. O'Rourke also queers speculative realism, a school of thought typically associated with Brassier, Laruelle, and others, that often falls under the umbrella of new materialism. (See O'Rourke's "The Afterlives of Queer Theory" [2017]) Kolozova's *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (2014) is the most extensive post-continental intervention in feminist and queer theory and mounts a truly groundbreaking argument for the limitations of poststructuralist theory for studies of gender and sexuality. Laruelle writes the preface, "Gender Fiction," to the book.

Lauretis lamented that it had become a “vacuous creature of the publishing industry” (297). Regret for its speedy institutionality is often cited as the key apprehension. For example, in 1995 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner claim queer theory is a “virtual industry” and they ask why its advocates “feel the need to introduce, anatomize, and theorize something that can barely be said yet to exist” (343). Queer theory's emerging disciplinarity within the university is a major source of their anxiety, and yet I cannot imagine what else might qualify a theory “to exist” for two academics, and how existence could be a precondition of theorizing. “Queer theory,” echoes David Halperin, “had to be invented after the fact, to supply the demand it had invoked” (341). This ongoing anxiety partly evidences generational shifts within LGBTQ politics, as well as the changing terrain of AIDS activism in the West from which queer theory emerged. But more notably the restlessness points to suspicions about theory and theorizing that while not limited to queer theory are uniquely expressed through it.

Similar criticisms tend not to accompany the disciplinarity of feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial theory. Imagine, if you will, the argument that race ceased being invented by the time it became an object of study. Thinkers such as Sara Ahmed and Roderick A. Ferguson, who provide critical analyses of the role of feminist and anti-racist theory in universities, intricately diagnose the utility of these fields for academic institutionality without promoting their supersecession or using language suggesting it.[6] Post-feminism and post-race have pointedly different connotations than post-queer, and they are often seen as efforts to suppress evidence of the structural impact of gender and race rather than as thoughtful criticisms of academic

[6] See Ahmed’s *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012) and Ferguson’s *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogy of Minority Difference* (2012), which describe diversity initiatives in universities, as well as the rise of interdisciplinary departments of race, gender, and sexuality. Both texts explore the institutional cultivation of minority difference and the consumerist advantages gained by institutional bodies through policies and practices of inclusion and the development of curricula.

institutionalization. Resistance to normative organization, particularly the organization of the university and of pedagogical traditions, is inherent to queer theory's contributions to academia, while not being unique to it. Radical reformation of pedagogical institutions, for example in terms of the education of women and people of colour, decolonizing the university, and expanding the limits of knowledge and history, is an ongoing queer mandate overlapping and sometimes allied with projects in feminist and anti-racist studies. It was feminist and anti-racist thinkers who taught us the importance of transforming teaching and learning, and that such work is never complete.

Queer theory's refusal to obey expectations is linked to the temporal curiosities of the post and after queer theories. As it turns out, its troublesome ephemerality and temporal overcharge became key definitional aspects of the field. As Annamarie Jagose argues, queer theory's most enabling characteristic is its "potential for looking forward without anticipating the future" (131), while the ideal of queer criticism as "radically anticipatory" points to the establishment of queer objects and thought discovered only in their belated recovery. Queer theory has always had a problem with time – a fact elaborated beautifully by Elizabeth Freeman in *Time Binds* (2010). Its privileging of the avant garde, what Freeman describes as "always ahead of actually existing possibilities" (xiii), provokes the image of a theory standing before the definitive closure of the past and the present, always somehow ahead of itself. Is queer theory itself experienced as a "time bind?" These temporal disorientations give queer theory an aspect of opacity, as it seems to continually reside just outside the time coexisting with our present view. As practitioners we are never contemporaneous with the theory we study and produce. One way thinkers confront queer theory's problem with time, as I said, is by leaving queer theory behind. An exhaustion unique to queerness has palpably defined the trajectory of the field, which

suggests that exhaustion, indifference, ennui, and restlessness are important features of queer praxis, and are themselves productive of ongoing queer study.

All this is to say that queer theory is marked by a form of persistence expressed through its stated trajectory towards abandonment. The field has proliferated in part via these efforts to move beyond it, which cannot only be understood as philosophical ambitions of meta-theory, but as following a course of development unidentified with narratives of progress, resolution, and unity. Queer indifference points to an "archive fever" within queer theory itself, the various efforts to pronounce it finished so that we can charge into whatever more radical thing lies beyond.[7] My own sense is that this exhaustion is generative, not because it will redeem queer theory, but because it cites a destructive force that reveals the mutability of the field that refuses to remain self-identical. Indifference, as I have called it, names a turning away from the field's proper objects so that other objects come into view. As Ahmed aptly observes, "we are reminded that what we can see in the first place depends on which way we are facing. ... a queer phenomenology ... might be one that faces the back, which looks 'behind' phenomenology, which hesitates at the sight of the philosopher's back" (*Phenomenology* 29). Turning around and facing away generates new relations between people and things, as well as the destabilizing positions that constitute non-subjective orientations to knowledge. In *GLQ*'s special issue, "Queering the Middle," the editors suggest that "the middle" represents an important queer

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[7] I will return to this figure from Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996). Suffice it to say that I invoke it here to describe what Derrida diagnoses as an obsessive, repetitive, and "feverish" activity of establishing records of the past. Derrida's archivist consigns materials to the past, to memory, only to be confronted with the refusal of memory to remain statically in the past (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 14). Another explanation for queer theory's feverish archival impulses, provided by Ann Cvetkovich, is the affective motivations among queer communities committed to securing *a past* for gay and lesbian culture that seems continually at risk of erasure, misplacement, or invisibility. "That gay and lesbian history exists," she claims, "has been a contested fact, and the struggle to record and preserve it is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life, especially sexuality" (242). Interestingly, it may be more important to some that queer theory has a past than a present, or that establishing a past requires a substitution of its other temporal lives.

vantage that reimagines “routes and paths, contours and shapes, directions and teloses of queer lives, practices, and institutions” (Manalansan, et al. 1). This study visits the queer Midwest in Chapter's One's examination of *Brokeback Mountain,* but in a broader sense I take the postures of indistinction, disinclination, disinterest, neutrality, and darkness to be emblematic of a particular idea of the queer middle. This would not be a location between the subject and its world, but something like a suspension in the *midst* of incomplete relations. Indifference may be a way, as Sean Gaston says, “to register the midst as the uncontained. The midst would not be the middle, a subject-orientating ground or position, but in medias res, a finding oneself in the midst, in the middle of a relation to an indefinite and ungraspable beginning and end” (*Concept* 161). The midst is not a meeting point but a destructive sign that unmakes relations between people and things and from the rubble forms the base for new practice and thought.

Theory and Practice

As I said above, this study is not a philological investigation of indifference in queer theory, but an effort to attend to the effects and expressions of indifference as queer forms of agency. Considering the various indifferent relations in language and theory, how are actions such as turning away, middling, disinclination, suspension, and indirectness put to political, ethical, and aesthetic use for the purpose of seeking justice? In this section I bring together the political indifferences of Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Édouard Glissant, the aesthetic indifferences of Kant and Derrida, and the social indifferences of Leo Bersani to reveal the queer entelechy of non-subjective orientations to knowledge.

While states of indifference are often considered akin to a dangerous complicity with dominant conditions of power, or an effect of political disillusionment, their potential to furnish

critiques of power is inherent in the hegemonic utility of mobilized knowledge. If we disavow completely the indifferent we neglect to notice, as Foucault argues, how "A form of power whose main instance is that of opinion will refuse to tolerate areas of darkness" (*Power* 154). For Foucault, the production of docile subjects is linked to the proliferation of knowledge in increasingly transparent spaces. The authority of opinion is linked to a particular dream of Western modernity he associates with Rousseau, a longing for "a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts ... It was the dream that each individual, whatever position he occupied, might be able to see the whole of society, that men's hearts should communicate, their vision be unobstructed by obstacles, and that opinion of all reign over each" (152). According to Foucault modernity would see surveillance redistributed from a central gaze to a self-regulating populace, with the production of opinion and subjection to a dispersed field of visibility disciplining individual behaviour.[8]

Against this threat of universal transparency, Édouard Glissant demands a "right to opacity" (189). As Menon explains the limitations of relying on differences as a basis for political identity, Glissant suggests that the pursuit of understanding based on differences supports the disciplinary mandate of amplified transparency. The politics of difference achieves recognition of minorities, he says, but through the concomitant operations of comparison and judgement, "difference itself still contrives to reduce things to the transparent" (189). There is a connection, he insists, between hierarchy and transparency, and opacities constitute a central

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[8] See Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) on the operation of self-regulation and the internalization of power relations: "it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of the regulations ... He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (202-3).

strategy of his decolonial project in *The Poetics of Relation* (1997).[9] Glissant's concept of relations as *limits* to difference, rather than as determinants of distinction, undergirds his entire poetics and ethics of encounters between cultures in and across spatial and historical divides. For Glissant, the antidote to the reductive politics of difference is opacity, which elucidates a connection between the divisible and the visible. The right to opacity counters logics of difference by occupying sites of the visible where hegemonic efforts to distinguish individuals for the purpose of identifying subjects may be foiled.

Opacities can be queerly mobilized as tactics of evasion to escape the snare of normative expectations. Barthes's efforts to obscure his image in response to oppressive public attention occupy several instances of his capacious term, "the neutral." Throughout his lectures at the Collège de France on *le neutre* he makes known his exhaustion with demands to articulate himself as a public intellectual, ruminating on the "terrorism of the question" and flirting with desires "to give imprecise answers to precise questions" (*Neutral* 107). Risking perceptions of lassitude and indirectness, Barthes stores these and other disavowed expressions under the sign of "the neutral," which broadly includes dispossessed states of being, such as sleep and fatigue, third terms, such as drone bees which do not mate, and neither-nor constructions, such as neither active nor passive verbs.[10] These disrupt binaristic terms of discourse and the conflicts that

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[9] Of course, celebrations of opacity always risk the violence of erasure. Marginalized people are most often opaque in the sense of their removal from public space and lack of access to supports. Writing in a postcolonial context, the violence of being made invisible is not far from Glissant's mind, but opacity comes to name something else, something to the side of its conventional meaning, which is to say an ethics and a poetics that makes possible the freedom to be and to be with others.

[10] Barthes's definition of the neutral is first and foremost structural (*Neutral* 7), and pertains to the generation of neutral terms in structural linguistics from *la critique ni-ni* or neither-nor critique (the result of neither A nor B), and from "the friction of one binary element against another" (xiv). As such, neutralities are not limited to affectless or vague impressions but may also refer to "intense, strong, and unprecedented states" (7). Barthes's ambiguous response to criticism of the neutral as a negative theology does not disavow the neither-nor, but suggests that the neutral is not reducible to the neither-nor (79).

increasingly saturate his world. With the neutral, Barthes's refusal to be disciplined into productivity puts him queerly at odds with the expectations of intellectuals. The intellectual resources he gains from solitude and imaginative interiority furnish an array of queer strategies and attitudes that thwart efforts to harness intellectual life for feeding existing power relations and fueling conflict.

The "grip of the journalist" and the availability of authors as sources (107) undoubtably drive his demand for the "right to be silent" (23), as Glissant sought the right to be spared from scrutiny. In the 1970s Barthes is increasingly troubled by intellectual life in France, protesting what he termed the "ethology of the Intellectuals" and the French taste for debate (132; 116). Demands to be seen as the subject of articulation become a form of compelled desire he associates with force-feeding, in which power makes itself known in "forc[ing] one to eat, to speak, to think, to answer" (153), not in the repression of desire but the dictates of appetite and coerced satisfaction. Like force-feeding, the threat of the "obligation to 'be interested' in everything" (204) generates a kind of attention overload and manifests in a caricature of the intellectual as an endless source of opinions that exposes a cultural inability to separate interest and thought.

The distinction between interest and thought may well be a driving force of Barthes's meditations on *le neutre*. He frequently speaks of the heterogeneous *thought* of the neutral; throughout his remarks his abhorrence of compulsive interest shifts around a certain compulsion towards thought. In his notes on interest the compulsion to be interested always appears together with compulsion *to be seen* interested (often about the interests of the questioner). There is an ineliminable interpersonal aspect of interest, which is at once the attention and its solicitation, and for Barthes it is always tied to the response, question, demand, or hyperdemand. Through all

the iterations of thoughts of the neutral we don't hear about the possibility of the neutral thought, perhaps a third term that is neither interest nor disinterest. This third term would be achieved at such a level of abstraction that it may initiate a temporary collapse of thinking, and this demonstrates thinking's susceptibility to itself. Thinking resembles fatigue in the way that Barthes describes it as "the opposite of death … the *unthinkable* definitive" [my emphasis], whereas fatigue is actually "infinitude but livable in the body" (20). He goes on to discuss the particular antisociality of fatigue; fatigue and weariness, he observes, make effective excuses to be left alone (21). Fatigue's inherent antisociality does not equal disappearance into the self nor the elimination of others. Rather, Barthes's insistence that fatigue is *creative* "when one submits to it" (21), points to ways the inherent susceptibility of the body conditions its generativity, a habitual and significant engagement with the outside in which "new things are born out of lassitude" (21). Returning to thought and interest, Barthes illuminates their rival interactions with otherness, twin forms of subjection to others' demands and to the cries of the body. Thinking back to the discussion of post and after queer theories, our exhaustion with queer theory contains fatigue's potential for new thought, and does not spell the end of thought in the absence of interest. Barthes does not prescribe the evacuation of interest in any sense; but performed interest, often seen to be exchangeable with thought, is an impression of thought that excludes the insular and mysterious agency of the assailable body.

In deep mourning for his mother, Barthes decries the renunciation of suspending one's profile as a mode of refusing to let mourn ("to refuse, yes: it is in the code; not to reply, no: it is outside the code" [205]). Not a desire for monasticism or isolation, he specifies, "I can't suspend my presence to the world temporarily" (203), where suspension is carefully disarticulated from refusal to delimit the particular asociality of the neither/nor. Mourning, he indicates, bespeaks a

neutral form of sociality. Necessary to grief and yet also prohibiting, the neutrality of the self in mourning elicits a dramatic recoil against the desire for abstention. As we will see in Chapter One, solitude is often regarded as the limit of anti-normative life, untolerated even in outlaw spaces. As Barthes suggests, disinclination, as opposed to rejection, is radically opaque. In what is perhaps the most visible example of indifference in Western theory, the law-clerk Bartleby's iconic refrain from Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," "I would prefer not to," throws up a wall against the narrator's persistent attempt to narrativize Bartleby's life, creating a barrier to knowledge and to discourse that could not have been achieved with a "no."[11] Bartleby's refrain is forbidding not because it is negative nor even antisocial, but because it lies "outside the code," as Barthes says, through which liberal modernity is regulated by compelled articulation.

Foucault's darkness, Glissant's opacity, and Barthes's neutrality are not mystifying in and of themselves; all displace the individual subject from the penetrating gaze. While indifferent states present as unreadable or prohibitive, the language we have for these relations and their connotations demonstrate our shared participation in a heterogeneous array of non-subjective orientations to knowledge. Indeed, the divisions separating different and indifferent conditions often turn on the role of the self. The importance of "disinterest" for Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida is its use in the eighteenth century to mean *interest without self-interest*, rather than to mean an identification with the same. As Gaston explains, Derrida develops a radical concept of disinterest "that founds and exceeds the interests of being" (*Derrida* vii) central to an

[11] See Nicolas de Villiers's "Bartleby's Queer Formula" in *Opacity and the Closet* (2012) for a brief analysis of "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" as an example of an opaque subject of narrative (ix-xii). Other thinkers to explore Bartleby's indifference are Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

ethical relationship with the other. For Glissant as well, the inverse of opacity is self-importance, particularly the self-importance of being (Glissant 185), while "relation struggles and states itself in opacity. It defers self-importance" (186). Similarly, Immanuel Kant's "duty of apathy," as Lara Denis says, is not incompatible with feeling, nor does it recommend eliminating feelings, but describes a moral obligation to others that exceeds the vicissitudes of our individual affects and passions. As she argues, Kant makes room for personal feeling, but subjective relations are by no means the only vehicles through which one can practice ethical judgment, and ethical action should not lean on how we feel about the other in need (Denis 50-4).[12] The relative opacity of indifferent states is linked to their impersonal relations to knowledge, which is to say a knowing that is not axiomatically intelligible insofar as it is bound to an individual's experience or position. The individual can know, and know as an effect of her personal experience, but what indifference attracts is the non-privative dimensions of knowledge always at work in the circulation of thought between us that remains untethered to the personality of its referent.

Alongside relations to others, impersonality is an important condition of disinterested relations to objects for Kant and Derrida. Kant's thoughts on "disinterested pleasure" in aesthetic judgement occasion the bulk of Derrida's writing on disinterest in his essays on *Critique of Judgement.* Kant's view of the "disinterested attitude as essence of aesthetic experience" (Derrida *Painting* 39) refers, says Derrida, to his understanding of subjective interest as that which "always relates us to the *existence* of the object" (44). For Kant, *pure* aesthetic judgement requires the dispossession of subjective interest and "an indifference or more rigorously an absolute lack of interest for the existence of the thing in itself" (44). Accordingly, the "pure

[12] Denis highlights Kant's distinction between affect, passion, and feeling and their effects on rational decision-making. Kant's sublimity of apathy turns on the benefit of feeling and the limitations of agitation by affect and passion. (52-3)

pleasure" of judgements of taste and beauty is "this pleasure which draws me toward a nonexistence or at least toward a thing ... which is indifferent to me" (44). Disinterest, in other words, is the lure of the aesthetic object's distance from my being. Aesthetic judgement triggers an alteration in the subjective relation to objective reality that interrupts self-interested claims about reality's existence *for me*. It is both the indifferent subject and the indifferent *object* of judgement that lead to Derrida's understanding of pure aesthetic judgement as a "neutralization ... of all that exists in as much as it exists" (46). In its relation to the aesthetic object, Derrida describes a radically disinterested subjectivity, which is to say a subjectivity that is "not an existence, or even a relation to existence ... [but] an inexistent or anexistent subjectivity arising on the crypt of the empirical subject and its whole world" (46).

This condition is the basis for Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's thesis that art shatters the self. Aesthetic judgement, as Derrida says, neutralizes a particular kind of self-relation I have with things outside of me. For Bersani and Dutoit this neutralization amounts to a crisis, a radical disorganization of the self's cohesion. By shattering selfhood, as Tim Dean explains, art collapses "the boundary between what is inside and outside art" (390), disrupting impulses to dictate the cultural domain to which an artefact belongs. Is it art or is it life? Art dissolves identity and the margins of subjecthood, traversing the divides between cultural domains and between the subjective self and objective reality. Another domain, Dean continues, where these relations strongly take hold is sexuality. In art and in sexuality, the impact of excessive stimuli interrupts the coherent binds of self-identity, a phenomenon that Bersani and Dutoit twin, throughout their oeuvre, with gay erotic experience. As Dean points out, aesthetics and sexuality are not only similar but, as Freud originally observed, erotic impulses can be triggered by objects that may be as aesthetic as they are erotic. The erotic and the aesthetic object overlap, and this

area of indistinction has, through Bersani's and Dutoit's influence, a formative role in queer theory. There is a close connection between the presence of art's sensate impact and the virtuality of the insensitive distance of disinterested pleasure. We can glean from Kant and Derrida that disinterested pleasure is not an absence of strong impulses. The sensory overload that shatters the self is the source of its dispossession, marking the ephemerality, and indeed the impermanence, of the self's coexistence with its body.

Taken together, ethical relations and aesthetic judgement are jointly supported by disinterest as both a disruption of epistemic intelligibility and of ontological relations. However, both disruptions arise on the expulsion of personality from the seat of epistemic and ontological foundation. Knowing and being are not absolutely eliminated as conditions of reality, but their firm tether to the subjective and objective reality of the person is not the basis of their possibility. As David Simpson has observed about postmodern literary studies and critical theory, the contemporary notion that “all knowledge claims must be accompanied by or seen as consisting in a rhetoric of speaking personally and saying where one is coming from” (78) is accepted widely across the humanities despite not being shown to certify pedagogical or critical practice. The compulsion to speak personally, he says, places the presence of the subject as the originating and rehydrating object of knowing in the academic humanities “just because it seems to be there” (89), as if knowledge were to only accrue value in the event of being issued by the living, breathing, interested person.

What this work describes as indifferent is not a refusal of the affective subject, but something closer to what Kant calls in *Anthropology From A Pragmatic Point of View* “negative attentiveness,” for him an expression of cognitive abstraction (Goetschel 54). Neither willful ignorance nor distraction, negative attentiveness is a form of attention aimed at representations

one wishes to leave out of consciousness, and not just any representations but, as David L. Clark explains, “those objects one feels uncontrollably, compulsively compelled to attend” (“Kant's Aliens” 269). For Kant abstraction is an act of “turning away” (*abstractio*) necessary for mental health in resisting the threat of fixation or obsession, but it is also a necessary feature of the capacity to choose between representations (one aesthetic object or the other) inherent in the powers of aesthetic judgement. Abstracting from representations is also linked to the impersonal attention Kant describes as disinterest, for in diverting attention from a feeling one attends to it “as if it had nothing to do with me” (*Conflict* 189). One attends to the feeling as if one were dispossessed of it. Therefore, negative attention is not opposed to attention, but indicates a turning away, as Clark continues, that is a form of turning *to* that includes various cognitive and perceptive tendencies.[13]

According to Bersani, these various strategies of turning away, primarily from oneself, can be a major lure to social space. Queer spaces especially can generate the particular pleasures that belong to what is not me and not mine that draw us into proximity with others. My own commuted existence and the non-existence of the other and the object *for me* is what Bersani in another work calls the renunciation of “acquisitive impulses,” or the pleasure inherent in “our being less than what we really are” (“Sociability” 11). Indifferent relations have a destructive effect on the autonomy of the subject and object and the interested relation of the former to the latter. As with the relations to art I discussed, what draws us into sociality is the dispossession of the self, a breaking down rather than a consolidation of the hypostasis of individual existence.

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[13] Negative attentiveness may have been a precursor to repression and *déngation* (Clark, “Aliens” 269), for example. Other cognitive and perceptive orientations to consider are meditation, deconstruction, and disidentification. Inattention is also one of the many states that Blanchot claims provides access to the “eternal Outside,” and its experience carries attractiveness and a “negligent passion” (*Disaster* 55).

What remains for Bersani is "the function of a subject without personality, of a partially dismantled subject" (11), which is to say the possibilities of relation released by the destruction of normative subjectivity. In other words, the potential for continuities of being, forms of relation to the side of identification, is a kind of impersonal sociality, not the self against the world, but the possibility of the other in the self and the refraction of selfhood by relations to alterity.[14]

What I have been aiming to develop is an understanding of indifference as otherwise than a privation, and otherwise than as a condition solely synonymous with negative affect. Consequently, the orientation of this study is side-ways looking, and is composed of several acts of turning away. Chapter One turns away from attachments to pursue solitude, while in Chapter Two my focus on cinematic vision displaces human perception. Bringing dream-life to the fore in Chapter Three, I turn away from waking consciousness, exploring how dream-life must practice a negative attentiveness that puts waking ideas to the side to sharpen the margins of the human's political life. What I explore is a queer gaze oriented to what passes through sight when turning away, and the situations in which turning away provides for the contemplation of objects in their non-existence for me. As I have shown, indifference is strongly associated both linguistically and philosophically with impersonal relations and with encounters that dispossess the self in its normative relations with others. It exposes the self's impermanence with regard to the modes of articulation and experience that the self is imagined to found, as well as its anonymous submergence within the rhythms of social being. It also forges opportunities for

[14] Performance art by queers of colour is the occasion for Muñoz's meditations on social practices of disidentification. What Muñoz describes as a strategy of "read[ing] oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (*Disidentifications* 12) is one form of the impersonalization of social space that Bersani claims can be a major engine of desire. Disidentification can certainly resemble personalization, for example when one inserts oneself into a thing that has already rejected one's personhood, but other configurations of disidentification may permit a temporary abstention from aspects of self-interest in order to productively, challengingly engage with an other with which one cannot identify.

queer postures, which is to say, subversive relations to power and less knowable, even deviant, modes of social existence, aesthetic experience, and attention and inattention.

I have also sought to abstract indifference from the strict confines of human experience. Heidegger famously argues that the human is uniquely capable of boredom,[15] one cognate of indifference. However, synonymous as it is with impersonal relations, indifference often figures in non-human relations to knowledge and power. Another *OED* definition makes this connection explicit: The outmoded noun "Indifferents" means "Things indifferent; non-essentials" ("Indifferent"). "Indifferents" are things that embody *désouvrement* or worklessness, to use Maurice Blanchot's word, and assume a non-instrumental relation to humans and to human action. Similar to Derrida's explanation of aesthetic disinterest, they are insensible to my existence and my self-interested appropriation of the world. There is also something of this inhumanism in the very first *OED* definitions above. What person, and what human, for that matter, has no bias? Who is really impartial? Synonyms of indifference describe automations and job titles better than they do persons – both the person and the person's impersonal supplement. As such, indifferents are not opposed to human life but are often indistinct from it. For Barthes, for example, "The Neuter essentially refers to the inanimate, i.e., to the thing ... and to what is assimilated to the thing" (187), while for Glissant relation is radically unfixed so that "every subject is an object and every object a subject" (xx). These slippages are a natural function of the impermanence of the self with respect to the body and the body's saturation in a world of things.

[15] Boredom is a fundamental concept explicated throughout *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1995), through which Heidegger explains the movement or "attunement" of human *Dasein* as a relation to the world. Profound boredom, the third of Heidegger's three stages of *Dasein*'s attunement through boredom, is a "fundamental attunement for human Dasein" (282) and marks the divide between human relations to the world and what Heidegger calls "the essence of animality" (282), which is excluded from such attunement.

Stony

Queer indifference, I said, finds particular expression in impersonal and even inanimate registers, marking a site of indistinction between human and non-human agency. Having begun to discuss the social emergence and utility of this agency, I call attention to its evident materialism and the significance of the "world of things" for a greater understanding of kinships, politics, and materialities imagined through turning away, neutrality, and opacity. The queer indifference of film and dreamscapes, for example, is revealed through their relations to the material world outside the self and their unexpected representations of the self through its shared existence with material life. By turning to non-human and even inanimate modes of existence, I explore the richness of our shared existence with the non-human in the folds and grooves of expression and sociality, and the queer materiality of the most limited forms of relation. As Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen argue in *GLQ*'s special issue on the non-human, serious considerations of non-human existence help us "to denaturalize the kind of 'sex' that lies at the center of deployments of sexuality ... and multipl[y] our ability to imagine other kinds of trans/material attachments" (185). In their analysis of Laura Aguilar's photograph *Grounded #114* (2006), in which the artist crouches in a pose resembling a boulder behind her, they characterize Aguilar's mimicry as a "turning away" from the demand for full humanity. By "concealing sex and gender [and] obscuring race" (184) Aguilar reveals something through an expression of opacity, inhabiting the sometimes violent space of invisibility to show without visualizing queer connections to non-human modes of being, time, and agency. One interpretation of the photograph is that sex, gender, and race are reserved for humans, and by relieving us of our attention to these subjectivities the photograph permits us to lift our gaze to a body anonymously submerged in the equally unknowable, unfinished world beyond. There is a certain freedom for Aguilar in the

unmoving, immutable boulder. Her body is not contained by its contours but marks a point of continuity between being a human and the wider world. Aguilar does not shed sex, gender, and race, but her body is also not reducible to them. This is to say that by turning away and subjecting flesh to boulder, the artist marks a point of indistinction within human and non-human, not between them, but in the uncontained interior where queerness flourishes.

It is to another stone that I wish to turn to address what it could mean talk about a queer indifferent, which is to say a figure whose queerness is expressed through the registers of turning away, opaque presentation, and non-human life. How do these elements come together in queer media to make intelligible the opaque, inexpressive, workless potentials of racialized and gender-non-conforming bodies, especially in such a way that makes sexuality itself opaque to a history of queer life to which it ostensibly belongs? Queer literature's insensate, hardened, or frigid figurations of female masculinity and genderqueerness provide modes of withdrawal and anti-sociality that are not built on men's rage at women's rejection but indicate dynamics between women, FTM transpeople, and genderqueers not acknowledged socially and experiences of woundedness and grief that could be understood non-pathologically. The "stone butch," for example, in Leslie Feinberg's monumental *Stone Butch Blues* is a figure of queer life that turns on the opaque, inexpressive face of indifference, bringing the non-human stone into contact with the working-class butch identity of the 1950s. As Luciano and Chen suggest, "queer connections between flesh and stone" (184) help to denaturalize received ideas about what will count as gender and sexuality and to imagine other forms of attachment, even and especially when the stone butch appears to be an outmoded sexuality no longer available for contemporary identification.

According to Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* (1998), stone butch designates "an

enigmatic core of lesbian sexual and social practice" (124) that historically refers to a butch woman who will have sex with a femme but refuses to be touched herself and is therefore "untouchable." Her sexuality is uniquely defined by a particular form of antisociality revealed in what she will *not* do and what will not be done to her. Given my emphasis in this study on suspended postures, this definition of stoniness is emblematic of a certain sexual *désoeuvrement,* or worklessness, queerly marked by "the nonperformative aspects" (123) of sexual identity and sexual orientation. Halberstam explains touchability not as a category of receptivity but as an act of doing, recasting both receptive and active positions as modes of performance in the pantheon of sexual activity. The privilege afforded to performance in theories of sexuality comes from the notion that embodiment coincides with interested selfhood. Like Barthes' shudder at the ordeals of compelled satisfaction, stone retreats from the mandate of mutual satisfaction as the necessary profit of human sexual being. Instead, the expectation of a subject of desire propelled by volition is met with an asceticism proper to stoniness. Stone differs from the negative desire encoded in Lacanian *jouissance*, for the stone's minimal and inexpressive mode of desire is not strongly impelled by the death drive's pursuit of self-destruction but marked by a dis-interested orientation to erotic experience. The enigma of her untouchability, even within queer communities, turns on forms of denial and self-subtraction that cannot be reduced entirely to gender difference nor to traumatic experience. Instead, stone requires that we think sexuality other than through a vocabulary of experience, performance, orientation, and contact and to follow unpursued experiences and unconsummated actions.

Anne-Lise François's critique in *Open Secrets* (2008) of "the unambiguous good of articulation and expression" (xvi) offers an explanation for the hostility faced by the stone even

within queer communities that historically embrace non-reproductive Eros. [16] Even non-reproductive sex is tied to the expectation of "fulfillment as mutuality" (xx), a cultural imperative that renders stone sexuality intelligible only as deficit. Feinberg's stone butches practice and refine what François terms "reticent assertion," the array of uncounted knowledge, unclaimed experience, or unpursued desire that may take the form, in the case of the stone, of "a minimal contentment often indistinguishable from a readiness to go without" (xix). Such self-cancelling erotic experience may be normatively explained psychologically as masochistic erotic play, or as with restricting food or rest, the disordered pleasures of self-effacement that the first-generation Romantic poet William Blake named "the self-enjoyings of self-denial" (Blake 7.9). But deferrals to psychology and pathology fail to account for the profound incoherence of inexpressive and recessive actions within a liberal modernity committed to humanist subjectivities organized by ideals of self-possession and cumulative experience. Reductive psychological and psychoanalytical diagnoses also fail to explain the aesthetic function of stone and stoniness in *Stone Butch Blues.* In what follows I ask how this novel contributes to our understanding of stone butch sexuality as recessive experience by partially turning away from its characters as psychological subjects and turning towards the discourse inscribed in the stones and stone-like objects about what it means to be impenetrable.

What is *stone* in *Stone Butch Blues*? Beyond its insider signification, stones proliferate in the novel and they behave in several ways. Jess Goldberg's stone contains a complex mutability that connects Jess to the femmes' sex work and to other states of being through its categorical rigidity.

[16] See Halberstam, who explains the incoherence of stone butchness within queer communities and the various allegations directed against it (*Female* 124).

> She ran her hands through my hair. “I just wish I could make you feel that good. You’re stone already, aren’t you?” I dropped my eyes. She lifted my chin up and looked me in the eyes. “Don’t be ashamed of being stone with a pro, honey. We’re in a stone profession. It’s just that you don’t have to get stuck in being stone either. It's OK if you find a femme you can trust in bed and you want to say that you need something, or you want to be touched. Do you know what I mean?” (128)

As Halberstam describes, stone indicates that Jess's desire is routed through her lover Angie's pleasure, but it functions variously in this passage also as a sign of an unnameable shame and of Angie's sex work. In Jess's community stone butches date femme pros, and this structure of desire demands but does not fully explain the butch-femme pairing; being stone and being pro also bring a dynamic that is not entirely contained by the gender difference. The stones and the pros find each other as members of the working class and they share “stoniness” as well. “A stone profession” is how Angie describes her work, citing a parallel to sex work in which the pro provides pleasure to another in a sexual situation while obscuring her own. For Feinberg, stone butch identity and sex work are not the same, but their mutual co-existence for her 1950s queer Buffalo workers exposes a transitivity inherent to stone that signals its connection to other times, places, beings, and substances.

There is transitivity in intransigence that releases unacknowledged forms of relationality. This transitivity is evident in the behaviour of the novel's stones. Stones often change state, variously hardening, melting, accumulating, and vanishing. “Melt the stone” is one of the novel's most common references to stone,[17] so readers encounter stone through its dialectical

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[17] There are four separate repetitions of this phrase in the novel, each referring to Jess’s girlfriend Theresa’s effect on Jess (see Feinberg 8; 12; 221; 265).

associations with mutability, liquidity, and vulnerability. For Jess, who endures horrifyingly frequent assaults from police officers, stone solidifies as a strategy for surviving the brutal abuses of power. Meanwhile, stones melt upon extended contact with loving femmes. After an assault when Jess's body and soul are deeply wounded, she knows that it will "take [her lover] weeks again to melt the stone" (8). In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) Ahmed is drawn to pebbles because they acquire their shape over time through contact, and in the course of acquiring shape they transform into sand (186-7). Pebbles' slow mutability through contact is queerly affiliated, she says, for in taking and giving shape through contact with what lies around them, pebbles participate in a kind of queer kinship of contingent community. Ahmed returns to stones in *Willful Subjects* (2014) as symbols of "the other of the will" and what exemplifies the passive and the hapless (186). Indeed, while stones are impenetrable in normal circumstances, they are also strangely exposed. Stones move only by the impulse or touch of external forces. They have no internal substance with which to marshal any inherent power of volition, and their inert being, far from shielding them from the impact of others, relies on others for mobility. Their impenetrability is not synonymous with autonomy or power; they are at once impassive and passive. Like one of Barthes's thoughts of the neutral the stone balances the obdurate and the supple, the giving *and* receiving of impressions and the obliteration of all form. The word stone is almost tantamount to neutral existence in the world. Heidegger's observation that "the stone is worldless" (176) speaks to, from one perspective, the utter impoverishment of the stone's material life, its non-acquisitive existence in the world in the mode of not *having* a world. This is not to suggest that Feinberg's stone butches are worldless objects. However, the properties of stone and the stone butch's outmoded existence is essential for understanding the butches' queer kinship in the bars and factories and their experiences of abjection and wounding in the novel.

Stone's limited relational and affective horizons reveal how indifferences do not function to interrupt connections but *facilitate* queerly imagined kinships and alliances that correspond to different paradigms of attachment.

Melting does not come under our typical interactions with stone, a phenomenon that occurs at around 1500 degrees Celsius. This is an extreme occurrence that should signal just how critical the stones' contact with femmes can be. However, one might encounter melting stone while working in a factory. Factory environments imbricate humans in extreme transformations of hard, mutable materials. Jess is responsible for melting similarly hard materials in her jobs at two plastic plants. At the first plant, Jess feeds toxic green powder into a machine that melts the substance to produce plastic pipes. After a shift she leaves the plant to visit her friend Ed covered in a thick coat of plastic dust. The image of head-to-toe plasticized Jess standing before one of her stone friends invites us to ask what is plastic about Jess and about plastic's relation to stone. Jess embodies what Heather Davis calls the "uncanny resemblance between modalities of queerness and plastic's expression" ("Imperceptibility" 188). Impenetrable, opaque, and toxic to human reproduction, plastic's material effects in the world and its physical properties open a channel for exploring queer relations between humans and the non-human world and "finding creative strategies for living with toxicity" (192) in potentially inhospitable futures. Jess's own inhospitable present is rich with the toxic debris that infiltrates her body while at the same time provides work she needs to support herself and her loved ones. *Stone Butch Blues* is, in one sense, a novel about living with toxicity. Even as the novel affirms stone as a sexual identity it does so without passing it off as another version of health or normative sexual variation. Stone, Jess claims, inures in response to the assaults and intrusions of authorities, a pattern of violence that is seen to be perpetrated by a toxic system and not rogue reagents. Stones' plastic relation to

toxicity unfolds over an astonishing scale, which for Bruno Latour inspires the very structure of coexistence. His thinking is transformed by a striking quotation from Isabelle Stengers about "the risk taken by rocks – yes, rocks – in order to keep on existing" (297). Hardened fronts are not set in stone but are the *risks* taken to endure in scarcity. Unlivable environments give rise to stones that find ways to dwell in destructive conditions without reversion or repair.

In the second job, Jess pours plastic pellets into an injection-mold machine that spits out plastic parts. Her job is to keep the machine running because if it is switched off the plastic hardens inside it. This plastic carries an oddly subversive capacity to destroy the factory machines that transfigure it, the indirect action of non-human substance. One explanation for the centrality of mutable parts in Jess's life is that their formation resembles the gender transitions that also involve the mutability and recombination of parts and the changing states of stone. Throughout the novel Jess assumes and discards a series of pronouns including she, he-she, he, and it,[18] and she pursues hormone injections and top surgery. But the function of melting and solidifying materials in the novel indexes an aspect of stoniness that does not correspond to Jess's nomological, surgical, or hormonal changes. Like Aguilar's stone, Jess's plastic is not synonymous with subjective recognition. The plastic parts Jess makes uncannily show up in her social life. Scotty, her friend Gloria's young son, asks her to help him construct a toy Texaco station from colourful plastic pieces. "How do you know where the pieces go?" he asks, amusingly recalling the unhelpful sex talk Jess receives from Al and Jacqueline as a young baby butch. "'I've got this'," she answers, "'It's like a map. It tells me this is A and this is B and these two go together.' They didn't. 'I mean this is A and maybe this is B.' They weren't" (288). The irreducibility of the pieces to form coherent, working combinations complicates that initial

[18] This last pronoun is used by strangers after Jess transitions, and is not among those she ever claims.

explanation of the butch's role given by Al and Jacqueline and at the same time recalls the importance of another plastic part to Jess's queerness. The plastic dildo, that other hard object that traverses her many sexual encounters, also infiltrates her being and her lovers' bodies. As a type of prosthesis that helps to achieve untouchability, it produces a different kind of mediation from the way bodies are already mediated and protheticized. If more normative forms of bodily mediation effect a self-cancelling impression stabilized as mutual contact, the plastic part mediates an unfixed A and B dynamic. The plastic part connects Jess, in this context, to the femmes in that very particular way, and it also binds Jess's intimate life to her factory work, demonstrating how, as Davis argues, "objects of sexual pleasure are chemically linked to plastics of all kinds that make possible and attenuate other sexual *in*differences" (188).

Jess's relationships and prosthetics are saturated in a natural world of what Karen Barad calls "transmaterialities," the ongoing un/doings and trans/formations proper to nature's constant reworking of what counts as natural (Barad 413). The transformation of the materially plastic dildo into the virtual stone cock, the prostheticization of virtuality itself, evidences the "indeterminacies" (399), as she says, proper to nature's capacity to undo its own naturalness. The supplemental prosthetic is not added on, but encrypted in materiality's transmutating flesh. "Materiality in its entangled psychic and physical manifestations," Barad continues, "is always already a patchwork, a suturing of disparate parts" (393). The plastic part's queer assemblages activate indeterminate relational possibilities between bodies but also between histories of capitalist development and prospectively toxic futures. As Jess discovers working with Scotty's plastic toy, plastic parts carry potentialities beyond her own capacity to know them. The inoperable map they create reveals an indeterminate array of connections across bodies, things,

and times, similar to how the aesthetic object, for Bersani and Dutoit, can be indistinguishable from erotic objects.

Other stones and stone-like objects crop up in the novel. Scotty requests a “pet rock” from Jess (288), showing another face of stone appropriated by capital. Like Scotty, the young Jess is similarly drawn to stone. As a small child, Jess is briefly cared for by a neighbouring Dineh family whose language and culture she absorbs before her father removes her from the foreign environment. “Immersed in the music of two languages,” she describes her entry into life through a split reality: “one world was Wheeties and … the other was fry bread and sage” (16). Before leaving, the Dineh grandmother gives Jess a ring with a turquoise stone that she claims will provide protection, which Jess steals from her mother’s jewelry box and wears until it is stolen by cops who raid the bar she frequents and rape her. During a rape she soothes herself with a dream-like reverie, and the scent of sage permeates the visualization. Spectral mountains rise up before her, and she strides towards these looming monoliths seeking sanctuary. Like a stone thought, the ring protects Jess with imaginative escape. Jess’s small bit of turquoise is imaginatively connected to these larger masses from which it came and to the expansive history of the Dineh that nurtures her beyond the scale of sight. The protective turquoise ring is Jess's first stone and it signals her early connection to racial alterity and to the women of colour who offer care and protection where her genetic family cannot. The real protection stone offers, it seems, is them. Jess's stone is inscribed with the sustaining lines of difference she crosses and that cross her, and its loss marks the grief crystallized in a life lived under a brutal regime.

Earlier in the novel Jess's friends buy her powder-blue shirtsleeves with sky blue buttons. Another gift and another gift lost, because during the same raid in which the ring is stolen, the cops tear open Jess's shirtsleeves and the pebble-like buttons skip across the floor and disappear.

Jess's stone hardens after this encounter and others like it, but these stones are also gifts from others that paradoxically fortify connections and ephemerally mark the place where grief dwells. Shortly before Jess transitions and leaves Gloria's children, she carries on the tradition and gifts Scotty and his sister Kim with semi-precious stones. The three build a snowperson with stones for facial features, and that night Jess says goodbye to the grieving children. As gifted stones have done for her, for the children they tie persistent connections to the losses endured in human life. Linguistically mutable, both figural and literal in the novel, stone in *Stone Butch Blues* names a categorical rigidity undone by the brittle binds of category. Stone is the stumbling block of identity. It stands in for neither masculinity nor femininity, but for both a substance and its melting point, for human and non-human, and for *a fortitude unsupported by power*.

Halberstam insists that there "is nothing odd or unreadable about the desires of the stone butch *as long as she is understood in the more general context of female masculinity*" (124). Indeed, the conjoined desires to guard against disruption, provide pleasure, and affirm masculinity come together intelligibly in the stone, but Halberstam's eagerness to demystify the stone's opaque surface also encodes a restlessness with the impenetrability that seems integral to its lure. In the imaginative potentials of Feinberg's novel, what the stone is and what it is yet to be remains open. When Jess is an inexperienced baby butch, she receives sex advice from Al and Jacqueline that she finds mystifying and unhelpful. She accepts their advice, never quite understanding what it means. Only later, in bed with Angie for the first time, does Angie contribute an explanation that resonates. "I want you to feel it," says Angie, touching Jess's dildo, "This is an act of sweet imagination" (125). Angie draws a connection between the plastic part, touchability, and imagination. Jess's untouchability provides a form of sensation defined paradoxically by the plastic part's ephemeral link to imaginative potential. In other words, it is

the very insensitivity of the plastic part that permits the stone's sensory encounter. Angie imparts the pleasure of ephemerality intimately bound to stone, a capacity to be touched in the mode of untouchability. The imaginative potential of impenetrable stone, what Barad describes as matter's "agential capacity for imaginative, desiring, and affectively charged forms of bodily entanglements" (388), releases deviant modes of encounter and prostheticization that may breach the margins of intelligible connection. For François as well the value of reticent assertion is its unending exposure to the imaginative possibilities of desire. The "space of shared separation" (Ricco, *Decision* 1), to borrow John Paul Ricco's useful term, between "the having of a desire and its externalization, or the making of a wish and its accomplishment" grants our "[a]ttune[ment] to the experimentalism and provisional nature of human desires, [and] this ethos, far from negating, keeps alive the possibility of imaginative exercise" (François 22). These gaps are the indirect actions of human life, the rich indeterminacy between the self's beginning and what it becomes. Imagination, what Angie detects at the core of Jess's sexuality, holds stone back from becoming rigidly assimilated into selfhood. My argument is not that Halberstam is incorrect, but that the mysterious and insular exercise of imagination casts sexuality as the uncontained, what inside the human is contingently connected to what lies beyond it.

Imaginative exercise is integral to the stone butch's resistance to her historicization, what I began by calling her outmoded sexuality. In their inert existence, stones remain for the coming of what lies unforeseeably beyond the present. Stone butch sexuality is not among contemporary queer sexualities recognized and made available for identification. As Halberstam suggests, by offering stone's "historical" definition, stone's fossilization in the bedrock of 1950s social history renders it legible to us now as an antique queer sexuality interred in the past. Why this archive fever? Why this passionate pursuit to make "stones talk!" (93) as Derrida asks the archeologist in

Archive Fever (1996)? Similar to queer theory's perennial archivization, which I discussed above, stone's "intention to be lost" (Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* 72) does not guarantee its erasure but becomes an engine of its untimely persistence. While stone may be the very embodiment of an archive, Feinberg's novel archives stone sexuality in reserve for an unknowable future. Jess's rejection of Frankie for desiring other butches or Grant's admission that she is not a "real butch" (196)[19] signals a "definition," Derrida writes, of stone butchness "open to a future radically to come" (*Archive* 70) that is unrecognizable to the present dynamics of the novel. In *Archive Fever,* the archivist's fever – part passion, part death drive, part repetition compulsion – fuels his compulsive establishment of a record of the past to shelter it for an unknown future yet to come. Far from only immersing us in the past, archivization "produces as much as it records" (17) and provides "an irreducible experience of the future" (68). Stones' transitivity into other states does not erode their existence but *is* the experience of their future. Pebble beaches are striking to Ahmed, for example, because they reside in the midst of becoming sand. Their becoming is not visible "on the surface of a pebble," but the pebble's opacity exposes "a becoming that is not available to consciousness, or has not arrived in the present" (*Phenomenology* 186, n.11). The pebble lodges its future as sand in the unassailable callus of its present, holding within itself the not-yet of an archive unpreserved but transfigured as multitudes of granules.

Stone Butch Blues's archive is the place of the "archiviolithic." (Derrida, *Archive* 14). My turn to Derrida in understanding Feinberg's futural stone spotlights archive fever's insistence on the archive's own destructive relation to memory, to the very work of archiving, and is useful for how it shows memorial material disguising its resistance to historicization and striding towards

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[19] Grant's "secret desire," as Jess calls it, is not revealed in the novel, but it may indicate that Grant desires butches or men (518).

the future as a force of ruin. My aim is to re-temporalize stone butch as something other than a historical sexuality, igniting its incomplete affective and relational entelechy. The literary archive with which we are supposed to remember is the place, says Derrida (14), "of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory." The central paradox of the archive is that there is none, he goes on "without consignation in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorialization" (14). The "archiviolithic" is the lithic force that destroys the archive from within, connecting it to the vicissitudes of forgetting, mutation, and changes of state. Stone for Derrida is invariant only in the sense that the forces of corrosion and disintegration invariantly operate in the archive. There is a stone-butch-to-come at work in *Stone Butch Blues,* subject to the entelechy of the lithic imagination.[20]

Feinberg's characters face two types of future. The first is the future made legible in the present conditions of others. Watching an older pro at a bar, Angie tells Jess

> when I was a little girl I remember being in a restaurant with my mother and stepfather and I saw a woman who looked something like her … My stepfather said 'Dirty, filthy whore' right out loud as the woman paid her bill … But that woman just paid her bill and

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[20] A good deal of *Archive Fever* is devoted to what is unique about Jewishness and Judaism in its critique of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's writing on Freud and Judaism. Specifically, Derrida ascribes the futural impulses of archivization to Jewish singularity. Jess's Jewishness is one of her first experiences of abjection, when she is targeted on the playground and in school for being a Jew, and it remains a somewhat disavowed aspect of her identity as she detaches from her natal family. None of the butches or femmes she meets at Tifka's (a potentially Jewish name never acknowledged as such) openly shares Jewish ancestry, and so it remains fixed to the family she flees and the occasional memories of men's and women's separation at the Synagogue. While Jess envisions her stone-butch-to-come, the possibility of Jewish futurity appears all but lost. After Derrida, I ask if there is an "experience of the future or of hopefulness which seems … to be at once irreducible to oedipal repetition and irreducibly, uniquely, exclusively Jewish, proper to 'Jewishness' if not to 'Judaism'" (47) for Jess. Yerushalmi's claim that only for the people of Israel is there felt to be a religious imperative to remember makes Derrida tremble (50), and from this he draws a Jewish demand to bear witness to the relationship with the future. Is there a Jew-to-come, a stone Jewishness, or a stone butch Jewishness lived in the lithic membranes of a trembling archive?

took a toothpick and walked out real slow, like she never heard him at all. *That's gonna be me when I grow up,* I thought. (Feinberg 2010, 118-9)

Jess responds with a story similar to Angie's: "[At the mall with my parents there was] this he-she and a femme. All they were doing was looking at rings … Everyone was glaring at them. The pressure just popped those two women out the door like corks … And all the while I was thinking, *Oh shit, that's gonna be me*" (119). Like stoniness the butches and femmes share a relation to the future forged through equally despairing and desirous encounters with older women. Triangulated via the parents, the girls' identities spring to life as temporal experiences, as if *who I am* shares the same space with *who I will be* and *who I will not be*. Charged by the powerful combination of titillation and fear, these pivotal moments of recognition create a sense of inevitability that defines them. For young Jess the memory resounds in the repeated comments and looks about the hard road ahead she receives from the other butches. Their warnings about the "dangerous and painful journey" (45) provide a sense of the future that helps to stabilize Jess's identity and establish bonds across generations. But as Jess reaches their age a second type of future presents itself. "You don't know what's coming down the road" (533), her friend Jan offers.[21] The road changes state, its destination unseals, and the novel ends at the precipice of a not-yet as enigmatic as the stone butch core of lesbian sexual and social practice.

Another non-human, a plant, demonstrates for Jess how to thrive before an unseen future, and it provides an occasion for self-reflection on how a stone butch negotiates chaotic feelings and the normative demands of self-expression. Jess and her girlfriend Theresa repot a spider plant and Jess declares how it should be done for the plant to thrive. "Maybe I'm like the plant:

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[21] Jan's statement echoes Jess's friend Peaches's earlier consoling comment to Jess when she is much younger, "The right girl is coming down the road" (187). Jan's refrain borrows the hopefulness of the earlier remark while underscoring the difference between knowing and not knowing one's future.

my feelings got so choked up that I grew in a different way" (272), Jess says, straining to explain her emotional reticence to Theresa. "Maybe it's what makes you so sensitive" (272), Theresa offers. Plants are sensitive to their conditions, but for Jess they figure the stoniness that impedes expectations of transparent articulation so central to Western modernity, as François has explained. Jess now looks to the plant for a model of stone expression, not for its immobility but for its queer course of growth "in a different way" that with specialized care leads to its survival. As Jess and Theresa conclude this final fight and part for good, Jess is frightened for her future, but the road ahead unfurls beyond her horizon and extends towards the inhuman cosmos past the visibility of being and becoming. "I strained to look into my future, trying to picture the road ahead of me, searching for a glimpse of who I would become. All I could see was the night sky and the stars above me" (279). Unlike her reckoning as a child, Jess's search for identity is no longer met with an image of *who I will be,* but follows an errant path that releases her, with all the fear implied, to the elemental forces of uncharted futurity. As I will show, the particular kind of imaginative futurity that I theorize in this study has a way of dispelling claims of identity. Because *who I am* is *always* a temporal experience shaped by one's speculative orientation to the future, our hospitality to the future in the form of the unknown unfixes the regulatory operations through which we recognize ourselves. "Try imagining a world worth living in" (550), the activist Duffy urges. In the final lines of the novel Jess is no longer sure what to call herself nor where she fits in, but she repeats Duffy's words to herself as she wakes from a dream of her turquoise stone ring.

In its absence the stone ring returns to Jess in a dream. An old woman points to the circle cast by the ring on the ground. "I nodded, acknowledging that the shadow was as real as the ring" (Feinberg 552). The woman waves her hand between the ring and its shadow wordlessly

motioning “Isn’t this distance also real?” (552) In this ephemeral state Jess knows that she must “accept the realness of the object” (552). The hard stone shares space with its ghostly shadow, and where the stone was lost it becomes real in the dream’s imaginative depths. Nicole Seymour observes an echo of Angie’s erotic treatment of the dildo in this oneiric encounter with the ring (Seymour 64-5). The “sweet imagination” that turns the real of the dildo into the realness of Jess’s cock is similarly at work in transfiguring the stone ring into a circle “back to the past, forward to the future” (Feinberg 552). Dreams, as I explain in Chapter Three, are themselves transfigurations of material reality, and without the support of creative agency they generate alternative versions of reality that reveal queer ways of living. The materiality of Jess’s stone ring is not synonymous with the *presence* of its matter; instead, matter’s lure to imaginative potential disperses stoniness across an itinerant temporality, melting hard stone into a vapour state of speculation. The stone is its shadow and the distance between itself and its shadow, marking an indifferent site where distance functions both as protective mediation between bodies and as the reticent assertion of a certain kind of hope, shaped not by the expectation of recovery or restoration but the transmutation of solid substance in the lasting expanse of melting and corrosion.

“Stones' time is not our own,” say Luciano and Chen and stone “ignites longing” (185) for that very time encrypted beyond the moment of desire. Plastic products, Davis reminds us, dissolve into microplastics but they retain the chemical composition of plastic. All the plastic created since the substance was first produced remains on Earth, which means that almost every dildo remains long after the bodies to which they attached are gone. As Jess herself charts a course between gendered subjectivities and the vast world of plastic parts, stone lays a cobbled path through nature that makes possible modes of being that are unrecognized in the present.

Three Meditations on Queer Indifference

The subsequent chapters address related cultural expressions of queer indifference. Chapter One explores the affective and political stance of indifference to others in the form of solitude. What I call "Queer Solitude" is a form of antisociality embodied by turning away from compulsory forms of attachment. The "antisocial thesis" in queer theory has provided a suite of antinormative critiques of relations to others and to the past and future that work to regulate queer desire, but what I seek to capture by attending to solitude as a queer posture is the regulative pressure of rhetorics of connection and attachment that underwrite discourses delimiting human viability even within queer studies. Recalling Jess, who turns away from social expectations of mutuality, my subject in this chapter is a stony figure, the solitary cowboy of Lee's *Brokeback Mountain,* whose queerness is expressed not in his relationship but in his desire *not* to be in a relationship. Being connected or attached, and pursuing a legibly social life, is often considered to be an imperative of humanity and of neurotypicality. As Melanie Yergeau suggests in her consideration of autism rhetoric, "asocial rhetorics bristle against the compulsoriness of interaction, of human engagement, of compliance with the neurotypical. ... We might think of asociality as that which is ecologically oriented and preservative, that which extends notions of communion and relationality beyond the human" (71-2). Sociality is celebrated as that which establishes and conserves human life, such that indifferent impulses represent a shattering threat to social and political futurity. In other words, this chapter seeks the critical limit of the antisocial thesis, which is to say to take seriously the condition of being alone as an indifferent stance that releases new possibilities for relation.

In Chapter Two, I turn to a non-human form of indifference, the film camera's indifference to the world it views. What I call cinematic indifference pursues the traces of what

the camera records rather than what the filmmaker films. While the filmmaker has a point-of-view, I suggest that the cinematic “nobody's view” is never reducible to that view. Film captures, I argue, the unexpected ethical power of impersonal relations to provide witness without knowing or recognizing what it sees. In this section, I turn to the experimental film *Last Address,* which mourns the losses of queer artists who died of AIDS-related complications in New York City, and I ask how the indifferent gaze is put to the task of witnessing violence and suffering. Witnessing and attestation are imagined to require speaking, self-conscious humans, but I argue that filmmakers put the camera's impersonality to use to testify to the agony of the epidemic, making film itself its own queer witness. The camera's opacity to the cinematic image generates views of the world that humans cannot create themselves, providing points-of-view that decentre the human's perspective and retool her own exposure to violence. *Last Address* is a film thinking about what it might mean to be last, or even to come “after” the AIDS epidemic, and my discussion in this chapter picks up the condition of coming “after” queer theory. I write this dissertation at a time many label post-queer, and it is no coincidence that this claim coincides with similar ideas about the AIDS epidemic. In asking how film witnesses the epidemic indifferently, my aim is not to rescue the epidemic or queer theory from the exhaustion that pervades them both, but to seize the impulse to turn away with film’s unique inhuman mode of witnessing human activity.

In Chapter Three I dive into the “area of darkness,” as Foucault says, of dream-life. Several forms of Barthes's neutrality relate to sleep and dreaming for the way that these ambiguous states negate the agentive capacities that normally define our rapport with reality. Turning our attention to sleep, says Muñoz, provides a unique vantage for queer thought from which we can “dwell upon modes of being in the world that might be less knowable than sex”

("Sleep" 142). In dreams we are disconnected from our waking identities and we traverse our dreams' strange visualizations otherwise than as rational subjects. While we are often made to feel that dreams represent intimate manifestations of our personalities, the unconscious logic through which dreams rearrange our views of the material world and impose "negative attention" upon what is closed to the waking mind suggests that they *un*make the self and the world in which it resides and provide for renewed attention to imaginative exercise that, as François notes, is made possible by attention to modes of recessive action. This chapter also develops the discussion I begin in Chapter Two on non-normative modes of witnessing HIV/AIDS. With David Wojnarowicz's dream diaries, I ask how the artist's dreams bear witness to the epidemic, and I explore the dream's own queer view of the self from which it springs and the external conditions that ensnare that self.

In these final two chapters I explore film and dreaming as examples of indirect action, which is to say as modes of agency whose radical response to violence and suffering acts upon us *indirectly* in known and unknown ways. These are reticent forms of activism that may not be *seen to be* active or activist, and yet in that betwixt space between a call to arms and disinterested representation, they command my attention. I become answerable to them, even if the answer is not transparent. Dreams are one place we might imagine a queer middle that summons us, for they suspend us between the material world and interiority, and between imaginary action and physical immobility. In the midst of all that, Sharon Sliwinski writes,

> Violence is enacted in the material world, to be sure, but it draws upon the imaginary realm to gather its awful force. Here is where the potent work of dream life comes in, generating, as it does, a buttress between these sometimes hostile dimensions. Dreaming offers a potential place in which to be, to exist, in all the rich senses of that verb, an

> interim space in which to negotiate the conflicting demands of a hostile external reality and the relentless drives from the inside. ("Freedom" 236)

We are alone when we dream like so many stones on a pebble beach, but in our solitude we are connected to the world beyond, suspended in the zone of indistinction between the self and the exterior forces that make themselves felt through us.

Chapter One: Queer Solitude

The imbroglio, perplexity and messiness of a wordly world, a world where we, our ideas and power relations are not alone, were never alone, will never be alone.

— Isabelle Stengers

If there exists a world before one exists into which one is born, how is it possible that one is ever alone? One must cultivate solitude from within the unflinching vigilance of the world. Confidence in the continued existence of that world both produces the desire for isolation and allows one to safely recede without relinquishing one's own existence. Often, the impulse comes as a temporary abstention that makes worldly existence liveable, a sense that if one is and always will be interdependent, there are at least interdependencies from which one can develop an interior, an expectation of privacy, a space for invention, and something like a personality. And yet it is not long before the achievement of aloneness becomes a tectonic force that captures the self, for whom aliveness is suddenly confirmed only as it is seized as if from without. The drives take over, the world appears larger from the inside, and things are created not by intention or will but as if from some place inside the body in a mutiny of subjectivity by unconscious and autonomous rhythms that shimmer between the first self and the next one in the process of coming into being.

Those familiar with D.W Winnicott's essay on the capacity to be alone [1958] (1972), which I will engage shortly, will hear echoes of that work in these prefatory remarks. Winnicott departed from Freud, who thought that solitude solely brought about states of deprivation and anxiety. Many philosophical thinkers are eager to show that solitude does not really exist. For Maurice Blanchot, the solitary writer remains nothing more than a solipsistic fantasy. He dismisses it, arguing, “A writer who writes, 'I am alone'... can be considered rather comical. It is comical for a man to recognize his solitude by addressing a reader and by using methods that

prevent the individual from being alone. The word alone is just as general as the word bread. To pronounce it is to summon to oneself the presence of everything the word excludes" (Blanchot, "Dread" 343). Those words reveal the undeniable sociality of discourse, although knowing about the discursive milieu does little to reverse the meaning of the writer's claim. In fact, the writer's solitude is only intensified by that knowledge, and the social function of language only deepens language's negativity. Her address to the abstract milieu of others, or to herself, is workless, for the someone she addresses is no one, and she becomes one of the no ones. She addresses others with a disoriented address that is emptied of function. Inside her address there is no address, and this void address makes the field of others before her a field of no ones to whom it is impossible to reach from her oneness.[22] Since solitude does not exist for her, we refer to the deprived illusion of it – loneliness. But solitude is only impossible in discourse if sociality and aloneness are mutually opposed. Accordingly, I want to consider the significance of solitude in social scenes as a praxis of the body. I want to dwell with solitude in the context of queer theory, even and especially as fantasy, for psychoanalysis teaches us that fantasy is the refuge of desire, pleasure, media, and culture.

I take it that the themes in queer theory of desire, otherness, sex publics, public mourning, and affective communities make a focus on solitude and its cognates seem somewhat regressive and potentially naïve. After all, we live in the midst of what Judith Butler calls in *Precarious Life* (2006) "the fundamental sociality of embodied life" (28). We are never *really*

[22] As Sean Gaston observes in *The Impossible Mourning of Jacques Derrida* (2006), we have no context for this statement (77). To whom is the writer writing, herself or a friend? Or is she writing dialogue for a fiction? This information would further define the function of the declaration of solitude for the writer. Blanchot has also written far more thoughtfully and extensively about solitude throughout *The Space of Literature* (1982), including the solitude of the artist or writer, the work itself, and "essential solitude" (19-34; 251-3). The above statement does not represent the entirety of his thinking on this subject.

alone. We are connected to others, defined by others, dependent on others, and responsible for others, and in few other areas than sex and grief are these facts more apparent. Indeed, Butler insists that even grief, far from being a purely internal or isolating condition, makes its claims upon us "through recourse to the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are ... implicated in lives that are not our own" (28). For Isabelle Stengers in my epigraph, these embodied realities across time and space make aloneness not simply distasteful but *impossible*. Our worldly existence is existence in crowds. For Stengers, something about "worldliness," what makes the world a world, is anathema to being alone. If this is so, being alone may demand a rethinking of the assumption that the world is "worldly," or that there is a world. Her challenge in the epigraph summons us to question perceptions of our collective containment in a unified "world" that makes coexistence meaningful through social binds, that which constitute messiness and worldliness.

We are used to the idea that meaning is conferred through connection with others, so much so that connection is often considered to be a defining characteristic of humanity and a standard of human health. A recent *New York Times* article on the health consequences of social isolation is blunt: "Human connection lies at the heart of human well-being" (Khullar). Normative concepts of social connection are often wielded to degrade those who relate otherwise as sub-human and deathly. Neurodivergent or neuroqueer nonsocial relationalities, Melanie Yergeau argues, are held up as evidence of autistics' lack of humanness and human belonging, exposing how "cultural understandings of what it means to be nonsocial are deeply entrenched in values of human worth" (16). What she and others call "compulsory sociality" refers to the various techniques of regulation and compliance that compel normative social interaction, gender expression, and bodily movement to which the "neurologically queer" are often subject, but it

also relates to wider cultural attitudes about what social relations should look and feel like, their basic good, and the inherent impropriety of neurodivergent modes of being. Resistance to compulsory sociality is common to both autistic and queer activism, one of many ways that autistic life, Yergeau shows, shares histories, discourses, and experiences with queerness. With few exceptions, solitude and its cognates gain meaning only as contingent states to be rid of. Consequently, we attend sparingly to the common and unavoidable occurrences of attachments falling apart. Times when attachments dissolve or never come together are so thoroughly associated with negativity that the range of meaning we confer upon them is exceedingly limited and impoverished. Might these moments constitute their own kind of life?

Queer theory has done much to stress our mutual interdependencies as ineliminable conditions of embodied life, particularly against neoliberal promulgations of the brutal individualism of the self and the family. Queer theory has provided a means and vocabulary for the critique of affirming fantasies of solitude that often feature the autonomous subjects of liberal masculinity, men whose solitude is an affective extension of a brutal and exclusionary logic of personal sovereignty. The inertness of the movie cowboy or the soldier boasts a capacity for autonomous action through an affective disembodiment that abjures relations of difference and vulnerability to the outside. Yet queer theory also teaches us, as Michael Cobb argues, to be critical of the "rhetorics and politics of connection" (210). Solitary people are often the abject figures in whose name gay politics makes its claims. For Justice Anthony Kennedy, author of the 2015 Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that legalized same-sex marriage in the United States, the decision turned not primarily upon affirmations of difference, dignity, liberal individualism, or even competency in child-rearing, but on the affirmation of mutuality as a relational imperative. Kennedy writes, "Marriage responds to the universal fear that a lonely

person might call out only to find no one there. It offers the hope of companionship and understanding and assurance that while both still live there will be someone to care for the other" (United States, Supreme Court 14). For the *New York Times'*s Frank Bruni, the specter of aloneness is also a primary motivation for gay rights. He pulls a scene from the AIDS epidemic concerning the fracture of the couple: "the steadfast, heartbroken man being shut out of his beloved's final weeks — not allowed in the hospital room, not welcomed at the grave — because some family members disapproved and no law trumped their bigotry" (Bruni). Grief is relational, and never is this more apparent than when one is shut out of the mourning process. The plight of the steadfast man feels so real as to require no explanation, as does the smarting solitude of his beloved who must die alone. For Kennedy, as for Bruni, it is not the desire, drive, sex act, or relationship that is abject, but the one – the one who must live and the one who must die outside the orbit of the other. From the view of marriage equality, we must think about compulsory connections in two important ways: as both relations to others, and as relations to the state. In a biopolitical economy where the state produces certain ways of living as its means of regulation, connections between people and things are always at once connections to the state. As "homonormativity" has been coined by Lisa Duggan as a corollary to heteronormativity to describe a demobilized gay constituency under neoliberalism and a "privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50), "compulsory attachment" is the broader cultural imperative by which compulsory heterosexuality continues to make itself heard.[23] The spectre of aloneness is a primary incitement to gay politics as is the figure of the solitary person a screen upon which queer theory makes its claims for the other and for fundamental sociality.

[23] See also Jasbir K. Puar, who argues that gay and queer bodies are produced in the service of nationalism "insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm but also because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist projects" (39).

Kennedy's commendation of marriage supplies a potentially queer figure in the image of that lonely person cast askew of marital law's return of the call and mortal promise of care. It is not that the want of companionship and care in the height and in the decline of life is not valid or vital for queer life, but the solitaire provides the queer imagination with a figure of what Leo Bersani and others have called the non-relation.[24] This is an abstract term, but I take it to mean relation without relationship. I consider what it means to be with others other than in the form of a relationship, and what it might mean to a deny a relationship to the state. As Yergeau points out, neurodivergent communities provide several models of this in their resistance to compulsory sociality. Autistics' “resistance to the encroaching world” (qtd. in Yergeau 28) says Miele Rodas, is a queer and queering feature of neurologically-divergent ethos, for example the asocial activity of the autistic child who lines up her dolls instead of making them interact releases the potential for queer forms of relationality “forged with and between things, fields, spaces, air particles, moments, motions” (Yergeau 72). In other words, asocial postures of association reveal potentially queer forms of organization and interaction that lean on the impersonal dimensions of existence.

In this study I speak of a solitude that is not fundamentally a deprivation, but from which deprivation is never entirely out of reach, not only in the instances in which solitude may be sought out, but as an indissoluble condition for living creatively. Solitude is less the shape of finitude – an exegesis or teleology of mortality – than it is the inevitable intervals, crevices, and distances that encounter the body and that are produced by the body over time without coming to define it. Therefore, I am less interested in the ways solitude comes to legislate and stigmatize

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[24] In addition to Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, Guy Hocquenghem, Tim Dean, William Haver, and John Paul Ricco are also associated with this term. These thinkers reside in the areas of modern psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and ethics, where the concept of the non-relation has been most useful.

identities, such as the loner, the single person, the introvert, or the hermit, than the ways solitude *happens* to us. I also see solitude characterizing a number of scenes in which queerness emerges in film and theory, and as a condition that has allowed the self to veer "off-line" (103), as Sara Ahmed says in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), to discover new orientations in life. For the cowboys in Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), for example, the self-sufficiency of masculinity shelters a kind of queer relation to difference in which the self is *alone together*. Throughout this study I follow these opening words of John Paul Ricco's *The Decision Between Us* (2014): "[F]or anything to exist, there must be more than one thing, each one separated from each other, together partaking in the spacing that is opened up by separation" (1). The space of coexistence is shared, but what is shared is *separation* from each other – separation that both facilitates togetherness and maintains singularity, an alone that is always together, and a together that is conditioned by the forces of aloneness. To point out that we are always surrounded by others (and therefore we are not really alone) is "as general as the word bread," but as Ricco indicates the concept of coexistence as space presumes an apartness that casts coexistence as something far stranger than togetherness. Aloneness is possible because separation is possible, and separation is possible because there is always an other there. Only if we assume that aloneness is a constitutively different kind of embodied relation than plural relationships must we rescue the solitaire from her fallacy of independence. Even as aloneness does not eschew relations of dependency and power that grid social life, it supplies a different model of intersubjectivity that complicates the connection between the self and the other, and indeed the self and its outside, as dialectical, mutual, or sympathetic, and at the same time, unintelligible, unknowable, or negative. If we can draw a social matrix for solitude we can also draw from solitude an index of the asocial, recessive, eremetic, and even narcissistic stances that makes

possible the bond with the other. A queer concept of solitude reveals that when we are alone we are alone together, a condition that opens a space for an understanding of the relations between us as always mediated by the forces of singularity, forces that make it possible to relate outside liberal notions of having a relationship with others and with the world.[25] Solitude names an indifferent relation between me and the other from which difference can emerge.

What if homosexuals, claims Leo Bersani in *Homos* (1995), "declin[ed] to participate in any sociality at all?" (168). Bersani's challenge to the political efficacy of civic and social participation for gays through such movements as gay marriage and military service has become somewhat of a movement over the last twenty years in gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. The "antisocial thesis," as it has come to be called, broadly questions the assumed benefits of liberal inclusion in the dynamics of state recognition for queer people and argues for the adoption of a radically disruptive posture towards the state and towards social life in general. It is an argument concerning the very sociality of queer life and queer desire, as Bersani claims that "the most politically disruptive aspect of homo-ness ... in gay desire is a redefinition of sociality so radical it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself" (7). What such a withdrawal would look like has been the subject of a number of theses across this movement, from Jack Halberstam's gender failure in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) to Bersani's later work with Adam Phillips on bug-chasing and impersonal relations, *Intimacies* (2010), to Tim Dean's expansion on those topics in *Unlimited Intimacy* (2009), to Lee Edelman's

[25] This said, positing liberal norms as choices that we observe or neglect at will may become its own normatively queer stance. As Puar argues, the standard of "freedom from norms becomes a regulatory queer ideal that demarcates the ideal queer" (22) and may function to exclude those who are by default not free from norms. My argument does not aim to suggest that indifference to or refusal of attachment norms is a choice, nor that negotiating them is at all escapable by dint of volition or freedom of thought. Rather, my project is aligned with Sara Ahmed's claim that "more reflection on queer attachments might allow us to avoid positing assimilation or transgression as choices" (qtd. in Puar 22).

wholesale rejection of “reproductive futurism” in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Laura Kipnis's *Against Love* (2003) might also qualify among the antisocials for its heretical challenge to the universal approbation of love and the seemingly natural segue into what she calls the untenable and punishing ideals of marriage, although Kipnis is more embedded within feminist discourse than queer theory. These thinkers offer a range of often conflicting and divisive perspectives of what it means to be “antisocial,” if they even self-identify with the movement at all. They find queerness at the cracks in social life where relationships with the state, with lovers, and with kin fall apart or do not deliver on the social and personal benefits that were promised. They find in the successes of liberal democracy the failure and erasure of queer lives. And most importantly they seize upon these disappointments and failures for a radical queer politics that pledges no fidelity to the civility or norms that hold sociality together.

Since its 2004 release, Edelman's *No Future* has been the touchstone for this movement. Next to Bersani, Edelman is singularly associated with what has become known as the “antisocial thesis.” At the centre of *No Future* is the worship of the American family and its legitimation in the figure of the child, which comes to symbolize the future and its promises of the good. As the reproductive product of heterosexual marriage and the recipient of society's hopes and dreams of its own continuance and salvation, the child is the politically expedient alibi for any bipartisan discourse or policy made in its name (for the children!), even and especially if the interests of the non-reproductive adult (the homosexual) are sacrificed for its imagined good. A particular version of the child, says Edelman, bullies queer life by denigrating non-reproductive Eros and perennially demanding the erasure of queer life to further its agenda. Conservative characterizations of queers as lusting after death and hostile to the future serve as a

useful point of departure for Edelman's retooling of the Lacanian death drive as a political or "non-political," as it may be, analogue with which to figure a queer theoretical resistance to the political and the social as such, and to support the disposal of the imaginary future as a basis for life in the present. For Edelman, the substance of queerness is its indifference to liberal fantasies of community and connection and its corrosive effect on their cohesion. Like the structure of the death drive, queerness is not a coherent system or identity but an incoherent force of disruption that is seen only through its interruptions of social order. Queerness can only ever disrupt social order and can never itself become the basis for its own.

Edelman and those closely associated with the antisocial thesis are not alone, so to speak, in identifying queerness in opposition to coercive or traumatic sociality. In *Feeling Backward* (2007), Heather Love links the queer archive of negative feelings to "the experience of social exclusion" and the historical erasure of same-sex desire (4). Her figure of the "lonely lesbian" is the historical product of a society that ejects queer Eros to regulate life. Opposition to "chrononormative" time in Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds* (2010) places queers outside of the temporal cycles, genealogies, and narratives that structure heteronormative life, such as the "life cycle" or the familial passage of inheritance.[26] In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed explores our orientations towards certain forms of sociability by the promise of a happy life. "Happy objects" (Ahmed, *Promise* 21), such as marriage or children, are thrust in the path of our gaze to draw us into legitimated forms of connection and away from those that seem to promise only unhappiness. Representations of heterosexual bliss often function in this way to bind certain prescriptive and exclusionary models of the social to the lure of happiness. Unhappy people, she

[26] Furthermore, see Lauren Berlant's critique of women's "intimate public sphere" (viii) in *The Female Complaint* (2008), and the connection between whiteness and the national politics of "coupling, kinship, reproduction, and procreation" in Puar (128).

notes, are often described as “unsociable” (9) and “lonely and high in neuroticism” (qtd. in Ahmed, *Promise* 9). As we are lured by the promise of happiness our journey there is also propelled by a recoil from threats of despair. Unhappy objects like the childless single person or dying alone orient us away from the threat of unhappiness that so often comes in some form of being alone. Nowhere are these dynamics clearer than in the twentieth-century canon of queer literature and film, where in such texts as *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) a queer life means isolation and exclusion. In a world where queer life is wretched and miserable, where it causes parents of queers to be unhappy and where it will never produce children, heterosexual life appears to provide the only viable means to form intimate attachments – not only with a significant other, but with one's genealogical past and future. That liberal avenues of recognition and social belonging such as marriage are now available to queer people does not change the mechanisms that continue to determine how one will and will not receive hospitality from the state. As Denise Riley puts it, “it's as if one must count as a family in order to count at all” (57).

But “counting” is not the goal of the antisocial thesis (nor is it for Riley or any of the aforementioned thinkers). As Edelman and Riley show it is precisely in the desire to “count,” to be counted among the counted, that queers opt into social civility and the institutions that uphold it, while preserving the divisions and inequalities that those institutions protect. As a way of seizing and reclaiming the unhappy and exclusionary orientations that mark uncounted queer life, loneliness has come under the critical lens of queer theory as an “antisocial” affective and political posture, although one not explicitly allied with that movement. Queer critiques of loneliness often address solitude, both in name and concept, and solitude is sometimes used interchangeably with loneliness. As both Riley and Cobb show, embracing loneliness continues to be a politically threatening act. In “Lonely” (2011), Cobb toys with the idea of adding a S for

Single to the expanding LGBTQI2S acronym to reflect its status as a stigmatized, non-majority sexuality. Sharing with Ahmed a focus on the terrorizing force of happy objects and their more mundane regulatory effects, Cobb examines the couple form as a refuge for the lonely in a political economy in which loneliness is mobilized as a lure to totalitarian logics. After Hannah Arendt, Cobb suggests that when one feels forgotten and abandoned, totalitarian discourse speaks to one's sense of alienation, offering alibis for why the world seems empty and has left one behind. But Arendt's answer to the corralling of the lonely is not more closeness or better relationships. What is at stake in this brand of total terror is that it “leaves no space for private life and ... the self-coercion of totalitarian logic destroys man's capacity for experience and thought” (qtd. in Cobb 216). Loneliness breeds the suffocating crowds and regulated intimacies of the social, thereby destroying the human's privacy, understood not as the protection of property but as the capacity for imagination and meaningful experience. The effect of all this, Cobb says, is that in being “pressed together” by totalitarian discourse, the space between us is obliterated. “[T]he individual is crowded, but not in a good way. [Moreover, it] is crowded with couples” (216). From social media to globalization efforts, modernity brings us closer and closer. The crowd obliterates our meaningful separations, overwhelms us with contact. “Closeness,” says Cobb, “has come at the expense of distance” (216). Contact, particularly intimate contact, becomes the only space for *life,* the space in which the biopolitical production of life invests its energy. Meeting someone, even touching someone meaningfully, is associated not just with love but with life, and love as life. When life is produced as the very bonds that support the state, the demand to connect closes other spaces in which meaning may dwell. When the only space for emotion, continuity, democracy, altruism, and health is the tight space between bodies, is there any possibility for being alone, asks Riley, “being understood as also social within one's

solitariness” (58)? And yet as Riley shows, “loneliness” draws out the spatial figurations of the “inside/outside” distinction that structure our understandings of the social and the solitary. The public/private, social/solitary, and interior/exterior divides are metaphorical, “as there is not literally a great exterior which stands massively against our separate interiorities” (Riley 52). Indeed, loneliness and solitariness put into question the very designations of inside/outside binaries and their efficacy as a means to divide human experience. Consequently, the couple/singleton or crowd/individual fail to capture what we are seeking in being alone, similar to what Riley describes as “being understood as also social within one's solitariness” (58).

Elias Canetti's distinction between singularity and personality in the formation of crowds displays the irreducibility of aloneness to signify individuality. A crowd becomes a crowd, he argues, in the discharge of hierarchy, when “distinctions are thrown off and all feel equal” (Canetti 19), and when “the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person” (21). The destruction wrought by the crowd, he suggests, is directed against symbols of hierarchy, and although this freedom from hierarchy is a temporary illusion, it powerfully motivates crowd behaviour. This is to say that the crowd member does not create alliance across difference, contributing to the formation of a heterotopia, but seeks the removal of differences, helping to constitute a singularity that is not reducible to individuality or identity. To be sure, crowds are heterogeneously constituted,[27] and there is variation among the efficacy of and the lure to a stripped-down existence and a stripped-down sociality. Where in Arendt's populist

[27] Canetti's main taxonomies are the open crowd and the closed crowd. The former denotes a crowd oriented towards unlimited growth, while the latter regulates its formation and boundaries like “a vessel into which liquid is being poured and whose capacity is known” (17). A fascinating element of Canetti's argument, in his analysis of Freud's case study of Daniel Paul Schreber as an example of psychical crowding, is his conviction that repressed homosexuality is not the occasion for paranoia, but a more flexible preoccupation with crowds. The essence of paranoia, he says, “is the *structure* of the delusional world and the way it is *peopled*” (522). Processes of power, he continues, are apiece with systems of peopling and de-peopling the world.

crowd the individual is pressed too tight, Butler's "assembly" is a purposive crowd where politics emerges, as she says, "between bodies." Here exists a "space of shared separation," as Ricco names it, in which what is shared among bodies is distance. Is it possible in a crowd like the assembly to figure a solitude different from Arendt's lonely mob? In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler observes that the formation of assembly "puts liveable life at the forefront of politics" (18). Indeed, a purposive gathering of people stages embodiment as the stakes of politics. What does it mean when "the people" are seen as "life" conceived as visible bodies whose lives cannot be denied? *Life*, encountered in faces and arms and legs and mouths, is made real in the exposure to the body of the other that reveals the uniqueness of life – a life – in the midst of all else. The human's unique embodiment and therefore her mortality make a claim upon me in its singularity. Life appears to me as *a* life, but that one life is always a life lived among others. The purposive crowd that states "here be bodies at stake" summons the force of the singularity of life to make its mark.

Additionally, the promise of solitude may be what draws one into an assembly. Have you noticed how, in the murmuration of a protest and the synchronicity of the protest chant your voice and your face blend with others? This blending configures an impersonal space that does not erase your singularity but establishes associations between bodies organized otherwise than as personal interaction. Through your participation you escape a certain recognition, a certain interpersonal confrontation or interaction that you engage in multiply in your daily life. When you speak you receive no reciprocal response; when you move it goes unnoticed. Suddenly you are alone; your body is yours. You are not dispossessed as you are when you are called to being by an other. Your body is freed by the proximity of others. Photographs of crowds typically feature the aesthetics of a multitude defined by a shape that does not resemble the human, nor

even what is recognizable as life. These images do not resemble life, and with that lack they free the individual lives of which they are composed of that recognition. The 1992 Ashes Action procession in Washington, DC began with a crowd of protesters marching towards the White House with ashes in hand of loved ones who had died of AIDS-related complications. In the available footage the protesters shout over each other the names of their loved ones in no particular order. It was a surprising and spontaneous counter-practice to the ordered recitation of names performed at showings of the AIDS Quilt (The Names Project). Suddenly the voices run together and no one name can be heard above the rest. The claim of the singular life – the name, the box of ashes – is brought forth in the blending of assembly. The bearers of these tokens speak, in a sense, without being heard, which is not to say that they are erased but that in the din of voices you can shout a name that means something to you and it will be heard by you alone. Grief is shared and mobilized here, to be sure, but it is felt and expressed in an oddly singularizing way, with no expectation of reciprocity or mutuality. Not even respectful silence is expected or elicited in response. The boxes of ashes may also constitute their own "crowd." They were once embodied people that are now indistinguishable piles of ash. When the ashes are poured onto the White House lawn they blend together, as if even the identical piles of grey ash were not indistinguishable enough. When the protesters marched to the White House for Ashes Action they were protesting the indifference of their government to the mass deaths of people with HIV/AIDS. What was at stake in the visibility of the ashes was not primarily *life* in its singularity but deaths that had gone unwitnessed *as deaths*. In a terribly negative sense of the word, these are deaths that occurred alone because they occurred in the presence of others who did not recognize them as deaths. The harm of the government was a harm rendered precisely because it was not recognized as harm, observed but uncared for. Such is a harm that occurs in

the presence of others but that goes unwitnessed, precisely *because* it was witnessed by those who did not view it as harm. The dissolution of these bodies to ash emphasizes their incoherence as beings whose deaths occurred in full view of others and yet who died alone in the obscurity of the harm done to them.[28] Cobb points out that lonely people tend to be surrounded by others, and while that observation is evident (are not we all surrounded by others?), it serves to emphasize how being alone gains meaning when meaning itself is threatened in acts of togetherness: when death is witnessed but witnessed as something other than death, when life is witnessed otherwise than as life, and when violence is witnessed as non-violence. Being alone is produced by these incoherences that require witnessing, proximity, and intimacy in which the subject is alone with her life, death, or harm because no one is present to bear witness to *that.* The act of carrying ashes was a revision of the work of the assembly to put life at the forefront of politics, for it shows that for there to be a life that can die is already a form of assembly, a "being-with" founded upon the mutual recognition of life. But a life that is not seen to die, a violence unregarded as violence, arrives at an absolutely negative solitude in the midst of others.

Not only do humans form intentional crowds, but non-humans, such as ashes, the panels of the AIDS Quilt, or items in a museum, also form them. Or fragments of a virus. Another crowd of non-human entities is the body with HIV/AIDS, which Bersani and Phillips present in *Intimacies* as a solitary crowd. For them the barebacker is "a hermit in the desert [in a] profound sociality that isolates him" (51), yet this isolation is the product of the alchemy of viral remains (of the HIV virus) from anonymous others that forms a thick impersonal crowd:

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[28] See also Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), for an explanation of how such unregarded violence is racialized. What Sharpe calls "wake work" gathers the meanings and connotations of *wake,* as in the aquatic impressions of a ship or the collective mourning period after a death, to describe a paradigm of black consciousness grounded in the ongoing effects of chattel slavery that include present forms of terror, non-being, and extra-legal violence performed on black bodies (17-22).

> The barebacking bottom enters into an impersonal intimacy, not only with all those who have pumped semen into his body, but also with all those unknown partners, perhaps now dead, with whom he has never had any physical contact. His subjecthood is, we might say, absorbed into the nameless and faceless crowd that exists only as viral remains circulating in his blood and perhaps fatally infecting him. For him, their identities are nothing more than these viral remains; his willingness to allow his body to be the site of their persistence and reproduction is not entirely unlike the mystic's surrender to a divine will without any comfortably recognizable attributes whatsoever. (54-5)

One need not be a subject to be with others. The barebacker is called into an impossible community of no ones that extends from the past to the future, an ironic queering of the happy genealogies described by Freeman and Ahmed. Impersonal intimacy is the site of a thick weave of connections that draws the barebacker into a social and spiritual net, a cloud-like transcendence in the miasmic imaginary of the crowd. Similar to Blanchot's writer, the barebacker might say "I am alone" only to be alerted to the nameless and faceless others that render his statement naïve. But this only makes him more of a hermit. Unlike the couple form this is a community founded on shared vulnerability, and yet "community" hardly describes the nameless and faceless crowd that comes together for the hermit in the desert. These members may be considered to belong to a continuity rather than a community. Here, the crowd is the one organism whose inside is the outsides of so many others, a being whose subjectivity has become only one among several. This is a solitude without self. But is this hermit lonely?

Like solitude, loneliness challenges the efficacy of the inside/outside binary, for both of these conditions express something other than the actual presence or absence of others and the inclusion in or exclusion from crowds. Loneliness has a certain queer appeal as a maligned,

antisocial category available for identification. Like unhappiness, fear of loneliness has a regulatory function that reproduces particular forms of relationships. The lonely person not only feels lonely herself, but is considered a risk for making others lonely. As Ahmed describes the queer utility of unhappiness to form and mobilize revolutionary communities, so there can be a community of the lonely to resist and revolutionize categories of belonging. In her essay "The Right To Be Lonely" (2005), Riley seizes the abjecting function of loneliness to draw attention to its queering potency in a political economy committed to the prestige of the family and the priority of romantic connection. The "right" to be lonely is a parody of that language, for (as I will elaborate later) a "right" signals inclusion in the very social order in which loneliness is deployed to regulate relation. Rights are conferred as a mode of "counting" – as the family counts – among those who are recognized and legitimated by the state.

In her call for "a sociality within one's own solitariness," Riley makes a subtle turn away from the concept of loneliness. Loneliness exists in the same grammatical category as solitariness, and its use in the place of solitariness would have made a stronger case for "the right to be lonely," if it is indeed loneliness that harbours a productively queer mode of sociality. Cobb also describes his project as "want[ing] to think about the isolated figures of the 'single' who are misconstrued as lonely figures. They may not be lonely – they may just want to be antisocial, they may just want to relate to others outside of the supreme logic of the couple, which has become the way one binds oneself to the social" (217). For an essay entitled "Lonely," it is quick to disavow the very idea on which it hinges. In their disavowals, both these essays bear witness to an incoherence that is glossed over in the fungibility of these cognates. But the difference is more than semantic. By turning to solitude and antisociality, both thinkers reframe the subject of their work as a condition of being alone that is not reducible to loneliness. That is because

loneliness describes a subjectivity while solitude describes a negativity of the social itself; in other words, loneliness is a quality of persons or communities while solitude is an aspect of an impersonal sociality. What I mean to say is not that solitude is an objective quality (such as actually being without others), but that loneliness requires the existence of a *subject* who is alone, while solitude names an internal negativity of the social seen only in its mutation or disruption of social cohesion. Being alone, therefore, is not necessarily a subjective state of loneliness nor is it a case of being objectively without others. It refuses the spatial metaphor of inside/outside. It cannot be a subjectivity; to recall Edelman, "it can only ever disturb one" (17). What Riley and Cobb describe is a queer force of the social itself that fractures the inside/outside binary, challenges the promises of regulated intimacy, and disrupts subjective identification.

For the antisocial thinkers, social exclusion is a symptom of the political utility of children to marginalize non-reproductive adults and others considered inimical, but it is not the primary mode in which queers are abjected. As the Lacanian death drive is internal to the systems it disrupts, so queerness is an incoherence *internal* to sociality. While "antisocial" is broadly understood as a queer-identified abstention from sociality, it is first of all a negative always already inside the social – sociality's own constitutive undoing – and therefore a structural element of sociality itself, albeit one whose work is to undermine structure. Even ostensible relationships – the sexual relationship, the friendship relationship, the familial relationship – are harassed by the excess that overwhelms the social stability conferred to them by social narratives. Lacan's observation, Edelman reminds us, that "there is no sexual relation" attests to the always already interruptive forces of social structures (qtd. in Berlant and Edelman 1). Following this largely Lacanian archive, I understand solitude similarly to be an incoherence that is structurally internal to social order. Solitude does not then exist in opposition to sociality

but as a mutation of the social. Sociality generates solitude, not only as a consequence of its regulatory power, but as the winnowing potential within itself, its own power not to be.[29] As bonds are forged they are at once vulnerable to their own disintegration, the underside of sociality, its dissolute condition. Even here the force of otherness makes its mark. When belonging shrivels, when mutual knowing is thwarted, being remains. In other words, coexistence does not disappear when sociality shudders, rendering us alone together and sharing what separates us from each other. *No Future* takes aim at humanism and the humanist subject that is so thoroughly embedded in our pedagogical ideals of freedom through community and rationality. If, as I noted earlier, human connection is considered to be a defining quality of humanity and a bullying imperative for a normative standard of human health and neurology, something like solitude stands out as a potentially queer force that disrupts the bonds that knit together compulsory attachment. Solitude expresses what in the human recoils from humanity, what seeks a relation to otherness otherwise than through community and prescribed intimacy in their normative, prescriptive forms. As such, a queer solitude focuses on what is inhuman in the human, how the human who must live with others coexists through strangely inhuman connections, all, paradoxically, while remaining human. The married couple who finds themselves alone together; the anonymous lovers; the friends who betray each other; the child who lines up her dolls. These relations produce their own interruptive solitude, so that even the most legible relation is struck by forces that suddenly find two people alone together, the queer forms of being-with. Through interruption beings still persist together, which is not to say that solitude is overcome, but becomes constitutive of what it means to coexist.

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[29] This idea is derived from Giorgio Agamben's concept of sovereignty, which he describes in *Homo Sacer* (1998) as a power that removes its potential not to be (46).

The “antisocial thesis,” as I noted earlier, is the name of a critical practice, and one that is not necessarily very antisocial. In Bersani's, Edelman,'s, Kipnis's, and others' accounts, the non-reproductive adult's itinerant sexual and communal relations do not count as relationalities from which one must withdraw.[30] They are what is at stake in our mutiny of reproductive futurism. But solitude suggests not only the abstention from civil sociality but from sociality as it refers to human connection and attachment. The meaningful bond, the itinerant sexual encounter, the party, the community, sex publics, or solidarity: while these do not have the same legitimated significance as marriage or parenthood, they continue to place our survival upon the our participation in or acceptance by a community that may be internally legible to itself. Even the minority community of the lonely elevates the human and her loneliness by creating a space of belonging. These relations give value to the individual and receive recognition by the community. This study departs from much of the antisocial archive in that it seeks a radical limit of antisociality, a commitment to take seriously what it means to turn away from social compulsions. Other relations, the ones that even queer theory posits as transgressive and freeing, can become part of the cultural apparatuses that support civil society and can activate the same normative pressures that drive us into attachments and that make attachment the condition of our social survival and value.

Queer solitude takes another view of the dynamics of solitude, one that puts pressure on attachment itself. I draw upon a number of thinkers, not all associated with the queer canon, to show how solitude becomes associated with a “no future” of its own that disrupts normative

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[30] The framing opposition between state prescribed forms of intimacy and itinerant, uncounted relations is most evident in the self-described antisocial critiques, but it extends, differentially, to the range of thinkers I have mentioned, for whom compulsory heterosexuality is mobilized to stigmatize queer and racialized forms of intimacy and belonging.

scripts of intimacy, togetherness, and community. Beginning with Emmanuel Levinas's later work, we will see how aloneness is figured as finitude, what we could call a manifestation of the death drive. Levinas's later philosophical work has been foundational for queer thought after Butler's *Precarious Life* brought *Entre Nous* to the centre of her theories of precariousness. His capacious oeuvre spans philosophical works as well as Talmudic readings, and writings about contemporary Jewish life, of which his book *Difficult Freedom* [1963] (1990) is perhaps the best example. Levinas's earlier philosophy as well as his writings on Jewish life have not attracted the same level of engagement for queer thinkers. But it is here where Levinas's thinking on solitude begins and is most visible. The reception of Levinas's central ideas about the ethical relation between the self and the other has brought his work to bear upon issues of relationality, recognition, and responsibility. Earlier meditations on solitude in *Existence and Existents* (1978) and in *Difficult Freedom* complicate some of the bold claims in the later work, and are useful for thinking about the incoherences of relationships and the significance and necessity of solitude for the human.

My own engagement with this division in Levinas's work bookends this study. Levinas's later characterizations of being alone as finitude correspond to descriptions of antisociality as a "universal fear" or as part of the death drive. But I would like to move beyond a diagnosis of the death drive as the function of queerness as it appears in the hands of Edelman. Following Levinas, D.W. Winnicott's psychoanalytic writing on being alone describes solitude as a psychical condition of being alone always with an other present. Challenging the inside/outside divide as a basis for an understanding of solitude, Winnicott develops a relational theory of solitude, which is to say that he defines solitude as a mode of being together otherwise than as a privation. Here is where I turn away from the tenets of the antisocial thesis, for what I call queer

solitude is not simply the finitude of the social, but a constitutive undoing that produces its own kind of coexistence, albeit one that cannot become its own identity or society. I bring this range of twentieth century theory to bear on the 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain,* which explores, I argue, a dissolute togetherness that is but is also something other than a gay relationship. The film provides its own knowledge about an enduring queerness expressed through the desire for solitude, or the desire invested in the separations between us. The movie cowboy, with his indifferent demeanor and claims of self-made triumph, becomes a site for exploring the demands of compulsory attachment and the queer forms of desire channeled through distances and introversions. With this image of a film character's strange indifference to the person he loves in mind, I return to Levinas's earlier writing, which develops a significant space for solitude in the interpersonal dynamics of ethical discourse. Levinas's early work draws these heterogeneous threads together and provides a universalizing account of solitude as a force that disorients our connections and permits ways of being otherwise than through relationships of consciousness to the world.

Solitude is not only an abhorred and feared state, but one that incites ethical remediation. Let us look at an argument from Levinas that is given a large role in structuring Butler's *Precarious Life.* Levinas is a thinker for whom inter-relationality lies at the very centre of Western thinking, what he calls ethics or “first philosophy.” For Levinas, the ethical relation, established in the face-to-face encounter, is not a relationship, which is to say that it is not the self's relation of consciousness or knowledge to the other. The other comes upon the self as a mystery, what Levinas calls “alterity,” as a sensuous and embodied demand that shatters the mastery of the ego. The term “face” stands in for the expressive body of the other, what he calls sense or expression. This is to say that the demand of the other is not made upon me with words

or even visual apprehension, but with the effect of its shattering corporeality upon my own corporeality prior to my comprehension or my values. The other who faces me is not the other within me, or that I recognize as other, but is its own alien other beyond my representation or recognition. The face-to-face relation establishes the other as that which confronts me in the singularity of life, as we discussed earlier, with the force of alterity overcoming me in the singularity of the face and the expressive body it signifies. “First philosophy” refers to the priority of the sensuous relation – the demand of pure alterity upon the flesh – over relations of knowledge or co-presence, the relation to the object of consciousness. This latter relation Levinas calls ontology. His oeuvre – stretching from the 1930s into the 1980s – is an attempt to think philosophy otherwise than ontologically by recasting the intersubjective relationship as a radical and disruptive encounter with the unknown.

Levinas's significance for this study is his positing of the ethical relation between the self and the other as otherwise than a relationship. His pedigree of Husserlian phenomenology places his theory of inter-relationality within the margins of phenomenology, or being's ways of existing in the world, even as Levinas revises Husserl's phenomenology – and arguably the whole philosophy of phenomenology – from the study of relations of consciousness to the ethical relation with pure mystery. As Simon Critchley describes it, Levinas’s philosophy pursues “the phenomenology of the unphenomenologizable” (*Ethics-Politics* 184). In Levinas's later works this “non-relation” adamantly proscribes aloneness. In *Entre Nous* (1998) he describes the demand of the other as “the fact that I cannot let the other die alone, it is like a calling out to me” (104). For Levinas, the other's precariousness is coextensive with aloneness. “[T]he relation to the Face,” says Levinas “is both the relation to the absolutely weak – to what is absolutely exposed, what is bare and destitute, the relation with bareness and consequently with what is

alone and can undergo the supreme isolation we call death" (104).[31] This incitement by the face of the other carries within it both my responsibility and the provocation to do harm. In the exposure of its corporeality, "the face of the Other [is] always the death of the Other" (104), which not only demands my responsibility but incites me to murder her, encoding "the temptation to go to the extreme, to completely neglect the other" (104). Whereas Levinas formally characterizes the demand of the other as an expressive conveyance of the biblical commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," elsewhere in the book he describes the conveyed command as "not-leaving-the-other-alone" (131), which hails the as-if-through-discourse response from me, "Here I am" (131). The return of the call ends the other's solitude as well as my own, for the call of the other impinges – quite beyond my will or desire – upon my own isolation. The condition of my ethical responsibility is therefore the interdiction not only of murder but of aloneness, and of aloneness nonetheless as a type of murder.

The intersubjective relation appears to become exchangeable with sociality characterized in opposition to the solitude of the self and the other. To condemn to solitude is to condemn to death. It is hardly surprising that aloneness is a virtual synonym of death and dying for Levinas, as death signifies "primordially in the very proximity of man or in sociality" (146). Indeed, death gains meaning as a concept specifically in the demand to remedy the other's solitude, and therefore one's own. In the concreteness of the other's corporality, "[d]eath signifies in ... what for me is the impossibility of abandoning the other to his aloneness, in the prohibition addressed to me of that abandonment" (146). If aloneness is itself a death – shall we say, a social death – then dying alone is the death of death. Aloneness becomes the "no future" of the precarious

[31] The barebacker in *Intimacies* may be one example of a relation of vulnerability without responsibility, as Bersani and Phillips argues that he is drawn into a "nameless and faceless crowd" (55) If there are no faces, one does not bear the weight of the commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill."

body. To be left alone is to have one's future foreclosed. Ethics is the proscription of this fate, the demand upon me to reproduce the social. Recall that the commandment “Thou Shalt Not Kill” encodes both the proscription of murder and the impulse to murder. In this double-edged command we see both the structure of ethics and its internal negativity, for while the command consecrates an ethical system, it contains a drive that seeks to destroy it. It is clearer now what are the stakes of dying alone, voiced by Kennedy and Bruni, and why the prospect evokes a “universal fear.” But looking further back into Levinas's earlier writing, we find that solitude holds considerable interest for him. These writings cast solitude in a number of guises: perhaps most repetitively as the being's own relation to existing, yet Levinas also explores solitude as an internal negativity, one that is more constitutive, persistent, and unconscious than the “doing” of existing or the identity of the subject. In these accounts the being does not die as a consequence of its solitude, nor can solitude be overcome by companionship. Inside every relation there exists the non-relation from which solitude erupts. Before we move onto those analyses, let us examine why a life without solitude leads to its own kind of death.

For Levinas in *Entre Nous*, aloneness is the abject state of the human. It is the call of the ethical bond – the location of precariousness – but never itself the site of an ethics or a sociality that would affirm its cultivation. If Levinas's concept of responsibility were to become part of a formal ethics or morality it would institute a regime of connection. If I have an “unlimited responsibility to the other,” the absence of any limit, the absence of the death of responsibility, itself introduces the violence of a totality. Levinas's idea that totality is primordial to human relations has led some to argue that his concept of inter-relationality contains fundamental violence. James K. A. Smith says that when totality is originary for Levinas, “there is a way in which relationality is always already inscribed with war” (qtd. in Shepherd 89). The

psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman once suggested to me that "all of the attachment disorders that we see today are somehow linked to the demand that we be attached, that we be in contact, that we be available" (Britzman). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, personal and wearable technology, and the manifold surveillance and self-surveillance technologies for fitness and sleep tracking demand that we not only connect with others but that we connect with ourselves, treating others and our own bodies as sources of information and feedback. Often the cautionaries of computer culture warn that our immersive and obsessive use of technology from social media to robotic surrogates will destroy our ability to authentically connect with others. Indeed, that was the argument I thought the computer anthropologist Sherry Turkle would make in her 2011 book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other.* I was wrong. For Turkle, what is at stake in our reliance on technologies is not our capacity to be with others but our capacity to be alone. "People are lonely," she states, "The network is seductive. But if we are always on, we may deny ourselves the rewards of solitude" (Turkle 3). In a world of networks, everything is connection and connection is everything. How easily the demand to be connected, to be attached, becomes the very site of the abnegation of ethics – the site of a profound terror. How easily, when "responsibility amounts only to responding," can the response "here I am" represent the most intimate discursive violence.

While for Levinas ethical responsibility manifests through responsiveness and expressiveness, Winnicott characterizes the demands of response as potentially violent experiences for the subject. In "Communicating and Not Communicating" [1963] (1972), Winnicott describes the stakes of communicating and the treatment of the silent patient in psychoanalytic practice. While it is the patient who assumes the role of the silent partner through most of the essay, Winnicott frames the retreat from communication as a "right" in reference not

primarily to the patient but to himself: "[The right not to communicate] was a protest from the core of me to the frightening fantasy of being infinitely exploited" ("Communicating" 179). The fear is connected to the fantasy that one may be eaten or consumed by the other. Communication, like Jacques Derrida's concept of hospitality, must have limits, for to be completely and totally hospitable to the other is to be effaced by its horizons. To be exploited, Winnicott continues, relates to "the fantasy of being found" (179). Indeed, the violence of discourse, as Butler has shown, is a certain violence of being constructed as found, which presumes one is lost: the violence of being found by the Law, of being found in a world one did not ask to enter, of being given a name, of being called by that name or another name, and therefore of being found by another without one's asking.

Winnicott differed from Freud in his belief in an essential solitude of the human, a zone of privacy around which the ego develops its various defences: "At the centre of each person is an incommunicado element, and this is sacred and most worthy of preservation. I would say that the traumatic experiences that lead to primitive defences belong to the threat to the isolate core, the threat of its being found, altered, communicated with" (187). Psychoanalysis, he continues, consequently presents a great threat to the human, for it proposes to invade the private asylum of the individual. Finding the human has other effects. As Winnicott points out, when a baby finds an object in its environment it also *creates* that object. The world is at once found and created by the infant.[32] This capacity for creation is part of what Winnicott saw as the violence of a psychoanalysis that pursues the exposure of inner life. What is found by the psychoanalyst is at the same time created by her. The individual who stands before the Law therefore faces a similar

[32] Both concepts are expressed in the word "founded," which employs the root word "found" to mean created or started.

threat. Butler named this threat “recognition,” in equal parts a deeply-felt global desire for legitimation (desire is the desire for recognition) and the fear of being recognized by the laws of the sovereign state in such a way that one's personhood is delegitimated, pathologized, or criminalized (*Precarious* 43). The violence of being found by the Law is that the Law will create the individual it moves to discover. It may find a legitimated person who is made into a rights-bearing citizen and who consequently enjoys the hospitality of the state. In such a case, being found is celebrated and may be transformed into a narrative of belonging. The Law may also find a delegitimated person, an illegal, refugee, homeless, criminalized, racialized, disabled, or queer, for whom the recognition of the state amounts to a social death. Recognition by the state means bearing a certain relation of consciousness to it. Michele Foucault observes a similar violence in the space of the confessional and its connection to the population sciences. Information about the individual is elicited in confessional spaces as a means to constitute *subjects* of the inquiring institutions. Just as the law creates a subject of the state, the doctor requests information about the body to create a patient, a subject of medicine; the teacher requests capacity of the child to create a student, a subject of school. Foucault's concept of biopolitics suggests just this dynamic: in its inquiry into the dimensions of human life, the state creates life as the strategy of discipline. To be found is to be subject to biopower – to be exploited, eaten, or consumed by the state. Delegitimation is threaded through the assemblage of the reactive exercises of law enforcement and the pre-emptive speculations of intelligence agencies. The circuit of finding and creating is not temporally fixed in the context of biopower, for as Puar shows in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), the activities of securitization – enacted simultaneously upon and for the same public – profoundly sway “the tenor of temporality: the realignment from reactive to pre-emptive is a conversion from past-tense subject formation to future-tense subject anticipation, from the

rehabilitative subject whose violated rights can be redressed through social representation and legal recognition, to regenerative populations who are culled through anticipation" (154-5). The formation of criminalized subjecthood in particular is therefore not only the end-product of technologies of recognition, but an anticipatory and speculative logic of "pre-crime" that produces recognition through targeting and profiling marked bodies. To be found is to be made or remade, which is why it is both so desirable and so terrifying.

Perhaps the sheer gravity of being found is what is at stake for Derrida when he claims a "right of inspection" (*droit de regard*) in teletechnological contexts (Derrida and Stiegler 31-40). This right refers both to a desire to control the collection and dissemination of one's images and to the right to access archival images.[33] But just like Winnicott's right, Derrida's, as he points out, lies outside the regulatory system of rights and could never be claimed as such. Claiming a *right* either to inspection or, its opposite, obscurity, is a parody of the system of rights. Winnicott and Derrida appropriate a language to convey precisely what their claims are not. Similar to Riley, they employ a "diction of belonging" (Riley 49-50) to express "the vacancy of claims to rights which repose triumphantly on the authority of their own assertiveness, and by inversion [the diction] also parodies the plaintiveness of felt exclusion" (49). So often implicitly designed and understood as "individual rights," the right in Winnicott's and Derrida's writings also parodies the cult of the individual and its recognition by the state. In the place of the individual is an ineffable privacy or anonymity that cannot be found by a rights discourse. If these are rights, the sovereign state or the institution that bears its might is handed the power of belonging and

[33] Derrida also claims a "right to narcissism" in "Right of Inspection," which is broadly related to these various calls for self-interest that parody the right, which is understood always as individual rights. Pheshette DeArmitt addresses this comment as well as Derrida's enduring interest in narcissisms in *The Right to Narcissism: The Case for an Impossible Self-love* (2014).

exclusion over yet more dimensions of life. The rights-bearing liberal subject is the very figure of state recognition that functions to separate those who receive its hospitality and those who do not. A *right* is the very kind of connection, the very kind of being found, before which these thinkers recoil. As Derrida himself admits, the "right" to inspection is an unattainable horizon. It is a fantasy never to be realized, yet it is at the level of fantasy that that the field of cultural objects lies before us, the domain of scenes, of images, of culture. Here is where the rhetorics of connection – the discourses of the fantasy of being found – make themselves heard. In light of this totalizing sphere of connection, solitude may be a reservoir of resistance. But resistance does not bespeak the absence of the sociality that gives rise to it. Turning now to Winnicott's essay on the capacity to be alone, I wish to dwell with the fullness and richness of solitude, not as the absence of the social, but as a certain way of being with others.

In "The Capacity To Be Alone" [1958] (1972) Winnicott details what he calls the "capacity" to be alone, rather than the fear or desire of solitude that characterized most of the psychoanalytic literature on the topic. Winnicott found this capacity to be an interpersonal *achievement* and not a deprivation for the individual, as well as a sophisticated sign of emotional maturity.[34] This capacity may not correspond to the condition of actually being alone (as in Winnicott's example of solitary confinement) but refers to a stage of development occasioned early and potentially enjoyed and revisited throughout later life. This capacity to be alone is conditioned by a paradox, as Winnicott calls it, in which one is only alone when another is present. For the infant, the ability to be alone requires awareness of the continued existence of the mother beyond her immediate presence. Only when the infant reaches the awareness that the

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[34] Winnicott's observations render a distinction between "being alone" and how Melanie Klein, a considerable influence on Winnicott, described "loneliness" as a depressive and paranoid position.

mother is "reliably present" can it enjoy being alone. One is always, therefore, alone together. One's capacity to be alone in later life depends upon the development of this early experience. In Winnicott's sense, one already has to have been cared for, and one must again be caught up in a scene of interdependency, for one to experience aloneness.

The "one-body relationship" suggested by aloneness (as opposed to the two-body relationship of the infant and mother and the three-body Oedipal relationship) therefore involves the proximity of a second body, but Winnicott does not include the capacity to be alone in the domain of two-body relationships. The "paradox" rather suggests that the capacity to be alone lacks the constituting, desiring, reciprocal, or mutual dynamic that defines the two-body relationship while nonetheless retaining some important use for the second body. This is a one-body relationship that needs two bodies. The one-body relationship must present us with a mode of inter-relation quite different from that of the two and three-body relationships, one that requires the proximity of more than one body but other than the through dynamics of projective identification.[35]

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[35] What establishes the dynamic of alone together as opposed to the two-body relationship is the suspension of the infant's projective identification onto the mother or the patient to the analyst. A term first coined by Melanie Klein (a considerable influence on Winnicott's education as a psychoanalyst), it names a complex phenomenon that has been taken up by several psychoanalytic thinkers on the relationship between mother and child and analyst and patient, although it is an expansive term that, like many psychoanalytic concepts, can become useful in different contexts for a range of interpersonal relations. In short, projective identification involves an interchange between parts of the self and an object into which the self puts both good and bad parts of itself. Projection can expel unwanted elements onto the other, or provide a refuge for the protection of good parts. The self may also consume parts of the object. Most often, projective identification names the projection of unwanted parts of the self onto the other. Klein identifies it as an aspect of the depressive-paranoid position, in which a child expresses hatred towards itself and aggression towards the mother by identifying her with all it despises in itself. Projective identification is an aspect of interpersonal relating that has been credited as a vital step in distinguishing "me" from "not-me" and, by Thomas Ogden, in the movement from the intrapsychic to the interpersonal. As part of the psychic currency of interacting with others it broadly names the complex and shifting dynamics of identification, in which the self projects onto and receives projections from the other as a means to control and mediate the relationship. "The Capacity To Be Alone" begins with Winnicott's praise of the patient who "achieves" a silent session with the analyst. Here is a rare moment in which the patient suspends the campaign of aggression and fear that motivates interpersonal dynamics. I can be with another who is different from me, and can countenance my own difference, and therefore dwell alone across the gulf of another who then is also alone.

To parse this strange one-body relationship, I turn to a particularly rich passage in "The Capacity To Be Alone" that lays out the stakes of being alone for the individual and describes the role of the second body in occasioning this position.

> When alone in the sense that I am using the term, and only when alone, the infant is able to do the equivalent of what in an adult would be called relaxing. The infant is able to become unintegrated, to flounder, to be in a state in which there is no orientation, to be able to exist for a time without being either a reactor to an external impingement or active person with a direction of interest or movement. The stage is set for an id experience. In the course of time there arrives a sensation or an impulse. In this setting the sensation or impulse will feel real and be truly a personal experience. It will now be seen why it is important that there is someone available, someone present, although present without making demands; the impulse having arrived, the id experience can be fruitful, and the object can be a part or the whole of the attendant person, namely the mother. It is only under these conditions that the infant can have an experience which feels real. (34)

The stakes could not be higher, for these conditions set the stage for how the infant experiences the compelling force of singularization. Winnicott suggests here that acting and reacting with the other is a kind of virtual experience for the individual. What is stressed is the alienation of the individual as an interpersonal subject, as a being in the world. What Winnicott calls elsewhere the "false self" is a self defined only through the dynamics of action and reaction. That is, in the alienation of the self to itself – when the self becomes a *subject* in the world– it experiences

selfhood as virtual, what Lacan referred to as the "barred subject" (Fink 41). And yet this state of alienation may be the only comfortable one for the individual if it does not have the capacity to be alone. The discursive subject is indeed always alienated from itself through its mediation in discourse, and the solitary person does not escape discursive mediation by virtue of being alone; but the particular social relation in which the infant finds itself is hospitable and minimally invasive, what Winnicott calls being "present without making demands." The baby is released from identificatory relations with the mother, if for a short time. That is, the baby suspends its projections of itself upon the mother so that she is not what is good or bad in the baby. Something new, something singularizing, happens to its identity non-traumatically. It achieves the ability to reach out to alterity and find something other than itself, something entirely new and strange. As the other stands back and the individual flounders, the sensation or impulse that arrives comes neither from the pursuit of directed attention nor, importantly, the claims of an other. Use of the passive voice in this sentence obscures the origin of the sensation and how it comes about in the interaction between the inside and the outside. The passivity of this experience cannot then be attributed to something being done to the baby, its subjection to the violence of alterity; rather, this is an experience of being, which Winnicott places earlier in infant development than the later experiences of doing or being done to.[36] This sensation cannot be attributed to the mother even though her (or her substitute's) necessary proximity to the scene

[36] Winnicott refers to "being" and "doing and being done to," respectively, as the female and male aspects of development. These gendered aspects do not correspond to normative attributes of femininity and masculinity, but to paradigms of development and their relation to the mother or her equivalent figure. Being comes first, and has to do with the relation to the mother and the infant's development of an interior, a creative space. Doing and being done to come after, both passive and active interaction. Together they make a "bisexual" or multiply gendered being like something akin to plant physiology. While the formulation is reductive, it also holds the potential for a fantasmatic version of gender that is irreducible to stereotyped qualities or characteristics of bodies. See *Playing and Reality,* pp. 100-114.

conditions its possibility. Only by her withholding can the baby experience something "truly" personal through its heterogeneous rapport with the outside.

Winnicott's paradox permits us to read Blanchot's comical writer differently. Recall that Blanchot claims that a writer who writes "I am alone" is not to be taken too seriously, for by writing these words she addresses a reader whose presence illuminates a social scene the writer denies. After Winnicott, we can read the writer as defining her social space in the mode of retreat, separation, and most importantly, a kind of hospitality. Being alone together is then only a paradox if we accept that solitude is opposed to sociality. I can be alone when the other stands back and withholds her demands, and this requires a gesture on the part of the other. This is a different situation than when the writer embodies her false self to interact with others; her phrase "I am alone" is one way of saying "I feel real." And this statement may be a way (as I will address later) of saying "I am writing." By saying "I am alone" she heralds the community of no ones who are reliably present despite, or even because of, their "nameless and faceless" (Bersani and Phillips 55) abstraction beyond the horizon of her immediate presence. Language opens her to the reliable if impalpable continued presence of others that allows her to securely withdraw without disappearing. And yet in becoming one of the nameless and faceless she experiences her realness as the ineffability of the social that reliably persists. She becomes real in this moment of subjective abstraction. What Winnicott calls realness, another word for the forces of singularity, is something other than subjectivity, or the being-found and being-made in the world. Realness is perhaps the instability of this state, the sense that existence persists after and in advance of the subject, which is not to say that being transcends subjectivity, but that the intervals between performative repetitions – the spaces that permit change between our subjectivities[37] – are more

[37] In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1991), Butler argues that subjectivity is a product of the repetition of

than contingent states of being, something other than connective tissue between other states. The words "I am alone" appear in Winnicott's essay on the capacity to be alone as a conveyance or a dream imagined into the mouth of the preverbal baby. "I" indicates emotional growth. With "I am" the baby now has "a life," or an awareness of a protective environment. "I am alone" expresses the baby's confidence in the reliable presence of the mother and therefore its ability to be alone for a limited time. Experiences of being alone throughout life, says Winnicott, make a life that contains reality rather than futility (34) because they remind us that there remains a world – even when there is no relationship with the world.

As this one-body relationship is only possible in relation to the other's body it is helpful to conceive of aloneness in relation to the Kleinian *position,* rather than an ideological mandate, stage, or type of identity. By this, I follow Eve Sedgwick's uptake of Melanie Klein's vocabulary of positions as critical reading practices: "The term 'position' describes the characteristic posture that the ego takes up with respect to its objects ... a much more flexible to-and-fro process between one and the other than is normally meant by regression to fixation points in the developmental process" (Hinshelwood qtd. in Sedgwick, "Paranoia" 8). As a position the experience of solitude emerges in an unfixed relation to the field of objects before it. However, Winnicott argues that Klein's positions are necessarily two-body relationships. Solitude is set apart therefore as a "non-position," what I imagine to be an unfixed and mobile relation to a field of objects that floats free of the interchanges of projection and identification whereby the solitaire sees itself in its environment or borrows from it to constitute its sense of singularity.

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performative acts. These repetitions of the same do not eliminate movement among subjectivities, because change occurs in the intervals between repetitive performative acts (28).

Aloneness requires that the ego take up a particular posture with regard to what is beyond it that is not characterized, as we said, by having a *relationship* to what is beyond it.

Position or "non-position," as I have described it, also emphasizes the solitaire's orientation with respect to objects and part-objects. As the other withholds (being present without making demands) the baby moves for a time in an unscripted way, or at least in a way that is not scripted by reaction, directed will, or concentrated attention. Other forces have room to make themselves known. There is potential here for what we could call freedom. The capacity for this type of movement is part of what Ahmed has called a "queer phenomenology." Motivated by the centrality of "orientation" to phenomenology, Ahmed engages Husserlian phenomenology as a philosophy that centres the lived body and its relations of consciousness to objects in its horizon. She focuses on how our directions towards objects are shaped by the history of the object and in turn shape the space around it. Could the experience of aloneness even be reckoned as phenomenology if it is exercised through "*no* orientation"? Regarding "no orientation," we may recall Immanuel Kant's polemic, "What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?" Here, Kant provides a thought experiment, asking how one orients oneself in darkness. If vision is one's primary sense for orienting oneself in relation to the field of sensible objects, which resources would one marshal in the dark, when sensible objects must be apprehended differently and without visual coherence?[38] One does not charge forth, but wanders unstably, accosting objects in proximity before apprehending their form. One must become alert to one's own singularity and its differential components ("the feeling of difference in my own

[38] Kant focuses on vision as the human's primary sense for orienting itself, but the observation can be extended to include multiply abled people. One who is blind or partially sighted and who uses her sense of touch as her primary navigational engine might be said to be "in the dark" if her hands are tied behind her back or otherwise occupied. In that case, she would have to rely on a secondary sense to orient herself in her environment.

subject, namely, the difference between my left and right hands" [Kant, "Orient" 8]), moving along through obscurity without trusting one's proprioceptive composition and positioning. Even other voices seem to come from far away, a place outside that draws us but cannot alert us to the intervening objects in our path. Orienting in the dark supplies a model for what it means to be alone, floundering with "no orientation." It presumes the openness of the self towards its outside enacted through an intense introversion in which the self must marshal the stuff of its own being to navigate a world foreclosed to its perception. Suddenly the world no longer reflects me; it is just dark, and just an outside. Kant's response to the title question forms the basis for how he argues that one orients oneself in thought, when the field of objects is supersensible and the terrain is a mess of knowledge, experience, and affect. In solitude, we are similarly oriented inwards and we navigate space through our imaginative representations. We reside in that "immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark night" (10).

With this image of the self dissolving into the dark night of its singularity we can begin to think about marginal or minoritizing modes of orientation. For Ahmed, languages and experiences of queerness have phenomenological import. Following the concept of a "sexual orientation," Ahmed asks how movement, directionality, spacing, and the disruptions thereof are imbricated in sexuality and queer spaces. Queer politics involves disorientation, she writes, without legislating disorientation as a politics. Disorientation is another name for that type of movement activated in the immeasurable space of the dark night. It destabilizes, not always radically, but in doing so marshals a set of orientating powers other than the dominant means of stabilization. Queer sexualities are posed against "straightness," suggesting an obliqueness that implicitly puts one off-line. What Winnicott describes as having no orientation or direction of interest implies an experience of disorientation that Ahmed locates in queer life. "Disorientation

shatters our involvement in the world" (*Phenomenology* 177) but it also, she points out, functions as a point of reference for new orientations, new directions and lines that do not pledge fidelity to normative scripts of family and community. Solitude can be imagined both as the site from which new possibilities might be made apparent and an "indirection" that is itself a kind of "direction."

These indirections often follow histories of exclusion or unbelonging and they shape spaces in which radical modes of belonging can flourish. The concept of indirection that I have begun to develop emerges as the transgressive possibility of singularity in a milieu that yearns for connection. It thwarts sociality itself and it contributes to defining the space of shared separation, or the space of coexistence. I have called this "being alone together" as a way to complicate both concepts of "alone" and "together," which juxtaposed make their own linguistic space of shared separation. Aloneness becomes something other than the independent subject, as Riley, Derrida, and Winnicott parody the right and its implication of the individual rights of the liberal citizen. And far from proscribing this aloneness, as Blanchot implies, existence produces it. As Ricco suggests, the space between existents is an indecisional space characterized by neither connection nor isolation, but the sharing of separation. This indecisional space is neither an intermediary zone nor a liminal state, such as social civility on the one hand and anti-sociality on the other, because sociality encodes its own interruptions in the mutations of structure. "Separation," as we now understand it, is not a gap between stations of stability but the working of sociality as it expresses itself by unworking. Queer relations emerge from this territory in which the connections that make us healthy and define our humanity veer "off-line," as Ahmed says, or render us alone with a world that is something stranger than a reflection of ourselves.

In what follows I step into this indecisional territory to examine an expression of solitude as a queer orientation. In the film *Brokeback Mountain,* an international community of viewers found two homosexuals and their enduring relationship, whatever one thought about those two gay men and their relationship. The film is very much a "fantasy of being found" for queers in mainstream cinema. Film itself, because it throws up images with which one identifies or disidentifies, seems to encourage our "finding ourselves" through its characters. And yet as D.A. Miller argues, *this* film emphasizes cinema's capacity to keep the spectator alone "and at a remove from the [erotic] triangle we that [the characters] construct – to install us, at key moments of narrative expectancy, in a comfort zone outside the narrative" (58). The narrative cleaves, he says, the subjective eroticism of the characters from the objective view of the erotic energy that we are not encouraged to share with them, giving the film its "universal" appeal and its unerotic, sanitized relation to homosexual Eros. In another sense, the formal solitude in which the film allows the spectator to comfortably reside elaborates a different, discomforting solitude that refracts the ostensible narrative object of the film: the relationship. If the film satisfies a certain "fantasy of being found" for queer viewers, it concomitantly disrupts that discovery by locating the prize on a character who persistently refuses the founding identification ascribed to him. As I will show, *Brokeback Mountain* challenges the universality of relationships, enacting for us a mode of queerness expressed not through a same-sex relationship, but through marginal forms of relationality and the embodiment of solitude.

Alone with the Marlboro Man

Let us begin to look at being alone together as a queer phenomenology by exploring the relationship between the lovers and between the lovers and the mountain in Ang Lee's film

Brokeback Mountain (2005), an adaptation of Annie Proulx's short story of the same name. In the film, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) is the figure who embodies a queerness organized around solitude. His character begs comparison to the solitary cowboys of Marlboro Country, those impenetrable self-made men on horseback,[39] yet as I will argue he does so in such a way that the toxic masculinity associated with them is intercepted with a queer mode of relation. Ennis is something other than a repressed loner; instead, his indifferent relations to others reveal his desire for a subversive way of having a relationship. Ennis meets Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) in the summer of 1963 when the two are given work illegally herding sheep on public land – Brokeback Mountain – in Wyoming. The two become lovers in the wide-open but solitary vista of the mountain. At the end of their employment they part, but continue to see each other periodically over the course of twenty years after Ennis and Jack respectively marry, have children, find work, and, in Ennis's case, get divorced. Jack dreams that he and Ennis will leave their wives and live together on a ranch raising livestock, but for the remainder of Jack's life until his murder at the end of the film, Ennis thwarts Jack's domestic fantasies. Ennis tells Jack from the start, "It's a one shot thing we got going on here." He has no plans to enter a relationship. Even after his divorce when he gains relative autonomy, Ennis recoils from the notion of coupledom with Jack or anyone else.

Like many American Westerns, *Brokeback Mountain* is visually organized around orientations. At the beginning of the film, Ennis and Jack are responsible for directing one thousand sheep around Brokeback Mountain. Aerial shots of their progress up the mountain show a stream of small white logs moving together as herding dogs and the men on horseback

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[39] Reviews have compared Ennis to the Marlboro Man and other figures associated with Westerns. *The Atlantic*'s Christopher Orr, for example, praises Ennis's particular brand of masculinity in continuity with other celebrated cowboy characters, claiming "He's the Marlboro Man. He's Clint Eastwood. He's John Wayne" (Orr).

define the direction, shape, and pace of the moving herd. A sheep who begins to gallop off-course is abruptly shuffled back into the herd by the dog. Young and disabled sheep are carried by the men. But over the course of the summer, the uniform movement and shape of the herd loses its integrity. The herd suffers a loss when the men fail to supervise the sheep one night and a coyote picks one off of the herd. When Ennis and Jack return in the morning, they see the herd congregating on a low plateau while a single sheep lies eviscerated on a small hill. This image foreshadows two later scenes in the film: a memory from Ennis's childhood of seeing a man mutilated and murdered by his neighbours for living with another man, and a *mise-en-abyme* of Jack being beaten to death, presumably after his own “orientation” is discovered. The message is clear: it is dangerous to be plucked out of the herd. The sheep's is the first bloody body ahead of the bodies of two gay men. Shortly after this first loss, the sheep get tangled up with another herd owned by Chileans, and the men try to disentangle the two herds. At the end of the summer, the men's boss Mr. Aguirre castigates them for mixing the herd: “Some a these never went up there with you. The count ain't what I'd hoped for neither. You ranch stiffs, you ain't never no good.” By the end, some of the sheep have been lost to a new herd, and some sheep of the alien herd have made their way into Ennis's and Jack's charge.

These disruptions to the size and flow of the herd are not random; they occur during the “dark nights” when the herd is left alone unsupervised. Ennis's and Jack's relationship takes shape in the solitude of the mountain, and the nights when they are together they are isolated even from their sheep, to whom they have an obligation and responsibility. While the men fuck, the sheep are exposed to the contingencies of their environment; their own aloneness is no promise of happiness, for one among them dies. But it does create the potential for new configurations of community and continuity. When Aguirre's herd is mixed with the Chilean

herd, its composition is altered. With the entry of the “new blood” its genetic future is given a new destiny, and the departure of its native members displaces its own genetic heritage into a foreign population. It is worth pointing out that the second herd is Chilean, and that the mixing of the two herds mirrors the movement of racial diaspora to an extent. The film's visual interest in orientating raises questions about relations and relationships that fuel the narrative. The film asks: Where am I in relation to you? And how does our proximity define what we are together?

Brokeback Mountain was marketed and praised as a film about gay love that both flourishes and fails in the impoverished social environment of 1960s rural America. B. Ruby Rich describes it in *New Queer Cinema: Director's Cut* (2013) as “queer or gay, postqueer or simply our movies” (xxvi), reflecting the deep ambivalence generated by the film in queer aesthetic circles for the novel event of a LGBTQ-centred film becoming megahit. Predictably, it was both loved and derided, praised as the gay man's *Gone With The Wind,* criticized for the shortfalls of its representations, and hated for its normalization of homosexuality. Its appeal to universal themes created a wide-ranging mainstream audience. Ang Lee repeatedly emphasized its universal message, claiming in his Academy Awards acceptance speech that the characters Ennis and Jack taught the production team about “not just all the gay men and women whose love is denied by society, but just as important, the greatness of love itself” (Lee “Academy”). Various salutes to its universality meant the film was claimed by many, quite beyond queer audiences. D.A Miller's argument in “On the Universality of *Brokeback*” (2007), that the film dramatizes the heterosexual's erotic gaze upon the thrill and tragedy of the homosexual closeted life (50), is supported by the wealth of commentators for whom the film is really about the laudable progress made by straight people. In his book on the film, *On Brokeback Mountain: Meditations about Masculinity, Fear, and Love in the Story and the Film* (2008), Eric Patterson

devotes a long paragraph to the priority of the straight person and presumed heterosexuality in the film:

> In both its versions, *Brokeback Mountain* demonstrates the capacity of straight people to become allies in the struggle to overcome homophobia, since the story is the creation of an author who is heterosexual, and the movie was based on her story by two screenwriters, a director, actors, and many others who are heterosexual. The *Production Notes* for the film show that during the process of making it, the straight people involved made a serious effort to think about the lives of men who love men and to learn from sexual minority people who were involved in the production. In being able to imagine what it's like to be a man who's attracted to men, [the aforementioned] and the many other straight people involved in making the film version all demonstrate that it's possible for members of the majority to understand homophobia and to work to end it. (xlvi)

Good for them. Corroborating Miller's argument that the general audience's gaze is activated and maintained by a denial of its truly erotic charge, Patterson characterizes the heterosexual's connection as not erotic but sympathetic, tolerant, and progressive, even as it participates in the thrill of Jack's brutal murder. Not only gays are "found" by this film, but straights too are found as the paragons of the progressive liberal citizen. As Miller suggests, the film's universal appeal rests upon its prim, unerotic treatment of the lovers, expressed primarily in its understated mastery of cinematic "craft." He argues that the universality of the love story is enacted through the recessive, "beautiful" treatment of the content, particularly its visuality (Miller 50-2). Patterson's straight people who "imagine what it's like" are attracted by the concept of difference and the great deal of labour imagined to be required to perform it, and made to identify with a

sanitized, visually appealing eroticism that permits their identification through the erasure of that difference and the very denial of the erotic connection. If the relationship itself is, as Miller states, prophylactic and oriented towards the universal appeal to a self-congratulatory audience, it is perhaps more dynamic for the way it elicits the “universal fear” with which this study began. Much of the film is organized around schooling the characters to fear being alone. Jack's first dance with his future wife Lureen is accompanied by rather menacing song lyrics. As they dance we hear: “No one's gonna love you like me; no one's gonna love you like me. No one, no one. I know sometimes you felt so lonely. I know you felt so sad and blue.” The subtle threat deploys loneliness as a weapon to orient Jack towards his happy object. Later, Ennis’s wife Alma uses a similar, although gentler, type of persuasion with Ennis. Entreating him to move the family into the city, Alma says she wants “A real home, a lot of kids for our girls to play with. And not so lonely like you were raised. You don't want 'em to be so lonely, do you?” The background chatter of the film mobilizes the terror of loneliness to corral the leads into a crowd of couples. Crowds in the film are, as Cobb suggests in a different context, crowds of couples. Jack first dances with Lureen at a public dance; Jack and Lureen attend a cotillion as a married couple; Ennis and his family attend an outdoor festival with other families. When the two leads are not spending time together or in their homes their time is spent in coupledom surrounded by other couples. Social space is constituted by coupledom and the couple form appears to be the only way to connect visibly to the social. Ennis's reluctance to become a legible couple with Jack occurs among these environs. Coupledom, the film shows, stretches beyond the private relationship between two people.

The ostensible reason given by the film for Ennis's reluctance to live with Jack is the brutal homophobia that Ennis has witnessed from an early age. Ennis carries a great deal of

internalized homophobia as well, making a show of threatening Jack with violence if he hears any details of Jack's sexual experiences in Mexico. Miller's extraordinary essay on the film suggests that Ledger's performance of Ennis is designed to display the totalizing repression that informs his every move as a tortured gay cowboy in 1960s Wyoming. Everything from Ennis's "evasive eyes" to his "pursed lips" and his "rounded posture" exposits "a virtual cornucopia of psychosomatisms" (54). For Miller, Ennis's reticence is a symptom of repression, as is the inertness of the character's posture that reeks of repressed energies. Ennis's withholding nature can certainly be figured as an expression of a desire to be without desire, and consequently to repress his erotic impulses, a labour that has all but taken over his body. In its earnest practice and repetition, his repression transforms his body into a theatre of symptoms, a performativity of the recessive labour that attempts to hide what is so painfully apparent. Ledger's affected performance, his character's virtual embodiment of the ravages of homophobia, is the first indication that this film is not primarily about Ennis and Jack and their relationship, but about Ennis. He is the first to attract the gaze of the other – of Jack – when in the first scene Jack admires him in the side mirror of his car. He is also the last character seen by the audience, alone in his trailer.

The total embodiment of Ennis's back-breaking repression completes the viewer's sympathetic relation to the homosexual while also satisfying its desire for the tragedy of the gay man. However, the film seems not to be entirely invested in the explanation of Ennis's embodiment as repression. Ennis is a withdrawn and inward-seeking character, and his personality is more complex than a symptom of the fear he develops as a child after his father shows him a mutilated gay man. He listens as Jack chatters; he offers to sleep alone out with the sheep as Jack constantly complains about this duty; and he can live comfortably without Jack for

far longer periods than Jack is able to. Beside Jack's restlessness, he is veritably calm and content with life.[40] Ennis grows up in poverty being raised by his siblings after the spontaneous loss of his parents. He grows up "lonely," as Alma reminds him, and appears comfortable on his own in adulthood. Concurrently, he was raised in a cultural milieu that with its regulatory homophobia and airless norms of rugged masculinity could still provide an alibi for repression as his defining assemblage of traits. But there remains the sense that Ennis's style of relationality runs deeper to a place that cannot be traced sociologically or psychologically to his childhood. His first daughter Alma Junior is a quiet girl, especially compared to her outgoing younger sister Jenny. In Annie Proulx's short story from which the film is adapted, she is described as "shy." In the film, Alma Junior asks to live with Ennis after her mother remarries and becomes pregnant, demonstrating a preference for a quiet life with one parent over the rambunctious activity of a full house. As Ennis's short-term girlfriend tells the girl, "You don't say much, but you get your point across." Alma Junior is like Ennis, and like him in the ways he is unlike Jack. Something of Ennis is passed down to her, and this inheritance or continuity occurs through an obscure and untraceable passage. Obscure, because the same world that made Alma Junior made the virtuosic Jenny, and the same 1960s Wyoming that made Ennis made Jack. Even Alma Junior's genealogy is obscured, for she is named for the mother yet through a process of gendered disorientation hails from the father. She is given a name but cannot be found by that name; it does not disclose who she is.[41] Why Ennis is the way he is cannot be reduced to a diagnosis or trauma in his past.

[40] The exception to this reading is Ennis's spontaneous violence, most notably on display at the Fourth of July fireworks festival with his family when two vulgar bikers refuse his request to check their language. Ennis's rage channels the brutal masculinity of the film's older father figures and symptomizes his own avoidance. I believe it is significant that Ennis's outburst occurs in a scene of crowded couples, where regulations of social and familial behaviour are tightly policed and on display. Ennis exhibits his social dominance against the red glare of fireworks while exposing his own spectacular show of intimidation as the wretched inheritance of certain masculine norms.

[41] One could also point out that Alma Junior is like her mother in a different way: she is a woman shut out of Ennis's life, a woman who would like to be there. She is the junior Ignored Woman. In addition to her constitutive solitude,

He could be neuroqueer, desiring forms of relation and bodily movement inconceivable to a neurotypical crowd imposing its social norms upon him. In other words, Ennis's eremetic tendencies are continuous with the way he relates to others. They are part of his orientation in the world and cannot be reduced to repression, even if repression may be a form they take.

Turning to repression as the sole explanation for Ennis's approach to relationships naturalizes the desire for coupledom and hetero-adjacent norms of relating as the only authentically real and healthy mode of forming sexual-romantic and otherwise significant attachments. Given repression as the alibi for Ennis's personality, as Miller does, we are left with the unmarked affectations of Jack – a character that garners little interest for Miller – who is a figure overflowing with a desperate desire to connect. Jack can barely tolerate sleeping alone with the sheep for a single night, and throughout the film he harasses Ennis in pursuit of a kind of relationship Ennis repeatedly and consistently turns down. Jack yearns after a private life with Ennis on a ranch raising livestock, a legible relationship modelled after the domestic couplings of their married lives. His behaviour is not regarded as disordered in the way that Ennis's bonds with others are figured as dead-upon-arrival, always already obliterated. Perhaps because the manic desire for recognition by the other, the want of legible connection and stable coupledom, is what drives and naturalizes compulsory heterosexuality. Yet for Ennis there is another possibility, something that involves but is not reducible to repression. Miller's repressive

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she also lives a version of Alma's loneliness. Alma's and Ennis's marriage could be described as being alone together, albeit a terribly negative version of it, and Alma Junior shares in this dynamic. Theirs is a marriage that does not thwart solitude but establishes it as an effect of coupledom. At the end of the film Alma Junior is engaged to be married young, like her parents before her, as if to both mirror their brokenness and repair it by forging a connection with a man to overcome the disconnect with her father. Alma Junior is set to repeat Ennis's life after living her mother's life.

hypothesis erodes a potentially queer form of relationality that recoils before the legible forms of attachment inherited from heteronormative fantasies of togetherness.

Ennis's desire to be without desire can be read as a reflection on the possessive and corralling force of desire in addition to an internalized rejection of queerness. Desire wants recognition, as Butler has shown, and so a desire to be without desire is also to recoil from recognition, from the desire to be found. Desire grips, it possesses, and it orients, and what Ennis seeks is a kind of lasting togetherness beyond the reach, or at the margins, of desirous possession by the other and by oneself. Ennis's queerness is organized around a deep and abiding capacity for being alone. His desirous life turns not only on his attraction to Jack and their time together in the wilderness, but on his need for solitude against a backdrop of individuals who want to push him into more crowded spaces.

Embedded in the narrative of the men's love is a subplot about a difference inside that of sexual orientation – not simply Ennis and Jack against the world, but a difference *between* the two young men that suggests divergent queernesses between them. “I'm not you!” Jack yells at Ennis the last time they meet. “I can't make it on a couple high-altitude fucks once or twice a year!” Indeed, Ennis's desirous life is routed both through a deep and lasting attraction to Jack and to an indifference to him. They do not share, I would argue, the same sexual orientation, if that term might be understood heterogeneously as the libidinous directions that stretch between attraction and neglect of others. Part of Ennis's desire is an orientation away from Jack and towards a space in which to cultivate a life unpossessed by others. Ennis does not *not* want to be with Jack, but wants to be with Jack in the mode of separation. This line, “I'm not you!,” and the disparity of need Jack expresses, powerfully interrupts the narrative of same-sex love that came to characterize the film, for it emphasizes a difference between the characters having to do with

sex. As if Jack cries out against the craft of the film itself, he points to the presence of two queernesses in the film, two ways of being together, and the friction between them. He draws us into a narrative in the film that is not about repression or discrimination but about the lacunae between us – not anything as legible as complementarity or incompatibility – that mediate our being together as a mode of being alone.

Ennis's recoil from Jack's fantasy of connection is not set against a desire for itinerant sexual encounters outside of the domain of domesticity. Very often in queer theory, coupledom is reproached by the possibility of other forms of sexual encounter that are not granted the same degree of state sanctity. Jack is also the focus for these types of sexual encounters when he travels to Mexico to find anonymous sex. But Ennis thwarts every connection he makes over his lifetime. His relationship to Jack is not unlike his relationship to his daughters, whom he visits occasionally and loves at a distance. He also remains connected to his daughters with a similarly periodic constancy. His child support payments keep him tethered to them while also providing a useful alibi for his own distance from Jack. Ennis recoils from the excess of every connection, making clear that what separates the men's sexual orientations is not the split between coupledom and the crowd, but the status of connection as it defines their being with others.

With its pedigree of Western films, *Brokeback Mountain* follows a long line of cowboys, the paradigmatic self-made men idealized for their autonomy and independence. Here is solitude in its most toxic, gendered guise. The Western is a genre that turns upon images of the ruggedly affected solitude of men that has become a cinematic ideal of heterosexual masculinity. Desire in the film is routed through that solitary affect, the masculine ideal of autonomy, and the film transforms the normative figure into a drama of queer erotics. Never is this clearer than when Ennis is compared to other icons of toxic masculinity in the film, namely Aguirre, Jack's father,

and Jack's father-in-law. B. Ruby Rich observes that Proulx's short story, "Brokeback Mountain," is part of an assemblage that appears to her to be "a collection of horror stories about the fatal effects of masculinity run amok" (191). The father-son relationship, she says, runs through each narrative. For Rich, the apex of this trope in the film is "the chilling visit that Ennis pays to Jack's parents on the ranch, where an encounter with the bitter patriarch fills in for Ennis every blank ever left in Jack's character" (191). Which blanks are these? It is, as we noted, Ennis's body that is seen to be incepted by the worst ravages of homophobic masculinity. It is he who ostensibly exhibits a most thorough repression. But the bitter man he visits in Jack's childhood home is *Jack's* father. The angry, passive-aggressive father-in-law also belongs to Jack. The gruelling pressure of living under the terrifying patriarch provides no alibi for Ennis's personality;[42] instead, these men are Jack's people. In other words, the figures who best represent the terror of toxic masculinity are connected to the man who charges after connection and yearns for stable coupledom. Jack's origins are revealed while Ennis's remain largely opaque, and they produce not a solitary inertness but a desire for recognition.

When Ennis faces Jack's father, each man's version of inertness invites comparison. Ennis's affect is brought close to something that resembles it. Through that resemblance the differences suddenly become clear. Their sameness exposes what is not the same. Standing before Jack's father, Ennis's rugged quietude is brushed with a softness that emphasizes his unique embodiment of masculinity. Jack's mother sees it as she plaintively hands him a bag to carry away what he has taken from Jack's room. His inertness seems to come from somewhere

[42] We know that Ennis was also raised by a similar type of father, who had at one time before his death taken Ennis and Ennis's older brother to the site where a man who had been living with another man had been beaten and castrated by neighbours. This scene is disclosed in a *mise-en-abyme* and Ennis's father is, tellingly, invisible in it. The film only bears visual witness to Jack's father figures. Ennis's origins are narratively foreclosed and cut short by the death of the parents.

else. Unlike Jack, Ennis's lines of inheritance are always obscured. As a father of daughters, he disrupts even the relationship of inheritance Rich describes between fathers and sons. Ennis's masculinity will not be inherited through the toxic relations between father and son. With respect to the transmission of masculinity, Ennis is made impotent. This is to say that within the logic of the film that lays bare the toxicity of masculine norms, Ennis is non-reproductive, and his physical reproduction of girls becomes proof of his impotence. Instead, it is Jack who is fecund and will reproduce the channels of transmission through which boys learn to be men. Alma Junior's inheritance of Ennis's mannerisms incarnates her father's masculinity in a feminine body. Through her it is shy and prudent. She is a node of transmission, but one set on a circuitous path that disrupts the father-son relationship and its brutal bond.

Ennis's detached expression and rugged posture captures the affect of a Marlboro Man.[43] In the thrill of the predictable controversy, many were quick to assert that the movie cowboy has *always* been gay (Rich 187). The Western's homosocial action generates an erotic charge precisely because such intimacy is folded recessively into the masculinist logics of male bonding. But for me, it is through the genre-defining solitude of the cowboy, not his homosocial romps, that Ennis primarily tropes the familiar character and queers its representation. The queerness of the film follows a certain trope of the Western cowboy and the hetero-masculine

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[43] It is worth noting that the inception of Phillip Morris's Marlboro Man advertising campaign is already a rich site for queerness. Marlboro's filtered cigarettes were originally marketed to women. The Marlboro Man inaugurated the company's stunningly successful appeal to men, a shift that represented a dramatic transformation of the meaning of the Marlboro brand and its target demographic. The Toronto AIDS Committee's reworking of Phillip Morris's Marlboro Man for its campaign, "Welcome to Condom Country," appeals to the queerness of the company's image of masculinity, drawing upon what Charles Roy calls the long-standing advertising tradition of using "macho" images to attract men (para. in "Welcome"). The campaign also inverts the values of Phillip Morris's smoker to promote healthy habits, fixating on the relation between masculinity and the male body as a continued source of interest and contestation. In the PSA, these visualizations of idealized relations between men and their bodies and between masculine bodies among others like them (perhaps even the horses included) are put to the project of certain idealized versions of personal and communal health.

ideal of the self-sufficient man. That trope is turned inside out when it is represented in *Brokeback Mountain* not simply as the individual “Ennis” but as a hydra-headed figure we may call “Ennis-Jack,” a single character defined by its alone togetherness. Between the two leads, Ennis is the singular focus of the film. The film is trained upon the display of his avoidant affectations as the true tragedy of rural homophobia. At the beginning of the film we first see Ennis through the side mirror of Jack's car. To establish Ennis as the singular fascination of the film's gaze, we encounter him standing alone as a visual representation. As Miller shows, the film is fuelled by the dynamics of the gaze upon the homosexual embodied in Ennis. Asked about the origins of the short story “Brokeback Mountain,” Proulx describes sitting in a bar watching a man she judged to be plaintively regarding a group of men playing pool and wondered if he was “country gay” (qtd. in Miller 52). The stiff, understated posture and yearning gaze that she projects onto the man becomes the character we recognize as Ennis in the story and in the film. Jack exists as a narrative magnet before whom Ennis can react. He is attractive, certainly more attractive than Ennis, and functions to lure Ennis's desire from its guarded shelter. Jack's supplemental function, his role as an appendage, allows us to regard both men as a composite of the lead. The solitary cowboy embodied by Ennis is refigured as two, not as a blend but as a solitaire understood as always already multiple. Ennis is the only lead, but paradoxically he needs Jack to stand on his own. Ennis's inertness is given a radical source; it comes from being *alone together,* not as a prior state of individuality or as a capacity for autonomous action, but as the interruptive force of the queer relation that brings the men together through a shared separation. Ennis is Ennis-Jack because the character *is* that separation of the queer non-relation. Jack's cry, “I'm not you!” is not exactly true. Jack is Ennis, but he is Ennis's fantasy of his own

difference. He is a world brought close and then turned away as what Ennis desires but does not desire to *have,* as if what Ennis wants is an interrelation beyond its own recognition.

What looks to be the autonomous man on horseback in Ennis is revealed to be a queer bond enfleshed in the solitary cowboy, a bond not made legible as mutual understanding or complementary match but as an interruption of the very concept of the "bond." Through Ennis, the film creeps up on the rugged solitude of the movie cowboy, converting it into a challenge to the norms of sociability, showing us that aloneness is always conditioned by the reliable presence of others. Reliable, in this case, because as a composite Ennis is always with Jack, although with him in a mode other than interrelationality. Being alone, the film suggests, is its own form of Eros charged by the interruption of the interpersonal. As a single character, Ennis-Jack is no coherent subject, but a self-different figure composed of the collapse of difference between the two men. He is not human. He is a figure, in other words, that in his solitude is not designated as a self but as a kind of escape towards otherness awkwardly moving in a body that can hardly contain that restless other. There is no relationship in *Brokeback Mountain* as long as the love between the two beings is routed heterogeneously through a disoriented leap towards what is beyond being.

Returning to the division between the characters, another division makes itself apparent. Brokeback Mountain, and not Jack, also serves the role of the other for Ennis who is present without making demands. Jack is a demanding other; he cannot allow Ennis to flounder or become undone peaceably, and Jack is certainly unable to be alone himself. But against the undemanding refuge of Brokeback Mountain, the lovers discover orientations in life that feel real, even if there are consequences to being plucked from the crowd. Brokeback Mountain remains the horizon for Ennis's and Jack's life together for the duration of the film. It stands

sentinel in the background, not only when the men venture outside, but on the backs of postcards and in the stories they tell their loved ones. It is the germ of their relationship and a constant shorthand for it. As Derrida suggests in *The Post-Card* (1987), postcards are a form of transmission whose double-sided visibility renders them unprivate in their circulation. Both the front and back of the message can be seen from the outside, and yet because it is an "open letter" it can be made indecipherable (Derrida, *Post-Card* 35). Brokeback Mountain is oddly similar to its reproduction on the postcard: it defines the visual space of the film (its "craft") by remaining open to viewing while harbouring the buried secret. The image of the mountain enters Ennis's home in this way: continuous with the outside. Fittingly, Ennis's affair with Jack is the open secret (the "open letter") that floods his home and every encounter with his wife. Alma has knowledge she will not act upon until after she divorces Ennis, a knowledge made workless in their home until even its disclosure does little. Like the postcard image, the secret remains buried in the mode of its disclosure, defining every dynamic in the unhappy home through its unclaimed presence. In its negative sense, the open secret establishes Ennis's and Alma's married relationship as a relation of being alone together. When Alma watches her husband kissing another man, she realizes that she does not know the man she married. The two will occupy the same space in a shared disconnection, the other a constant reminder that he or she is alone in a marriage held together only by law's recognition. Alma's knowledge of the secret only sharpens the fact that she does not know the man she thought she knew, that knowing too much opens the vacancy of their bond. An open secret structures the conversation between Ennis and Lureen, which is also mediated by a technology of transmission. When Ennis telephones Lureen she describes a fiction of Jack's death as viewers witness a *mise-en-abyme* of his actual death at the hands of gay bashers. As viewers we are made to bear witness to a violent death that in the film

will remain unwitnessed as the violent death it was. The film does not want Jack's death to occur alone. As if the telephone call were as legible as the postcard, Lureen and Ennis speak about a fiction of a death each knows is false. They share the open secret, and the mutual construction of this fiction awards them a kind of intimacy seen nowhere else in the film.[44] They bear witness to each other's pain through the open secret, what Anne-Lise François describes as "a self-cancelling revelation [that] permits a release from the ethical imperative to act upon knowledge" (3). The open secret is itself a mode of being alone together, as the two must share in the unacknowledged secret both know but cannot claim to know. Ennis shares in a range of versions of this dynamic with Jack, Alma, and Lureen. Perhaps he and Jack's mother also share it, as her willingness to allow a man she has never met to enter Jack's room in her house and to walk away with a keepsake suggests her knowledge of his significance to her son's life.

Similar to the postcard and the telephone, the mountain is "unprivate" (public land upon which Aguirre's sheep roam illegally), and functions as the constant shorthand for what the film never names outright but what Ennis calls the "thing we got go'n on here." Brokeback Mountain becomes synonymous with what Ennis and Jack have with each other – a something that is never actually claimed as a relationship in the film – but like the mountain, what they have is not really *had,* as it is not private. Whatever brings them together stands back from the privative couple form Jack envisions and from the very notion of *having* a relationship. They cannot be together as they are on a private ranch because their love is a function, so to say, of the undemanding presence of the mountain.

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[44] Perhaps one other moment of mutuality is the unspoken bond forged between Jack and Randall amid the crowd at the cotillion the two attend with their wives.

The unprivatized terrain of the mountain contrasts strongly with Jack's vision of the ranch on which he would like to live with Ennis. Other thinkers have noticed that the men's interactions with their wives often occur in enclosed spaces, while their interactions with each other often occur outside (Mendelsohn 12). Spaces outside of walls signal queer freedom, while spaces within walls are associated with constraint. Walls typically enclose domestic spaces, such as Jack's house and Ennis's apartment. The film is quick to make connections between the social constraints of compulsory heterosexuality and enclosures designed to protect and reproduce the heterosexual family. “Walls,” notes Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness*, “create spaces; they mark the edge between what is inside and out. The walls contain things by holding up; they bear the weight of residence” (107). In the film, they hold up the image of the heterosexual family. They also bear the weight of the exclusion and isolation of the closet. Jack and Ennis cannot be “out” inside their homes, and the tight spaces illuminate the awkwardness of the men's presence, a kind of filling-out that floods the small rooms with the enormity of the charade. Ennis, in particular, lives with an open secret that seems to seep into every crevice of his married life. Its enormity makes the confined space appear even smaller and more absurd. It is clear from this spatial trope that the men will never have a relationship on a private ranch maintaining livestock. Their life together does not fit indoors; it does not fit in private space. Instead, it thrives upon a certain continuity with the outside.

We are to understand that there would never be a ranch for Ennis and Jack. Even though the possibility of a ranch seems to end before it begins, enclosed spaces take on new possibilities at the end of the film. When Ennis learns of Jack's death, he goes to visit Jack's parents who still reside in Jack's childhood home. He enters Jack's childhood room – a room still set up for a child – which is flooded with light from large windows. Inside the even smaller space of the closet

Ennis finds hanging there a shirt that once belonged to Jack fitted around a shirt that once belonged to himself, from their days on Brokeback Mountain. He clutches the long-held symbol of intimacy to his chest and weeps. Folded inside these spaces – the child's room that signals the promise of reproductive futurity and the closet that signals the coerced silence of homosexual life – is something that belongs only to them, something that cannot be found by an other nor corralled by the normalizing logic of these spaces. The pathos of the shirts fans out to give the room a light that appears to come from the outside. In the final scene of the film Ennis gazes at the shirts – their order now reversed – inside another closet in the corner of his tiny trailer as the camera zooms into the postcard image of Brokeback Mountain. The small space of the trailer fills up with Ennis's thick grief. But the meaning of enclosure has now shifted. The shirts' switch reverses their inside/outside arrangement, showing this dynamic not to be fixed but bidirectional. At any moment the enclosed can become the enclosure and vice versa. An inside can become an outside. In the small trailer, as I said above, solitude is not defined by the inside/outside division, but ruptures assumptions concerning what is in and what is out, and what these states will mean socially. Both the film's relationship and its inside and outside spaces are seen to be non-hierarchical and open to the reconfiguration of roles and positions, only these horizons open up in the very last moments of the film *after* the relationship has ended. The film now nods to a different relationship rehearsed by the nested shirts, which are both an archive of the relationship and the emblem of its lasting significance.

Closure is how Derrida describes the impossibility of dividing the inside from the outside, what Simon Critchley calls the structural impossibility of “the belonging and the breakthrough” (*Deconstruction* 70). In response to Levinasian ethics, the *problem* of closure is the reliance on the terms of a tradition required to break out of it, the ultimately circular rapport

of enclosure and the process of closure. Ennis's shirts' infinite fungibility similarly interrupts the limits of the closure of the closet. Ideals of the closet resemble how Derrida saw the policing of philosophy as an enclosed structure of thought. “The desire to command one's frontiers and thereby regulate the traffic that moves in and out of one's territory” (74) is a logic of the closet Derrida finds in philosophy. Closure's internal division, its exposure to alterity, leaves an opening between belonging and not belonging. Ennis's and Jack's “closure” is likewise exposed to the internal division between their shirts, the trace of alterity marked by limitless reversibility beyond the limit of the shirts' enclosure.

With Jack's shirt tucked inside the contours of his own shirt, Ennis becomes the enclosure for his and Jack's twenty-year life together. Jack's larger-than-life personality, his dreaminess and his imagination, live on inside Ennis. And that enclosure looks to the outside towards the horizon of Brokeback Mountain. Greg Drasler, explaining his paintings inspired by the psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, writes about painting “the corner of a room” as “an elemental place of privacy and protection” (159). He continues, “Rooms, corners, ceilings, and doors become places into which the subject can expand, places where defences can be let down, where a subject can float into imaginative flight and unguarded repose” (159). The walls of enclosures can also hold up beings. Like the reversal of the shirts the inside can become a form of outside and pick up the tracks the film has laid for outdoor space. The stinging enclosure of domestic space gives way to the sanctuary of the closet in the corner of the trailer where Ennis can expand towards the undefined horizon of the mountain. For Drasler, small spaces may be coextensive with a generative abstention from the social. “Like taking a deep breath and letting it out,” he says, “to internalize a place, a privacy, or a pause seems to allow consciousness, seems to allow a subject to exist (159). Here is Ennis's realness and not the false self with which he connects to others.

Here, in the privacy of the corner, is the outside freedom internalized and Ennis is allowed to exist with a certain kind of freedom. Perhaps part of this freedom is a freedom from Jack. I do not mean to suggest that this freedom takes away or is different from the pain of mourning, or to suggest that freedom in any way means happiness, but that mourning provides a new way for Ennis to relate to Jack in a mode that was not possible before. If they are, as I suggested, the same character, Ennis's introjection of Jack upon his death is a realization of their inhuman oneness. Through the interiorized charge of singularity, a new orientation is possible. Ennis is now alone with Jack.

There is no relationship in *Brokeback Mountain*; the leads do not share the same sexual orientation; and only one is alone through his connection to another. If, as Miller argues, there is nothing particularly transgressive about the representation of the relationship between Ennis and Jack, the queer potential of this film reposes on the representation of Ennis's style of interaction through its challenge to compulsory attachment. I call this image queer not in regards to the content or status of the relationship but its disruption of the norms of connection. Ennis allows us to question the very existence of the relationship, and through him we witness a form of "orientation" routed through his indifference to another, an indifference through which the differences between the leads can emerge. Ennis's desire for solitude does not belie his love for Jack, but it establishes the form that love will take.

When connection ends, being remains. But what kind of being? Earlier, we saw that Levinas implores us not to leave the other alone, and that aloneness robs the other of its future. For Ennis, the couples that crowd his milieu constitute a form of death. There is no future for Ennis with them, so what is it that Ennis becomes in the shadow of the mountain? What is being in the dissolution of the social, when our singularity no longer permits us to define ourselves

through the coupled binaries that confer meaning? I turn now to Levinas's earlier writings to address these questions. In these works, there are other forms of life that dwell in the recesses of the social and indelible solitudes that are embedded in social structure. Levinas does not describe a restorative sociality, but existence at the very edges of a sociality that is sometimes at odds with its organization. Solitude emerges from this era of Levinas's scholarship in its own right as an ineliminable part of coexistence.

In *Existence and Existents* Levinas provides a different set of coordinates than in *Entre Nous* that found the possibility for being alone. In this book that considers states of sleep, fatigue, and indolence, Levinas addresses "the impossibility of the I rejoining the you" (Levinas, *Existence* 21) within the play of worldly relations to the outside. These marginal but habitual states engage alterity while never becoming a relationship, describing a phenomenology in which "existence is not synonymous with the relationship with the world" (21). Levinas explores the continuities and discontinuities between Being (existence) and beings (existents) in embodied states of passivity or *désoeuvrement*. He explores life in nighttime, when divisions become indistinct and when consciousness fluctuates, and in "light," which seeps through all as a replete presence constituting the spaces between existents, and between existents and existence. It is in these *désoeuvrée* conditions and these intermediate spaces that Levinas shows the non-mutual, non-reified relations in which materiality persists through exposure to the outside and the hypostasis of the impersonal forces of existence. Existence is given the character of "there is" (*il y a*) as the omnipresent materiality of life amid the fluctuation of attachments and connections. There is presence where no object exists; there is existence after oblivion. We remain after our vigour is extinguished and after night comes and we keep watch over nothing.

As the *il y a* of *Brokeback Mountain,* the mountain remains after all has fallen apart. When there is no life, and no relationship, Brokeback Mountain remains as what is and what was and what never was. “Tell you what: we could a had a good life together, a fuckin' real good life! Had us a place of our own!” Jack cries at Ennis, “But you didn't want it, Ennis! So what we got now is Brokeback Mountain! Everythin's built on that! That's all we got, boy! Fuckin' all!” Brokeback Mountain is the all, the all that has always been there. It is the “world” in the film, which for Levinas means not a substantive entity or sum of objects before us, but an orienting context for the movements of consciousness from embodiment. As Ennis and Jack's life together ends, something of their past and their connection remains. Their shared separation is embodied by a thing whose scale surpasses them in time and space. It is an impersonal geoformation whose anonymous presence keeps watch over the instant of their beginning and their everlasting end. In the Introduction I described the queerness of stones that surpass the temporal limits of human mortality and their persistence into an unknowable future. The stony mountain provides a kind of queer horizon for Ennis and Jack, what tropes their relationship and what remains in excess of it. It is a promise that even as their time together comes to a close, something will remain for a time yet to come. Levinas argues, “The disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear, the sheer fact of being in which *one* participates, whether one wants to or not, without having taken the initiative, anonymously” (*Existence* 58). It is not over when it's over. When the men's life together disappears, what remains is their strange stoniness that persists in Ennis.

After Jack dies and Ennis is alone is his trailer, Ennis clutches the nested pair of shirts that Jack has kept for so many years and stares at a postcard of Brokeback Mountain. Ennis's mourning interior is mirrored in the looming exterior of the mountain, whose exposed photograph he keeps close in the enclosed space of the trailer. The inside becomes indistinct

against the vigilance of the outside, and that outside becomes the image of a rapport that never became a relationship. The mountain stands in for what Ennis and Jack had and also for what they did *not* have. The *il y a* is both presence and the absence of presence, and for Ennis and Jack what remains is importantly what never came to be as well as what did beyond and in-between the field of local connections and attachments. Ennis's enduring defiance to human norms is also expressed by the mountain's vast scale and solidity. For Levinas mountainous bodies are a source of language for what in the human recoils from its own kind. "[When] in the *Illiad*," he says, "the resistance to an attack by an enemy phalanx is compared to the resistance of a rock to the waves that assail it, it is not necessarily a matter of extending to the rock, through anthropomorphism, a human behaviour, but of interpreting human resistance petromorphically" ("Meaning and Sense" 37). Brokeback Mountain contains no human desire or drive to resist, but the inhuman qualities of the mountain reside in Ennis's softer form. Nature against human nature, nature as the omnipresent capacity for becoming more than what one is, limns the quiet cowboy's queerly-marked desire and revolt. Ennis is intermixed in the world beyond him, and this continuity with absolute alterity leaves open his rapport with the past and future that enclose him. In the final scene of the film the camera turns from Ennis's tearful face to the postcard of the mountain, zooming into the image before the door to the closet slams shut and the mountain is again enclosed. The outside is enclosed in an inside like the nested shirts. It remains there inside the negation of the closet, as if that withholding space of secrecy could contain the world, which it does.

In *Existence and Existents* Levinas proposes two seemingly contradictory conditions. "Solitude," he claims, "is accursed not of itself, but by reason of its ontological significance as something definitive" (85). As the self tries to leap away from the *il y a* towards otherness, there

is no escape from itself, its own relation to the world. “The *I* always has one foot caught in its own existence. Outside in face of everything ... [the I] is riveted to its own being” (84). The other condition challenges the definitive state of the human: “[Reaching the other] is, on the ontological level, the event of the most radical breakup of the very categories of the ego, for it is for me to be somewhere else than my self ... to not be a definite existence” (85). Solitude both is and is not definitive – how can this be? Let us resolve this seeming paradox by suggesting that solitude cannot be purged from the human precisely because it indexes a trace in the human that is something other than humanness, the indefinite or inhuman part of the human.

In *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas addresses solitude in a language his later texts appear to forget. *Difficult Freedom* was released between the first two publications to make Levinas a well-known philosopher, *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise Than Being* (1974), and is often placed in a category separate from the “philosophical” texts for its Jewish subject matter. The text comes out of Levinas's Talmudic study, and through several short chapters – some added quite a bit after initial publication – describes *halakhic* practice (Jewish law) to challenge representations of Judaism mediated by Christian readings of Jewish texts. The ethical relationship is introduced here as an explanation of Jewish ethics. In this text that is “solitary” among the others, Levinas describes an enduring solitude of the human that stands apart from both earlier and later commentary on the subject. I invoke a passage from the chapter on the feminine, not for its discussion of gender relations but for its commentary on otherness, which here is named the feminine:

> Woman does not simply come to someone deprived of companionship to keep him company. She answers to a solitude inside this privation and – which is stranger – to a

> solitude that subsists in spite of the presence of God; to a solitude in the universal, to the inhuman which continues to well up even when the human has mastered nature and raised it to thought. (*Difficult* 33)

Levinas's parataxis takes us from an internal negativity deeper than social isolation, that persists through transcendence beyond being, through the universal, to the inhuman. Human companionship addresses this deep negativity, but it cannot obliterate it if it persists even in the presence of God. It conquers the conqueror and, perhaps more importantly, exceeds the thought of conquering or mastery. Woman is the one, Levinas says, "who does not conquer," and as such she resembles the inhuman solitude within even as she "addresses" it. Nature raised to thought is bound up in practices of *philosophy* that conquer with the production of logocentrism, co-presence, and relations of knowledge and consciousness that commit the violence of the universal concept. The violence of the universal, particularly the universal in thought, is linked to and beset by this ineliminable solitude of the human that is stranger than the simple privation of companionship. Importantly, Levinas invokes the inhuman here not to mean dehumanization but something elemental to the human. Dehumanization, the subject of which is present in some of Levinas's other work, supplies a universal concept of the human and how it should be treated and valued that excludes what comes to be excluded from the category. Here, dehumanization is part of the apparatus of the universal concept of the human, what the inhuman interrupts in its foiling of human mastery. In the universal is a singularity of the human that wants to master by universalizing and whose particularity undoes its own mastery: Both a structure of colonization and what undoes that structure from within. The movement from companionship to God to the universal to the inhuman bears witness to a developing conception of solitude that is first

understood as a stranger that persists in the presence of others (even God, the ultimately reliable other), and is finally seen to persist in the human through a radical abjection of its humanity. That is, the human is unique – alone – among creatures for its ability to negate humanity while remaining human. To be sure, such an ability contains the potential for awful violence. In *Brokeback Mountain,* for example, the man Earl whose body Ennis is forced to view as a child is castrated like the livestock that would have been raised in the area. He is killed *like an animal* but remains human and is made an example to his community. The human is the only creature that can be killed as something other than itself while still remaining human.

Levinas's observation also has more subtle implications. The inhuman expresses the stranger or the *il y a* inside the human, what can only disrupt the legible form we call human. If the universal, as Levinas calls it, includes "humanity" as a universal concept, solitude is the negative force that finds the human creature alone from its humanity, alone from philosophy, or the mastery that defines both. As I suggested above, Ennis's affected expressions are evidence of a character who is inhuman while believing himself to be human. Not only is he composed of the two leads, but the "psychosomatisms" (52) Miller notices are evidence of a body that does not quite know how to move like a human, or that is discomfited in the body of a human, not quite knowing how to move the shoulders, how to look at others through eyes, how to hold itself. He appears to be at home on horseback, but seems to lack a relation of consciousness to his own body. Ennis is what in the human recoils from humanity.

For Levinas there is something inhuman in the face-to-face interaction even as it overwhelms me with human visibility. The totalizing ethical relation that Levinas describes as the face-to-face interaction also creates room for an enduring inhuman solitude that is not obliterated by the other's proximity. From *Difficult Freedom:*

> In the ethical relation, the Other is presented at the same time as being absolutely other, but this radical relation in alterity to me does not destroy or deny my freedom, as philosophers believe. The ethical relation is anterior to the opposition of freedoms, the war which, in Hegel's view, inaugurates History. My neighbour's face has an alterity which is not allergic, but opens up the beyond. (18)

This passage comes out of Levinas's claim that the relation of transcendence to God is expressed in human relations. The relation of human corporeality is so important in Levinas because it is the only relation to God. A truly powerful God, he says, wishes for believers to have the capacity to doubt, even and especially to the point of atheism, and to return to faith of their own accord. God's confidence, as he calls it, requires a wide degree of freedom in believers. The role of the intellect enters into the divine relation as the capacity given to the human to come to belief on its own. In the passage above the face-to-face relation is the avenue for transcendence. By that, I mean that the relation of the corporeal body confronted and shattered by the corporeal body of the other is not strictly exclusive as Levinas describes it in later writing. Something non-corporal is activated even as the absolute singularity of the human body is the point of activation. Inside this "exclusive" interaction is an interaction of being with what is beyond being. In other words, the human is alone with God only when it faces corporeality. Here is where the human is indefinite, where it is released from its ontological fixation; in its proximity to the other, it is opened to what is beyond them both. The human ego is obliterated in the encounter, but the inhuman kernel persists in its solitude before what is beyond the human, what is also inhuman.

The relation of being to what is beyond being is also evident in the message conveyed by the face. "Thou Shalt Not Kill" is a commandment that comes from God's mouth and does not

originate with the precarious body, although it is expressed through it and only through it. The relation to the other shelters something beyond it that is not reducible to the other's body. The human mediates that relation, becoming a kind of secret of the presence of what is beyond it. This other relation to what is beyond being is permitted by human freedom, that sliver of solitude that remains in my relation with the other and ensures I always also maintain a relation to what is reliably beyond it. If Ennis's mourning is a freedom, as I have called it, it is a difficult freedom. In *Brokeback Mountain,* Ennis's relation to Jack is always also a relation to the mountain, to what is beyond Jack. Ennis's sights always appear to be focused just beyond what is in front of him, as if trained on an object that remains out of view. The wandering eyes Miller observes follow something always out of view of the camera, a something that is indexed by what is always in view of the camera, the mountain.

Coda: "I am writing:"

To conclude, I return to Blanchot's dismissal of the writer who says, "I am alone." Perhaps Jack was thinking this as he composed a postcard to Ennis. It is a phrase that invites derision for its melodrama and its myopia, and yet in choosing this phrase Blanchot picks up on a common sentiment for writers. In *The Decision Between Us,* Ricco claims from the first sentence that the space of shared separation is not solitary but shared. This is especially interesting because it follows on the coattails of Ricco's "Acknowledgments," at the end of which Ricco names two things he needs to write: "a quiet place of solitude and being happy" (*Decision* xii). Where does Ricco's happy solitude fit in the non-solitary space of shared separation, and what kind of space exists between solitude and happiness such that together they allow Ricco to write?

Sedgwick joins Ricco and Blanchot's writer in describing the writing process as "highly relational but, in practical terms, [a] solitary pleasure and adventure" (*Tendencies* 110).

Sedgwick is responding here to Roger Kimball's denunciation of her essay, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," as "mental masturbation," a damning epithet that refers to a foundational open secret about the opacity of the relational yet solitary practice of writing. How writing comes into being through pleasurable practices often outside the gaze of others, speaks to the potentially queer disorientations by which we create knowledge. What was meant as an epithet of the progressive influence of sexuality in English studies gone awry actually points to a queer truth about the production of writing. Masturbation, the usually solitary activity in which sexual energy is routed through imagination, relates to the interiorized process of writing in which one synthesizes one's knowledge and impressions to produce one's own knowledge. Similarly, the synthetic or inventive thought of masturbation strives to produce fantasy and images that *work,* that have a performative function. In writing, too, something is somehow made through these circumspect channels. How many of us have referred to or heard others refer to our writing as "my baby?" If children are created (not always, but as the ideal by-product) by sexual connection, writing and even the dark night of Kant's thoughts are created through the withholding space of a quiet solitude.

The self's capacity for solitude is a characteristic of its rich rapport with the world, its ability to make something from the totality of its experiences. Solitude is a technique of the self that enables a rapport with alterity, but for rapport to become creation, the self reflects upon its solitude. According to Winnicott, creativity can only occur from a space of "desultory formless functioning" (*Playing* 64), what he calls a neutral zone. This intermediary state shares with Ricco the connotations of separation and *désoeuvrement* that we have connected with solitude. In the

neutral zone the self enters a free space founded upon its coming-undone, the "unintegration of personality" (64), that when reflected back allows the self to propose its own existence. Only in the neutrality of the self can it flounder and roam freely until its own existence becomes the first thing it makes and continues to make as it changes. Here, "[n]o longer are we an introvert or extrovert. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals" (64). Neither an introvert or an extrovert, as he begins, the self need not be a defined *subject* when its relation to the outside becomes open to development and growth, the intervals between its performances.

The writer needs her space of quiet solitude to come undone and to be exposed to the world of thought with a flexibility and openness that her social subjectivity cannot afford her. She must create something from a place that cannot be reduced to a relationship with the world. When writing we orient ourselves in proximity to the thinkers we read and quote, whose indifference to us gives us the space to write something different. We enter the midst of a sociality generalized to a zone of the nameless and faceless. We are *no one*, and in being no-one we are any-one. But a *one* nonetheless. We are the one of an alterity that does not differentiate, part of the solitude of the generalized multiplicity of otherness.

Unmoored and unsure of the margins of her world, the writer may experience this state every bit as haunting and torturous as happy. Having knowledge of the social world draws her further into the abyss, where language takes on the desultory margins of existence inside the human. Werner Hamacher points out that "language on the one hand thematizes, objectifies, and defines, and on the other hand is emancipated as an unthematized, objectless, addressless

movement of alteration (122). That is, our words relate to specific objects in our vicinity that provide our footing in language, but our words never belong to us alone and will be shared with others. Words exist when no one is there to listen. This oscillation yields the stance of solitude when the writer sinks down into the repletion of existence. She is the vessel for the light of language's definition and the darkness of its indistinctions. And while bearing the solitude of language may be painful, it is clear that as Ricco points out the writer will still choose solitude over the crowd when writing, and this position still affords happiness and pleasure.

The sweetness of aloneness is a pleasure that is like anguish. What is the substance of its realness? What does it mean to feel real, to feel like a real human, if humanity is what one escapes to feel real? Indeed, the pleasure of solitude must take the shape of the terrible realness of the human – the human that is vulnerable, that suffers, that can never be responsible enough, and for whom responsibility is the site of humanity's murderous violence. We go off alone only to return to the bitter realness of our human bodies. "Materiality is thickness, coarseness, massivity, wretchedness. It is what has consistency, weight, is absurd, is a brute but impassive presence; it is also what is humble, bare and ugly (Levinas, *Existence* 57). The realness is the truth of our corporeality and its ephemerality in the world. And yet in this *eksasis* we find ourselves again and again reveling in the indifferent facts of material existence. If the *New York Times* is right, and connection is at the heart of human well-being, it may be the case that the meanings of being alone are those of the inhuman, and that the sense of realness that arrives to the solitaire is the realness and restlessness of the inhuman inside the human. Like Brokeback Mountain, the continuity of the world inside the solitary creature takes the form of inhuman things towards which we flee from the masses.

Chapter Two: Cinematic Indifference

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! -- Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

— *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly

We had been dating only a few months when we decided to grab a picnic blanket and walk to a waterfall in our city. I remember that it was a very warm, bright day, and that we walked around the breezy park looking at the falls before setting down our blanket to enjoy the rest of the day in repose. As we relaxed, I thought about how beautiful she looked, and I asked if I could take her picture. She agreed, and I raised my camera phone to her face. I took the picture, but her image appeared on my screen all wrong; it was her face at the angle at which I had been admiring it, but the photograph was missing what I had wanted to capture. It was her and not her. I took several more, impatient and bewildered with these anamorphic photos, because the images came back pretty but banal, blind to something about her face that was so clear to me. Much later, I guessed that that must have been the time that I had fallen in love, evidenced by the fact that the autonomous camera lens was indifferent to what had become plainly evident to me. A photograph does not love, after all, and yet through its own powers of subtraction I could see what I was and what I knew against its eliminating gaze.

That the photographic image seems disinterested in a world in which humans are highly invested has not escaped the notice of thinkers of photography and cinema. Cinematic automatism is the name given to what a range of film theorists including André Bazin, Jacques

Rancière, Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Stanley Cavell have described as the technologically-mediated representation of the world yielded by the photographic basis of the cinematic apparatus. For Rancière, automatism reveals truths of the playful, meandering, non-teleological content of life, which by his account does not follow dramatic progression. Echoing Jean Epstein, who argues against the focus on dramatic narrative in the cinema, Rancière states,

> Life has nothing to do with dramatic progression, but is instead a long and continuous movement made up of an infinity of micro-movements. The truth about life has finally found an art capable of doing it justice, an art in which the intelligence that creates reversals of fortune and the dramatic conflicts is subject to another intelligence, the intelligence of the machine that wants nothing, that does not construct any stories, but simply records the infinity of movements that gives rise to a drama a hundred times more intense than all dramatic reversals of fortune. (2)

The non-human intelligence of the camera lens is sensitive to complex and chaotic phenomena, what David L. Clark calls the "camera's hospitality" ("Remains" 163). These motions can be elided or instrumentalized by subjective perception and selection, or the human's desire to humanize the inhuman photograph. Cinematic automatism is not to be confused, suggests Rancière, with an identical reproduction of things, but performs a kind of ontological work that the human eye cannot; that is, the camera shows a world coming into being outside human rationality, permitting us to see our world through a decentred gaze. Similarly, Bazin credits the camera with an "instrumentality of a nonliving agent" (7), which for many makes it a compelling source of evidence that may compete with human testimony. Dziva Vertov praised this capability

of the camera to expose facts of the world in his early speeches for what would later become known as documentary film. But cinematic automatism is perhaps best known as the cornerstone of Cavell's philosophy of film in his 1971 book, *The World Viewed* (1979). Automatism produces a representation that circumvents subjective intervention, and Cavell identifies automatism as the artistic medium of cinema, placing cinema alongside other representative arts in the modernist tradition.

Cameras have a way of “looking” at the world that is different from human perception. They create representation without subjectivity, the visual without vision. They are nature denatured. As the contrast between my opening example and the comments of these thinkers show, photographic perception is both subtractive and additive with respect to human vision: distant from mortal preoccupations and yet also more attuned to the complex and minute movements of reality. Its precise relation to or difference from human perception is too mobile to state, and this disunity is part of what charges automatism with such intrigue. Rerouted through the lens, one cannot help but develop a queer relation to one's own vision, as Victor Frankenstein does upon regenerating the dead parts of his creature. The epigraph above is one of the most stirring pre-cinematic moments I have encountered in English literature. Upon opening its eyes, the monster changes instantly for Victor from a beautiful creation to a horrifying creature. Why? How? Victor's body seems to respond to these queries where his cognition cannot, swooning into a hysterical fever, his automatic functions mimicking the perceived change of the creature's body in his own. His own speech halts and convulses in alliterative, plosive repetitions (-- Great God!) along with the creature. The novel omits the exact moment of the creature's regeneration, as if the novel, Victor, Robert Walton, and Shelley herself recede in the instant of life, the first exposure to the world. The creature is alone for no more than that instant of its creation – that

cinematic ellipsis – and that instant makes all the difference for Victor, who upon making a human realizes that even for this creature, made in the image of humans, *the human* is not its primary point of reference. Its body disputes everything Victor is and Victor knows. He finds himself disoriented in the midst of a world that is indifferent to his ambitions. The camera may be inhuman and it may radically decentre the human, but the wish it satisfies to view the world itself or as it is (101; 165), argues Cavell, is all too human. In the capriciousness of its own logic or illogic, the automatic apparatus does not so much lie outside the margins of human perception as it effaces that anthropocentric difference between the human and the non-human, locating the human indifferently in the midst of a non-human universe.

What I call cinematic indifference is connected to another wish expressed in queer theory, the wish to be impersonal or anonymous. Where in so many daily interactions and prescribed forms of intimacy pleasure is derived from recognition and knowledge of the individual, in queer social spaces one finds pleasure in being, as Leo Bersani argues, less than oneself. "Pleasure does not serve an interest, satisfy a passion, or fulfill a desire," he says, "It is an intransitive pleasure intrinsic to a certain mode of existence, a self-subtracted being. A willingness to be less – a certain kind of ascetic disposition – introduces us (perhaps reintroduces us) to the pleasure of rhythmed being" ("Sociability" 11). What Bersani describes is a dis-interested pleasure, which is to say a pleasure invested otherwise than in the survival and the interests of the individual. Recall that interest without self-interest is how Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida describe disinterest, and this radical concept of disinterest is constitutive of social and aesthetic relations, what Bersani argues is an intrinsic pleasure of existing "at the abstract level of pure being" (11) from which we cannot personally profit (22). As a disinterested

encounter with the outside, impersonality calls one into the social at the very moment one's subjectivity ceases to be recognized by it.

I make a distinction between indifference and the type of non-recognition that leads to social death. To be called into the social for the purpose of a refusal of recognition may be structurally analogous to homophobia. In the camera's disinterest towards its subjects, the human is one impersonal creature among others included laterally in the frame. For the camera, “the social” is a radically heterogeneous domain constituted by the shared inhabitancy of anonymous beings. All is anonymous in the cinematic gaze not because of a structural abjection but, conversely, an undifferentiating inclusivity incepted by the withdrawal of subjectivity from apperceptive and chemical processes and the properties of the image. The cinematic image, in other words, is its own queer sociality.

Film always retains a trace of the impersonal. This is to say that the work of the director, cinematographer, or editor is not negligible or eliminated, but that this subjective work does not eliminate the trace of the autonomous apparatus. The work of the director, cinematographer, or editor, says Nibuya Takashi, emerges out of a conflict with the automaton because “they must change the 'nobody's look' of the camera/film into 'somebody's point-of-view' ... But it cannot be completely successful ... nihilism is an essential attribute of the camera/film, and it is impossible to wipe it out perfectly” (126). The indifference of cinema is therefore also subject to an attempt at “subtraction,” but the incomplete subtraction leaves a set of remains, and it is the occasion for our own pleasures of subtraction. The subjective work of filmmaking and film-viewing dwells inside and through the film's indifference, such that the division between the subject and the automaton cannot be discerned. To find oneself inside a film is the stuff of horror films, and the automaton holds that necessary distance by which we can be the “nobody” that the film pushes to

its margins but that traverses every frame. Cinema satisfies that deep wish in its capacity, as John Paul Ricco suggests in *The Logic of the Lure* (2002), to be "a blinding that takes our sight away (elsewhere), in an incessant approach towards the limits of sight, the place or perspective of no one" (46).

The automatism of the cinematic apparatus that satisfies the wish of a self-subtracted representation of the world opens us up to a queer way of looking at the world. I say queer not to suggest that all films are queer or even that most are, but to mark a relation to film that thrums with the impersonal, the anonymous, and the inhuman. By any account our relation to film is erotic; we are drawn to movies and they please us. We even say that our fantasies and dreams are like films. But films are a location of fantasies we share but that are not ours. The fantasy I enjoy on screen is not my own design and I am not a part of its design. Our desires are activated not in spite of but because of the camera that subtracts us from its representations. This is one way that watching films is different from having dreams: dreams are about us, but films never are. The contradiction is that they expose us to a representation of the world "as it is," but one that is never *our* world. We are drawn to that difference, but it is a difference that looks like sameness, and *that* type of vision is something we both claim as our own but that we cannot perform ourselves. In film what looks most familiar comes from somewhere else, as if it were an example of parallel evolution, or the development of the same organ in different creatures from entirely different aetiologies. We cannot see the world automatically, which is to say, without subjectivity. When I say the cinematic gaze is queer, I mean that it is irreducibly different from human gazes, but not by a difference that can necessarily be recognized *as* difference. Because the cinematic apparatus was modelled after the human visual apparatus, the cinematic image often looks like our own. Nevertheless, it exposes us to something alien and strange outside of

our own capacities. The content of that difference, or the way it is different from us, is that while our subjective vision gives us a differential relation to the world (I can think about the world as not-me or about myself reflexively), automatic vision is indifferent to what it "views." What the cinematic apparatus records and projects is the result of an exposure without reflection, a representation of desire that has come from no desire. The camera does not love, but as my prefatory example suggests, it is where we look when we expect to find love, where we look for desire and pleasure and fantasy. (What was the reason I wanted to take a picture?) Only through this film of indifference, this window of alien sight that subtracts the human, can I interact with fantasy otherwise than through subjectivity. This is not to say that what I perceive in film is not then routed through my subjective apparatus, or that there is even a moment "before" that happens; it is only to say that I am stirred by something that subtracts me and my way of seeing, and that when I reach beyond myself I need something stranger than my own imagination.

This chapter is concerned with the lure of the indifferent gaze and how it is put to work in queer cinema. Since the photographic basis of film is the source of what I have called indifference, my first move will be to explore critical commentary on cinematic automatism. Part 1, "Automatisms," brings early film theories of automatism into conversation. Specifically, I review theory in relation to Bazin, whose realist theories of photography are often recognized as the earliest source of philosophy for what later gets called cinematic automatism. Bazin is one of two film thinkers who provokes Cavell's *The World Viewed.* Cinematic automatism is the fulcrum of this well-known text, which argues for the recognition of cinema as a modernist art. For Cavell, it defines the tight relationship between the image and extra-cinematic reality and informs a phenomenology of the movies organized by the distances and estrangements between the viewer and the image and within the subject as viewer. Cinema, Cavell says, addresses a

human wish to see the world "as it is," but I wish to give the temporal delays inherent in photographic reproduction a greater role by exploring how the cinematic image comes closer to a world seen "as it was." We are never contemporaneous with the world-projections in film. Takashi's work on nihilism in Japanese-American cinema is founded upon the impact of the belated image. For him the temporalities inherent in automized production and viewing endow every image with a "slight rancidness" (Takashi 124). Our distance from the cinema is not only our viewing a scene that does not include us, but our viewing the product of an exposure that preceded our viewing and that is always already a view from the past. From here I move into a discussion of a queer film that bends towards the time of the height of the AIDS epidemic in New York City and that mourns the losses of queer artists who died of AIDS-related complications. Part 2, "*Last Address*," looks at Ira Sachs's short film, *Last Address* (2010), as a film reflecting on and reperforming cinematic automatism to address cinema's role in witnessing the AIDS epidemic. When humans forget, or were never there to attest to the past, can film serve as an inhuman witness to violence and loss? And if film "views" differently than we do, what is the value of this self-subtracted witness for the human? How does film's afterness inform the role it is so often given as a source of evidence? I am not interested in the film as a document of the epidemic – although it does draw upon some conventions of documentary – so much as I am interested in its capacity to attest without the capacities of subjectivity. Can a mechanism with no thoughts, feelings, or consciousness provide testimony? In this section I also demonstrate the relevance of Cavell's modernist theory to postmodernist film, not in an effort to identify the theory with either movement, but by travelling from realism to modernism to postmodernism I endeavour to situate automatism within a wider non-anthropocentric context and to the side of these three humanizing and historicizing movements. *Last Address* features a progression of long

takes of dwellings – the last addresses of some of the artists who died of AIDS-related complications in New York City – but it breaks this focus to show us animals. Birds fly over a roof, they dwell on drainpipes, and an orange cat grabs the attention of the camera. Part 3, "Cinema Animal," explores the indifferent gaze of the camera through the figure of the animal. The animal is another silent witness to the activities of human life and its own and it, too, has a gaze that is different from ours. I draw upon Derrida's notes about the gaze of the non-human, Anat Pick's extensive writing about film and the animal across her work, and David L. Clark's "What Remains to be Seen" (2015), on the animal witness to twentieth-century atrocity. Animals are living beings, but like film the animal is a non-human co-presence that encounters human activity. Insofar as it remains at the end of the world, its body retains something of a world not of its own design.

Part 1: *Automatisms*

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—

— from "Bright Star," John Keats

I have stated that cinematic automatism renders a representation that is different from human perception, not because the cinematic image necessarily looks different from our perceptions (I noted that it often looks the same), but because it is generated by a non-human apparatus that human subjectivity does not erase. Before moving forward with this idea, I wish to provide some context for it by reviewing several automatisms theorized by early twentieth-century film thinkers and more contemporary philosophers. Automatism is a fulcrum for arguments about the relation between cinema's material apparatus, the world, and human subjectivity and the capacity of the human to see its world and represent it. Indeed, I do not think it too bold to state that at the

centre of theoretical debates about automatism is the convergence and divergence of the human and the non-human as well as the question of what should count as human and what should count as non-human.

Bazin, Kracauer, Vertov, and Béla Belázs are among the earliest thinkers to define photography and cinema by what will later be called automatism. Bazin's lifelong interest in photographic realism, captured most succinctly in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1960), turns upon his conviction in the shared ontology of nature and photography and the recession of the photographer from the production of the photographic image. Photography is different from the “baroque arts,” as he calls them, because “only photography derives a benefit from [the human's] absence” (Bazin 7). For Bazin the plenitude of the photograph hails from an embeddedness in the world that decentres the photographer as well as humanizing habits of world-viewing. The human bears the camera, but the camera nonetheless remains outside her individualized autonomy and its subjugating relation to the impersonal world. Realism, in the Bazinian sense, therefore generates a powerful intercession of alterity in the automatic reproduction of the world with regard to vision. There is nothing that is “lost” in the photograph because the relation of the photograph to the world is not subjugation but, to borrow the words of Jacques Khalip, “anonymous saturation *in* the world” (*Anonymous* 14). Beholding a photograph provides a foreign view, not only because the photograph isolates the image “from the conditions of time and space” (Bazin 8) but because it contains a non-anthropocentric receptivity to the world “that our eyes alone could not have taught us to love” (9). Our instinct to turn to photography and film to find love complicates intersubjective notions of love, for as Bazin suggests it emerges from a profilmic relation with an inanimate, non-human attentiveness. In his meditations on the photographic *punctum* or wound, Roland Barthes also saw the affective lure

of photography's mechanical and chemical processes, identifying not its representations but the mutability of “light,” what he claimed, “though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed” (qtd. in Smith, “Photography” 34). John Keats knew something about film and love. Love arrests when staring at the *bright star* of a remote screen through its indifferent, otherworldly gaze: a light travelling to earth from a time that has already passed. Embracing alterity in the realist image is not a negation of classical realism, for as Clark writes, “realism is the occasion of dynamic translations and displacements – apperceptive, chemical – vis-à-vis 'nature' rather than a bare encounter with anything like an in-itself or 'real'” (“Remains” 161).

Bazinian realism is continuous with the photographic theories of Vertov and Belázs that have been called modernist by some current thinkers. These latter theories focus on the superiority of the camera to capture the minutiae of reality in comparison to the capacities of the human eye. For Vertov, the use of film as correspondence to or imitation of human vision entails the “pitiable slavery” (14) of the camera and its “subordination to the imperfections and short sightedness of the human eye” (14). The camera, which is “more perfect than the human eye” (15), is put to better use (liberated, as he says) for the “exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space” (15). Unlike Bazin, Vertov can only tolerate the camera's anonymity by personifying it as *vision* (of a subjugated worker) in an exploratory relation to space. The “kino-eye,” as it was called, redoubles the subjugating eye of the autonomous human in its relation to the impersonal; film's generation of “facts” from the maw of chaos relies upon the reimposition of the subjugating eye to reify the otherness of which the cinematic apparatus is also a part.

Belázs's less personified perspective is drawn from the camera's sensitivity to detail and the option to manipulate its scale of view to exercise its revelatory capacity:

> By means of the close-up the camera in the days of the silent film revealed also the hidden mainsprings of a life that we had thought we already knew so well ... We skim over the teeming substance of life. The camera has uncovered that cell life of the vital issues in which all great events are ultimately conceived; for the greatest landslide is only the aggregate of the movements of single particles. A multitude of close-ups can show us the very instant in which the general is transformed into the particular. The close-up has not only widened our vision of life, it has also deepened it. (Belázs 211)

The camera's likeness to the microscope provides a unique relationship to material life that reveals theological or metaphysical relevance to the material world. At once transcendental and revelatory, immanent and arresting, Belázs's camera has prophetic qualities that are attuned to activities of non-human actants and the continuous relations among physical phenomena and between the physical and the dramatic. Vertov claims for the human the totalizing power to throttle or liberate the gaze of the subjugated camera – a power, therefore, that is absolute in its ability to manipulate a gaze more perfect than itself. But the close-up to which Belázs gives such primacy glosses the camera's embeddedness in a world that in teeming with itself is already greater than the human, the camera, and the world's own substance. For Belázs, the camera addresses our mortal limitations by revealing a world that is not ours but to which our relations of perception and knowledge are never fixed. The impassive indifference of the camera, and not

the human's cognition, opens a space for God to slip through and become composed by an asubjective, non-affective nihilty.[45]

The camera's use in biology and mathematics was a source of interest for Bazin as well, for whom reality's feral movements are expressed not only in images of non-humans but the shared dwelling space of human and non-human life. For Bazin, “the telescope and the microscope,” says Angela Dalle Vacche, “serve an anti-anthropocentric mission, as they situate human experience in a context whose scale is nonhuman, either incredibly small or unbelievably massive” (147). The potential obscenity of these detailed sights also occupied Bazin. The expansive or even numinous visual field becomes obscene when the camera's realist gaze is turned upon the human. As Linda Williams argues, it is the cinema's realism that makes pornography a threat to those who would censor it. Automization transports the human outside itself with regard to its body and its own familiarity, giving the cinematic gaze its “inherent and unprecedented obscenity” (Williams 185). Suddenly embedded in the hospitable view of the film, the independent human sees herself dispossessed. Her estranging anonymity on screen contributes to that chilling cinematic effect, found most readily in pornographic and violent films, of showing people as anonymous bodies, and as bodies that are always bodies among other bodies. Bazin's and Williams's obscenity is a telling record of the deracination of the person becoming body on screen. However, let us not simply accept Williams's normative

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[45] Similar to Bazin's ontological theory, Belázs's camera performs ontological work that interestingly resembles some terms of contemporary philosophical inquiry on the relationship between Identity and difference. The camera not only captures changes in scale but also the *movement* between scales when “the general is transformed into the particular.” Giorgio Agamben's philosophy is structured according to an analogous relationship between what he calls “the common and the proper,” and François Laruelle's non-philosophy identifies the relationship between conditioning and conditioned terms, or the transcendental and the immanent. Agamben and Laruelle are jointly concerned with the philosophical terms developed to make the world an object of knowledge, and both their vocabularies are variants of the divide between the general and the particular and their co-constituting relationship. Belázs's observation taps into a key philosophical debate about how knowledge divides the world to represent it for itself.

characterization of the human body as somehow self-evidently obscene or grotesque. Williams takes the camera's realism at face value rather than regard these effects as the dynamic reinventions and captures of the self and the self's relations to others by the pornographic gaze. To what could we attribute the camera's obscenity? By lateralizing human bodies in postures of intimacy and vulnerability, the pornographic gaze captures the impersonality and inhumanness of sexuality. Framed non-anthropocentrically, sexuality is also seen to be radically shared, which is to say not as a product of individual bodies exposed but as the continuous relation with whatever else shares the frame. Where in extra-cinematic life we are often compelled to say no to the impersonal body and the impersonality of relations, the pornographic gaze says no to the no of the impersonal body on screen, and this double negation is the human's own indifferent perception of the body in a non-anthropocentric context. The impersonality of screen bodies is perhaps what generates the urgent need to create star "personalities" of the actor.

While pornography is a limit-case, it reveals the deep ambiguity Bazin registered in cinematic realism when the human is made to behold itself from outside the enclosure of its subjectivity. Misanthropy is as much a product of this extreme ambiguity as is wonder. In a pre-cinematic example, Lemuel Gulliver's voyage to Brobdingnag in *Gulliver's Travels* brings about his misanthropic and his misogynist disgust at the human form. Beholding his enlarged hostess nursing her baby, he confesses that

> no Object ever disgusted me so much as the sight of her monstrous Breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with, so as to give the curious Reader an Idea of its Bulk, Shape and Colour. It stood prominent six Foot, and could not be less than sixteen in Circumference. The Nipple was about half the Bigness of my Head, and the Hew both of

that and the Dug so varified with Spots, Pimples and Freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous. (Swift 82-3)

Gulliver's hostility is a product of the deep unease of being a human that is situated, to repeat Vacche, in a massive context whose scale is nonhuman. Were Swift to live another one hundred and fifty years, he would have recognized his enlarged reality of Brobdingnag in the scalar modulations of photography and then film. Swift presages the cold indifference of the camera to human embodiment, the flatness with which it decreates everything in its path. His disgust is directed not only at the unappealing body but also at the recognition of the human's material kinship with what it might see as inferior, a world generously composed of flesh and sinews. Swift's descriptions remind me of our near-universal cine-phobia, in which we see ourselves on film and wince at the image. Driver's license or passport photos are kept shamefully hidden, revealed only at obligatory encounters with the State.[46] "Is that what I really look like?" seems to be the common underside to our attraction to images of cells, landscapes, or pets.

The misanthropy of embodiment was exploited during the peak of the AIDS crisis in the West when the wasting bodies of people living with AIDS became a central source of imagery for the crisis and reinforced panicked fears about the threat of queer and other marginalized people. Therese Frare's famous 1990 photograph of David Kirby on his death bed that appeared in *LIFE,* for example, borrowed the visual evidence of disease to generate a shocking image of the impact of AIDS on the human body and the family. The photograph simultaneously attracts sympathy and sentimentality as it repulses viewers with the spectacle of disease.[47] Queer media

[46] This, as if our recognition by the State were necessarily twinned with a misanthropic reckoning with our real or disciplined selves. "I see myself as the State sees me," these encounters express.

[47] Ann Rooney's colourization of the photograph to create the 1992 Benetton clothing advertisement introduces a suite of questions about the impact of this photograph specifically and the relation between photography and other representative arts. Rooney's description of her colourized design as an "oil painting" (to make the black-and-white

also made use of these images, for example David France's film *How To Survive A Plague* (2012), which begins with a montage of images of wasting bodies as an introduction to its narrative of the rise and fragmentation of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). At the same time, independent publications like *Diseased Pariah News* parodied the trope of the diseased body as the index of AIDS to draw attention to the visual codes by which AIDS became an object of knowledge.[48] When I note the potential of the camera to turn against the human and to be used for this purpose, it should be said that not all humans are treated equally before the lens. Queers, but also women, racialized, and disabled people, have a history of victimization by those who exploit the camera's use as an instrument of control for the creation and maintenance of power disparities.[49] As I noted, the photographic imaginary contains the dream of mastery of the material world, for the expanded view it confers corroborates a colonialist fantasy of total access.

Where for Belázs and his compeers, photographs reveal things the human cannot see (and might not want to see), Benjamin's invocation of an "optical unconscious" suggests that photography and film capture what the human might have seen, but did not. The image picks up

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photograph look more "realistic") suggests a disquieted reaction to the photograph *as* photograph. Its reconstitution into this other form for advertising evidences both its inherent power and the powerful *lack* that drives Oliviero Toscani, then the creative director of Benetton, to select and alter the photograph to sell Benetton's clothing line. The strong desire this photo generates to add, complete, supplement, or fix shows how misanthropy, itself a very complicated relation between the human and itself, is put to work to generate desire, identification, curiosity, and the other affects at work to engineer spending habits. Advertising creates an impression of the consumer's own lack, convincing her that she also requires supplementation. There is something unbearable about Frare's photograph, which is both why Toscani selects it and must alter it. For more information about Benetton's colourization, see Alexandra Genova's "The Story Behind the Colorization of a Controversial Benetton AIDS Ad" (2016).

[48] For example, see the cover of issue #10 of *Diseased Pariah News,* which depicts an emaciated Senator Jessie Helms bending forward and looking back at the stream of smoke wafting up from the stack of cigarettes lodged in his anus. See also the satirical advertisement in that issue for "AIDS Barbies," including "Kaposi's Sarcoma Ken:" A Ken doll posed with lesions on its body.

[49] See Nicole R. Fleetwood's use of the polyvalent concept "rendering" to describe the *formation* of racialized subjects in visual media. Fleetwood's discussion of the performative function of black subjects in film points to the joint technological and social practices of constituting or rendering visual subjects (7).

what the human is present for but did not experience, what is "perceptible yet covert enough to find shelter in daydreams" (Benjamin, "History" 7). Like Rancière, he awards the instruments of art in the age of mechanical reproduction a receptivity or even kinship to material activity that disrupts the human subject's conscious relations to objects and disputes the human's ontologies. Unconsciousness in psychoanalytic usage suggests that the camera is not superior but serves a different relationship with the world and with the human that functions in and through human activity, and it emphasizes the limits to the fantasy of human mastery associated with photography. By stressing what evades volition and intentionality, Benjamin's construction, say Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, "attunes us to all that is not consciously controlled in the making, circulation, and viewing of photographs, the contingency involved in the production and consumption of images, as well as the unexamined motivations and effects of this technology's pervasive spread into wider and wider spheres of human and nonhuman activity" (2). As a relationship between (un)consciousness and sight(lessness), photography is a site in which seeing may be in conflict, and not corroborative, with the seen.

Benjamin gives an impression of the singularity of that relationship and its political relevance at the end of his observations about actors in "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1935] (1968), arguing that "film is the first art form capable of demonstrating how matter plays tricks on man. Hence, films can be an excellent means of materialistic representation" (247). Film is sensitive to the intricacies of matter, demonstrating its appropriateness to causes grounded in political materialisms. Mechanical, but also chemical and apperceptive, elements saturate human sociality in the context of its material conditions. Not until his concluding words in that essay does Benjamin show the optical unconscious working at a different scale in a political relation to the details and patterns of human activity. "[M]ass

movements," he says, "including war, constitute a form of human behavior which particularly favors mechanical equipment ... [for] mass movements are usually discerned more clearly by a camera than by the naked eye" (251). Here is another instance in which the strange transformative work of the camera modulates, as it does for Belázs, between the general and the particular. In this context Benjamin's optical unconscious expresses the uncanny ways that human activity and the non-human witnesses to it are made legible (or, conversely, when the self-evidently legible is shown to be horribly illegible) when atrocity passes before the camera. In *Human Rights In Camera* (2011), for example, Sliwinski explores conceptions of human rights that are bound to aesthetic experience. Through the mass generation and circulation of photographs and film, "our shared ideas about what constitutes the human subject leans on aesthetic encounters" (Sliwinski, *Human* 5). The camera holds the human at the margins of representation while being a source of inquiry for a world that is seen to be shared with others.

In the intricate behaviour of unconsciousness Benjamin's psychoanalytic analogy meets its limit. The unconscious reveals what the human did not see, but it was also unconsciousness that first submerged the unseen. The unconscious engages in a doubled relation to the material trace of atrocity, where it repairs an occlusion to atrocity that it imposed itself. Unconsciousness selects as does consciousness. Through the dynamics of deferral, substitution, and association, unconsciousness engages in a speaking-to-itself, negating its own negations (what Derrida named *denégation*). Benjamin's metaphor of unconsciousness continues to impose an anthropomorphism on film, as can the concept of hospitality also humanize the inhuman image. However, a metaphor that includes the dialectical activity of the unconscious also permits a more complex understanding of the image's estranging relationship to human activity and our reception of that relationship. The encounter with atrocity through aesthetic experience destroys

as much as it reveals. Film's sensitivity is exercised by an indifferent *in*sensitivity that consigns atrocity to anonymity, submitting atrocity as well to the category of the obscene. Film has no self from which material life can be known, but neither is material life unknown to film, for non-knowledge is still a form of knowing.

I have looked back at part of the canon of early film theories that centralize automatism in their approach to the singularity of photography and film among the arts. My focus on these thinkers is not intended to relitigate the supposed debate between photographic reproduction and montage as the defining basis of film – what is sometimes posed as the conflict between Bazinian and Eisensteinian schools of thought – but to emphasize the estranging and non-anthropocentric character of our encounters with film and the indifference of the cinematic image to its own traces as well as to human pretensions to knowledge. The organization of images is one way that humans reflect upon their encounters with the non-human. The queer wish to relate impersonally finds its reflection in entanglements with a medium that has the potential to de-individualize or even neutralize the human as it is caught up in non-human rhythms. Moving and still photographic images incorporate heterogeneity in and across the frame, so that the human who shares the frame with others (including other humans) acquires an aura of sameness. Turning now to Cavell, I demonstrate how cinematic automatism is implicated in phenomenological experiences of the movies and in film's temporal context that further places the image at odds with the viewer's present.

Cavell's well-known film theory establishes how desire and impersonality are brought together by cinematic automatism. At the core of *The World Viewed* is the task of theorizing about cinema and the consideration of "serious films" as modernist art. "A succession of automatic world-projections" (146) is how Cavell defines the medium, where "automatic" refers

to the cinema's photographic basis and to the absence of human subjectivity in both the making of the film and the perspective of the viewer who is absented by the projections. Automatism constitutes the artistic medium of cinema, a designation that allows Cavell to consider the movement from traditional film to the modernist reflection upon the capabilities and limitations of mechanical reproduction as a medium for representation. The automatic production and projection of images and the phenomenological relations to that apparatus delineate its use and evolution as art.

Mechanical reproduction satisfies a human wish, says Cavell, to view the world unseen. On this point he tracks with Bazin, who argues that photography is unique among the arts because it benefits from the absence of the artist. The lure of film, however, also involves the absence of the viewer from the world of the film. Self-subtraction in the cinema comes from each side of the screen: the subtraction of the artist from the moment of exposure and the subtraction of the viewer from the reality of the projected image. To view the world "unseen" is also to *be* unseen by that world. The cinematic world is a world in which you are unrecognized. This rapport between the image of a world that is alone and a viewer who in viewing is alone is symmetrical. The solitude of the viewer corresponds to the solitude of the film, which is reinforced by the modern viewer. Cavell imbricates the lure of the cinema with an expression of modern solitude. "In viewing films," he says,

> the sense of invisibility is an expression of modern privacy or anonymity. It is as though the world's projection explains our forms of unknownness and of our own inability to know. The explanation is not so much that the world is passing us by, as that we are displaced from our natural habitation within it, placed at a distance from it. The screen `

overcomes our fixed distance; it makes displacement appear as our natural condition. (41)

The cinematic experience objectifies the modernist trope of social alienation, whether James Joyce's contemplative solitaires or Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur*, so as the cinema naturalizes the condition it demands it also replicates a condition which already feels natural and that begs explanation. The displacement of the individual involved in the break from traditional ways of life and, in more recent times, the replacement of in-person interaction with virtual communication makes distance feel like our natural form of immersion in the world, and the cinema affirms or manifests this way of being.

Our own anonymity to cinematic reality gestures towards the anonymity of the "nobody's gaze" that the production team must turn into a "somebody's gaze." On screen is a projected world without us, and as viewers we view as if we were the "nobody" originally exposed to the world. That is not to say that we become the camera, but that we are drawn to an image of the world exposed from a position of anonymity, from which *I* am *no one* to that world. I stress this position because it counters contemporary appeals to immersion as a cinematic goal, or the widely-held conviction that we especially enjoy films when we feel as if the boundaries between our viewing and the screen dissolve. Christopher Metz's psychoanalytic theory, for example, is that film-viewing provides an entrance into the film that excites our "perceptual passions." The viewer can gaze at an arresting object (a woman's body, for example) and through the pleasures of scopophilia his gaze behaves as a point of contact: "I am in the film by my look's caress" (Metz 257). Metz's argument is perhaps most famous for being taken up by Laura Mulvey in her well-known essay, "Viewing Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1986), which argues that this phenomenon is gendered, and that film constructs a male gaze composed of voyeuristic and

fetishistic violence towards women. Because we know the viewer (or the gaze) does not actually "caress" the film – whether that be the screen, the celluloid, the set, or the actress – and does not physically enter or become "immersed" in it, we must assume that immersion is invoked symbolically as a phenomenology achieved by a combination of the drama, special effects, and cinematography. How one would measure this is unclear, as a feeling of immersion would be highly subjective and depend upon individual viewers' tastes, subjectivities, movie venues, and historical and local expectations about what constitutes good film. However, it is much easier to observe when cinema is not immersive. Mulvey's contribution, for example, was to show that the cinema is structured by the male gaze, and that even women take up this male gaze when viewing. That argument has since been significantly problematized and complicated, for example with considerations of race and sexual orientation. bell hooks, for example, draws on a tradition of black female spectatorship to distinguish an oppositional gaze that the construction of a dominant male gaze can never entirely eliminate.[50] Christopher Nolan's 2010 film *Inception* was billed as a particularly immersive film, but its release was met with rumours of a large number of walk-outs. There is a thread in a Nolan forum online dedicated to discussing and documenting the walk-outs. If a film specifically billed as immersive receives a reputation for walk-outs, I have to wonder if either immersion failed, or, what I suspect, that immersion is a refusal stranger, less intuitive, or less recognizable as an engagement with cinema.

As Cavell states, the film displaces us from a projected reality and naturalizes that displacement. "Movies also promise us happiness exactly not because we are rich or beautiful or perfectly expressive, but because we can tolerate individuality, separateness, and inexpressiveness" (213). Cinema seduces us with what Maurice Blanchot refers to as an

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[50] See bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation,* pp. 115-32.

"intimacy of exteriority" (*Disaster* 54), a deeply-held wish, in this context, for a lack of contact to be an engine of intimacy. Displacement, distance, and anonymity is what seduces us, not only a separation from the world unseen but a separation from oneself and the deluge of the private drives and affect that interiorize our world. It could be that immersion is a feeling of perfected distance. Only when we feel particularly invisible or anonymous do we abandon ourselves to a fantasy not of our own making, and we become a "rhythmed being." Immersion is a way to articulate engagement through the dynamics of hooks's oppositional gaze. If displacement, as I suggested, is already a familiar phenomenology, the cinema does replicate a feature of our extra-cinematic immersion, but an immersion defined by modes of distance and critique, an immersion completed by my absence from the world. Cinema finds what in this phenomenology is most seductive. In other words, immersion may be understood as finding pleasure in what does not call us and in what does not know us. It may be a way of articulating how we find pleasure in *an otherness that is not reducible to the self's representation of otherness*.

While the self-subtracted being of *The World Viewed* resembles the alienated figure of the modernist tradition in which Cavell places himself, it bears a relation to Bersani's "rhythmed being," which has a different set of characteristics. In contrast with the individualized subject objectifying its world, Bersani's figure is conditioned by a "stripping away of the self" ("Sociability" 22). Markers of individuality are removed, and social interaction persists only when "passions and practical interests stay out of the game" (21). The self withdraws from its interpersonal entanglement and leans towards the difference of what is outside of itself by donning sameness, a subtraction of what makes it unique. It may seem odd to insist that passions be removed when we are erotically drawn to cinema. Films excite a frenzy of passions, but *whose* passions are "in the game" at the theatre? I do not go to movies to enjoy my own private

fantasies. For that I have an imagination. Instead, I sit in a room with strangers as we enjoy the same fantasy that comes from without each of us. The anonymous eye of the camera has been turned into somebody's “passions and practical interests,” but not mine. Even as the director's name flashes on the screen and the actors embody their characters, this constellation of passions and practical interests does not seem to belong to them, nor does it belong to us. If the lure to this unowned scene entails “a loss of all that gives us pleasure and pain in our negotiable exchanges with the world” (22), the emphasis is on “negotiable exchanges in our world,” because here is pleasure and pain derived from our *relief* from negotiable exchanges in our world. A form of distance immersion, as I discussed, the experience is an opportunity, however temporary, to “live less invasively in the world” (22). In other words, Cavell's contention that we desire the impersonality of cinema is both a social *and* an ethical claim.

As I noted, detachment from the world is a condition reflected in the viewing of cinema. Cinema produces this mimicry because its automatic basis allows us to view the world as if unseen, which resembles our vision, the way we “look out” at the world. What cinema does, says Cavell, is to make this condition automatic. Cinema automatizes viewing as such.[51] It “takes the responsibility for [taking views of the world] out of our hands.” He continues, “Hence movies seem more natural than reality. Not because they are escapes into fantasy, but because they are reliefs from private fantasy and its responsibilities; from the fact that the world is *already* drawn by fantasy. And not because they are dreams, but because they permit the self to be wakened, so that we may stop withdrawing our longings further inside ourselves” (Cavell 102). Viewing films is an abstention from the self-involvement of the passions and practical interests that compose

[51] For Cavell the cinema redoubles our viewing through automization, but automization does not mark a firm point of difference between filmic and organic viewing that he implies. All viewing is, in some sense, automatic. That the views we take are ascribed to us does not demand our agency in producing them.

the subject and connect the subject to the world already drawn by fantasy.[52] In other words, I view a world outside of me, but it is not *my* outside, as much as it perfectly resembles my outside, and as much as it has shaped my concept of an outside that is distinct from my interior. I am not subject to the world projected on the screen because it is a world that does not include me; it does not need me or my consciousness to persist. Therefore, while the cinema resembles the way I "look out" at the world, its activating difference is that it projects a world in which I am not immersed. This is what reality looks like were it complete without me. And yet that looks no different than the reality I know. The world without me looks no different than the world with me. The central philosophical question of *The Matrix* (1999), for example, "how do I know my world is real?" taps into an anxiety about film-viewing. The Matrix is a world that looks like mine but is fuelled by a technologized (automated) subtraction of my body. Who would want to live in the Matrix? the film asks. Well, anyone who watches film is drawn towards the very conditions that should repel us. Tellingly, the character Cypher who makes a deal with Agent Smith to be returned to the Matrix demands that he become "someone important. Like an actor."[53] Part of the *jouissance* of cinema is enjoying and desiring a world that subtracts me.

As Bersani argues, the dissolution of my individuality in a social scene is part of the fantasy itself – not *my* fantasy, but the one outside me that offers me relief from my own and from my own responsibilities to negotiable exchanges. When Bersani refers to human intimacy, "The intimacy with an unknown body is the revelation of that distance at the very moment we

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[52] Another reason that films can seem more real than reality is because the cinema has shaped the way we experience reality, supplementing memory with its own *techne*. One of the reasons we tolerate "individuality, separateness, and inexpressiveness," is because the cinema taught us how.

[53] Or like Dr. Malcolm Crowe in *The Sixth Sense* (1999), the viewer is immersed in a world that does not include her, like the ghost the doctor turns out to be. The doctor only thinks he is real, but interacts with the world through a kind of intimate exteriority.

appear to be crossing an uncrossable interval" ("Sociability" 21), he could well be describing film. Our relation to bodies on film, or even the embodied viewing experience, is characterized by the mediated layers of displacement from a world that does not include us, a world that feeds my inner life as I watch it and feel immersed in its action, but between which a screen is interposed that erects an uncrossable barrier.

As I will elaborate later on, alienation is one of the tropes of modernist fiction that is most visibly transferable to postmodernism, although the alienation in postmodernist fiction is signified according to a different set of concerns about the sustainability of the world and the disappearance of the subject. While Cavell accepts Bazin's observations about the absence of the subject in the production of film, Bazin's realism poses a problem for Cavell and the modernist departure from realist traditions. In an added chapter to the 1971 text, "More of the World Viewed" (1979), Cavell calls cinema a "moving image of skepticism" (Cavell 188). Cinema satisfies our wish to see reality "as it is" *because* we know that that reality does not exist. We are granted our desire to view reality unseen when we are confident that no such objective reality exists. Lisa Trahair explains that Cavell revises Bazin's aesthetic realism by replacing realism with a notion of presence. "Presence," she says, "underpins his concern with subjectivity in so far as it prevents nature and humanity being fully present to each other" (Trahair 134). Cavell argues that

> what painting wanted, in wanting connection with reality, was a sense of presentness—not exactly a conviction of the world's presence to us, but of our presence to it. At some point the unhinging of our consciousness from the world interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world. Then our subjectivity became what is

> present to us, individuality became isolation. The route to conviction in reality was through the acknowledgment of the endless presence of the self. (Cavell 22)

The subject is isolated because subjectivity is all that is present to the self. Photography and cinema appear to avoid this problem of presence because they remove subjectivity from between the self and its presentness to the world. Another reason that films seem more real than reality is that by removing subjectivity from between the self and its exterior the self imagines that it is present to reality beyond the auto-affective enclosure of its own subjectivity. Yet presence may also be widely conceived as film's hospitality to heterogeneity and not anything like the removal of mediation or absolute co-presence. Part of the logic of the "moving image of skepticism" is that the cinema satisfies the desire for the world to be present precisely because we know that it is not. The image is present to me while I am not present to it. In the cinema, "I am present not at something happening ... but at something that has happened" (26). Perhaps the condition of "being present at something that is over" is a paradox (211), Cavell suggests, but "common sense is, and ought to be, threatened and questioned by the experience of film" (212). Film addresses our wish to see reality "as it is," while through the delays and estrangements inherent to viewing projections we are affected by our conviction in a world seen "as it was."

The belatedness of the image has little consequence for Cavell's assertion that cinema satisfies a human wish to view the world "as it is," but this temporal delay is implicated in the phenomenology of film-viewing. The cinematic image is viewed in the past tense, so the image that satisfies our conviction in the presentness of the self to reality already carries, as Takashi argues, "a smell of death" (133). There is an inevitable delay between what was exposed to the camera and what is projected and viewed. The image is already a little stale, already, Takashi says, "out-of-date." The reality we view is a proleptic reality in which everything has already

been lost. Like Orpheus reaching out to Eurydice, the cinematic image becomes visible only in the mode of its disappearance from the present.[54] Film reflects upon this condition by exploring the continuity between the lost image and the lost loved one that we so often encounter in movies. Home video, with its rambling succession of uncannily young relatives waving at the lens, has this function of providing encounters with the progressively remote object of grief. Film from the time of AIDS can have this function as well now thirty years on. Turning to the 1993 film *Silverlake Life: A View from Here,* I will show how dynamics of grief, and the camera's role in negotiating its demands, are implicated in cinema's material temporalities. Part documentary, part home movie, *Silverlake Life* repeatedly rebounds on proleptic images to explain the reality "that is." The film follows the life of a couple living with AIDS, Tom Joslin and Mark Massi, as they care for each other at their Silverlake apartment. Most of the footage is shot by Tom before his death, after which the camera is given over to his surviving partner, Mark. Peter Friedman, a student of Joslin's, assumes responsibility for the footage and directs the film that will become the documentary *Silverlake Life.* Already, the multiple handlers give the film a quality of being unowned by any "somebody's view."

Silverlake Life opens with a view to Mark. The camera quickly pans to bring a home television screen into view projecting an interview with Mark reminiscing about Tom. The film will follow the couple up to and after Tom's death from AIDS-related complications, but it begins with a narration of that death. Mark describes his impression of looking upon Tom's dead body for the first time, an event viewers are given to see later in the film. Images in this film lag

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[54] Maurice Blanchot famously invokes the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as an analogy for the disappearance of literature, a thesis that spans the course of his criticism but is specifically elaborated in the collection of essays *The Gaze of Orpheus* (1981). While a comparison is not within the purview of this study, a further study may pursue the relevance of Blanchot's literary analogy for cinema.

behind reflections and premonitions, the pre-echoes of their existence. The film yields multiple versions of events, holding it back from becoming assimilated into or exchangeable with the lives it shows. “Life wasn't like the movies,” Mark says, less than ten kilometers from Hollywood. Movies' estranging realities – which do not necessarily feel estranging at the time – are suddenly seen to be unexchangeable with life, and the non-living inhumanness of the images comes back to us in force. Images of Tom's declining body throughout the film gain the odd effect of already being seen to contain the death that will end his life and his filming. Those images also reinforce media representations from that era of people living with AIDS as wasted bodies. By beginning with Tom's death, the film further reinforces fear-based representations of people, particularly queers, with HIV and AIDS as already-dead or as walking corpses. That trope fed into pejorative characterizations of queers as death-seeking agents. *Silverlake Life* claims no fidelity to the labour of positive representation and the supposedly reparative work such representation performs for maligned communities. Like other queer cinema of the era it disrupts the politics of respectability and embraces the impious figures and precarious conditions that could mark queer life, particularly in its struggle with the AIDS epidemic. The film's irreverent acceptance of images of wasting leaves open its connection to the necrological narrative of queer life, while on a formal level the progressively wasting bodies mimic the out-of-datedness of the cinematic image and its receding present. The opening image of the taped interview does but also does more than route the film through Tom's decline and death. By beginning with a cinematic image of loss the film performs the belatedness of the cinematic image as it documents a reality lost and about loss. The majority of the footage is shot by Tom, and the decision to open the film with Mark's interview does not erase Tom's voice or work but takes the images from his hands, recasting “Tom's view” as an anybody's view that reminds us

that while the film is about Tom and Mark in their private apartment and their experiences with HIV/AIDS, it also documents an impersonal story about HIV/AIDS, treatment, suffering, and love that is not limited to the private view of the couple. By “impersonal” I do not mean “universal” in the sense of being widely or flexibly intelligible. Friedman's voice becomes audible as the image remains focused elsewhere. Then we see his hand extend into the frame but nothing more. Cavell notes at one point that while a prophet can hear the voice of God while on Earth, seeing God means that one is no longer of this world (18). Friedman imposes himself while maintaining his alterity to the cinematic image. His alterity makes a difference that is not visible as difference. He is threaded heteronomously through Tom and Mark, marking the men with a point of obscurity. Watching an image of an image of the loss of Tom the film casts “documentary” as a moving image of a late reality – a lateness that is never to be *last.* “Late” is a synonym for death because the cinematic reality always arrives late to the site of its presence before the self, who recognizes reality's presence in the mode of its loss. Shots of the television screen also function to convey from the outset of the film that while film is constituted by images, it records a reality beyond the screen that already contains images. Excerpts in the film from Joslin's first film, *Blackstar: Autobiography of a Close Friend* (1977), further establish the documentary image's foray into a world itself composed of image. *Silverlake Life* suggests that the image reaching towards its disappearance traverses the conditions of loss in a world already drawn by images, a world that is always leaping just ahead of presence and into its own disappearance. The film's subtitle emphasizes the delays of viewing between reality and the late image, “the view from here.”

By the time “the view from here” reaches the viewer, Tom is already dead; Silverlake life is already an after-life. Watching the film in the twenty-first century, the particular colour

saturation and tone of the images marks it as what I recognize as 1990s reality, what the nineties look and feel like from here thanks to my knowledge of those years through film and home videos. Despite the fact that I lived through every year in that decade, the cinematic image supplements my visual memory. Filming the television screen at the opening of the film somehow has the effect of making that nested footage appear “old.” Film has a way of doing this, as I said earlier: looking more real than reality. It colonizes memory with *techne*, perception with apperception. There is an emptiness to the images that has nothing to do with the film's content or Tom's energetic filming, but with the lateness of the image, its proleptic death, and the supplementation of memory. Tom's death is, in more than one sense of the word, “spoiled.” Takashi connects the anachronic or dead cinematic image to what he calls the absolute or material nihilism of the cinematic apparatus. As I said, its materiality has a way of supplementing human memory. This is why we do not view the moment of Tom's death, only the moment after, any more than we view the moment of life of Frankenstein's monster. And only if one can even talk of death in these terms as a moment, and if moments are given to be viewed. Tom is “late” because belatedness is the shape taken by the impossibility of this view and this moment.

Film's nihilism is not an ideological nihilism, but the literal absence of value, meaning, and affect with which the apparatus automatically records what passes before it. What Takashi calls film's “absolute nihilism” (126) refers to apparatuses that receive impressions independent of selection. Cinema's deathly emptiness is not, in other words, due to representations of death, but the trace of insentient sensitizers that themselves record traces. Film's nihilism is its automatic viewing, its generation of representation without subjectivity. What Benjamin and Vertov and other socialist filmmakers saw in film to aid the theories of economic materialism

was precisely the inhuman materialism of cinema itself that defined its relation to reality. As Benjamin suggests, film is uncannily hospitable to the animacy of matter. Like dreams the content of the film is directly linked to the material world; film's logic is expressed through the language and form of its outside, but where it departs from dreamlife is its indifference to its own outside, its unideological, asubjective, disinterested rapport with the material life that invites our interest. Therefore, the film's deathly emptiness is also an effect of the unlived conditions of its existence. Violence is often so startling on film not because of the violence itself, but the film's unmoved apprehension of terrible scenes that should move any subject. The human is implicated in the film's inert, unblinking view; the viewer inhabits that indifferent openness to violence, that raw exposure to the world's mortality through the immortal lens. And because the cinematic image satisfies a human desire to see the world unseen, we view violent images as if they were unseen, or as if there were no one there to bear witness to the unfurling violence. The “anybody's view” of the anonymous camera records violence without *seeing* violence and the viewer who takes up that view is made to occupy “the place or perspective of no one,” to recall Ricco, or the “blind spot” of sight from which violence occurs but occurs without being seen. As we said, film consigns atrocity to anonymity, submitting it to the category of the obscene.[55] So in Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* (2001), for example, when the camera is still before a long take of a young man being eaten alive, the terror is not only the violence itself but the human's embodiment of the film's inhuman, unembodied nihilism.[56]

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[55] Tellingly, the Latin origin of this word means off-scene.

[56] The effect of viewing unseen violence is most pronounced when the point-of-view occupies the position of “free indirect discourse,” a literary term that Pier Paolo Pasolini transposed for a “cinema of poetry” that he associated with neorealist film. The effect I discuss can be diminished when the point-of-view is aligned with a character, which characterizes the image as the “somebody's view” of the character. However, a plenitude of point-of-views may be the device used to saturate the effect of the scene unseen. For example, in the scene with the child dressed in red in *Schindler's List,* a man and a woman on a hill watch the violence in the streets and a little girl watching the violence in her midst. Violence progresses not in spite of these three gazes but because its visibility was a function

The conflict of bearing witness through film is that the cinematic image makes us present to a reality that has already happened, but which through the positioning of the camera's materially indifferent gaze happened unseen. When watching film, cinema's reality is present to us in the mode of being unseen, so that every view is a blind spot to what begs to be seen. The cinema's immorality, as Takashi calls it, is not only its indifferent representation of a reality already gone, but how it puts me in the position of the unseeing viewer who watches and takes pleasure in watching without witnessing the image. The terrible pleasure of the cinema is that as a proxy for the nobody's gaze of the camera, I view without seeing.

In this section I illustrated the continuity between cinematic automatism and the pleasures of impersonality that resonate in film-viewing. Cinema's material basis establishes a phenomenology structured by the distances and delays involved in recording and projecting. Cinema satisfies a human desire to be present to reality without the intervention of subjectivity by projecting an image of reality from which the viewer is absent. However, the satisfaction of this desire is achieved by the existence of the cinematic apparatus, which demands that there be a temporal delay between the reality exposed to film and the one exposed to the viewer via projection. The viewer is both temporally and metaphysically removed from the reality before which she would like to be present, and this withdrawal, far from being an impediment to the viewing experience, is a powerful source of its pleasures. These elements of audience alienation are caught up in desires drawn not just from the wish to see the world unseen, but to be absent from reality and to refuse responsibility for violence. In what follows I take up these dynamics of impersonality through Ira Sachs's short film, *Last Address* (2010). I first situate the film in relation to the grouping or movement that is called New Queer Cinema, both to locate it within a

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of its proliferation. The violence was seen but not necessarily as violence.

tradition of experimental filmmaking that traces its development largely from the height of the AIDS epidemic in the West, and to show how contemporary queer film engages the conventions of impersonality.

Part 2: *Last Address:*

Come hither in thy hour of strength;
Come, weak as is a breaking wave!
Here stretch thy body at full length;
Or build thy house upon this grave.

— from "A Poet's Epitaph," William Wordsworth

I've always thought that New York City will never blink when I die. Will hardly notice.

— Ira Sachs

Ira Sachs's short film *Last Address* (2010) (view the film for free at http://www.lastaddress.org/) follows an outpouring of independent films and experimental filmmaking by queer artists that began in the film festivals in the 1990s and became known and chronicled, thanks largely to the work of B. Ruby Rich, as "New Queer Cinema" (NQC). The film serially visits the façades of twenty-eight dwellings that were the final homes ("last addresses") of queer artists in New York City who died of AIDS-related complications. At only eight-and-a-half minutes long and with a soundtrack devoted entirely to the street noise from its filming locations, *Last Address* borrows the experimental bent and concerns about transformations in queer cultures that characterized much of the emergent queer cinema in the 1990s, and it tacitly traces its own lineage to that era as it elegizes artists who were working and producing then. "Experimental documentary" is how Alexandra Juhasz characterizes the film ("Digital" 325). Combining stylistic minimalism with a

documentary interest in the AIDS epidemic and the epidemic's effect upon queer artist communities, it also recalls the prominent role played by "video activism" for AIDS activist organizations in the 1990s, such as ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), its affinity group DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activists), and WAVE (the Women's AIDS Video Enterprise). By taking video production into their own hands, activists were able to provide counter-narratives to those disseminated in mainstream media and to fill the gaps in education and outreach. New forms of video production and the increasing affordability of production equipment made film and video more available to activists and young artists and allowed them to compete with outside representations of their own communities and histories. *Last Address* gestures towards this tradition of informative, low-budget video at a moment when AIDS activism has taken new forms and when video has never been more accessible or diffuse. By signalling this history, Sachs reflects upon the continued presence of film in queer cultures and AIDS activism and art, even and especially when terms such as "New Queer Cinema" and even "Queer Theory" have been pronounced over.

NQC has been defined by both its period-specific emergence and stylistic and thematic trends. Its emergence coincided with the AIDS crisis, with the appropriation of the epithet "queer" as an identity label, and with a new transformation of gay and lesbian studies called Queer Theory. Queer communities' newfound concentration and visibility in grassroots cinematic production served as a base of experimental representation for the anti-identitarian turn in theory and politics and especially the sea-change brought about by the health crisis and the shifting dimensions and affinities of affected communities and the demands now upon them. Following José Arroyo's description of the grouping in "Death, Desire and Identity," Monica B. Pearl goes as far as to argue that "New Queer Cinema *is* AIDS cinema" (23). This is to say that

some films thematize AIDS while others deflect it, but for Pearl the grouping is linked through AIDS as an inescapable, if not always apparent, reference. For example, abrupt disruptions to the lifespan and the fracturing of communities brought about by mass death are reflected in uses of anachronism and other transgressions of time. Gregg Araki's *The Living End* (1992) stages the present using a 1960s/70s cinematic aesthetic. Todd Haynes's *Poison* (1991) exploits the moral panic about queers and death with a Frankenstein-like narrative of a scientist who creates and consumes an elixir of homosexuality and turns into a murderous killer. Haynes also exploits film's ability to integrate other media to represent the proliferation of information about AIDS and vulnerable communities through several sources of media. *Poison* experiments with multi-media approaches to film, such as in the "Richie" storyline, which mimics a tabloid magazine. Haynes's *Safe* (1995), while not explicitly queer, explores immunity by following a housewife whose progressive environmental sensitivity compels her to withdraw from society.

NQC's efforts to establish queer history through film at this critical moment also focused on historical figures and personalities that had remained unseen. Anat Pick observes that lesbian cinema of this era is often elided in delineations of NQC and was addressing communities' erotic relations to their history and how queerness would stage itself in the performance of identities.[57] In Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), for example, a black filmmaker Cheryl (played by Dunye) obsessively researches a marginal 1940s black actress known as the Watermelon Woman. In the course of her research, which implicates her community and her family, she learns that the actress who plays the Watermelon Woman is a lesbian who had a relationship with her white director. Not only are these historical projects deeply erotic

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[57] See Pick, "New Queer Cinema and Lesbian Films" in *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader,* edited by Michele Aaron, Rutgers UP, 2004.

experiences, but in playing the protagonist Dunye distinguishes an erotics of identity, or our plays of attraction to and neglect of identity, as it gets produced through cinematic and photographic representation of queer people of colour. Dunye performs a or many versions of herself, and she examines how queer cinema was exploiting film's inherent re-presentations of the self to generate and perform newfound queer identities that could claim a history for themselves.

Like films of that era that were coming to terms with the impact of AIDS upon queer life, *Last Address* is preoccupied, to put it broadly, with "death and time and history" (Pearl 28). Its production in a year far exceeding the "official" timeline of NQC between 1992 and 2000[58] puts it in a position to transplant the genre's focus on time into concerns about announcements of "after AIDS." *Last Address* need not qualify as NQC to be a queer film, or an AIDS film, for that matter. But by describing itself as the last of the artist generation of that era, *Last Address* puts itself in a position of continuity and/or rupture in relation to those aesthetic flashpoints. Not to be too closely associated with NQC, *Last Address* also gestures towards "Old Queer Cinema" in the resemblance of its long takes to Andy Warhol's use of long takes for a queered durational aesthetic.

Although I have located Sachs in relation to NQC, his work visibly hails from a New York tradition of experimental filmmaking by women with a more oblique relation to what became christened at the end of the twentieth century as queer cinema. Sachs traces his own influences to Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) and Shirley Clarke (1919-1997). The influence of

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[58] Anat Pick remarks about NQC's apparent lifespan that like other aesthetic groupings it "now seems to have been a great deal shorter than that of the movies [and the filmic legacies] that first gave it its name" ("New" 103). In 2000 B. Ruby Rich announces NQC's "short sweet climb from radical impulse to niche market." Interestingly Rich's repudiation resembles Teresa de Lauretis's swift repudiation of queer theory a few years earlier.

Akerman, who is sporadically included in the category of queer cinema, on experimental film (especially experimental documentary) is inestimable, and her influence on Sachs is palpable on several levels. Akerman's cinematic use of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of “minor literature” is apparent in *Last Address*'s focus on minoritarian art and the use of urban topology to connect personal stories to political or impersonal trajectories. Additionally, uses of duration and repetition in Akerman's *Je Tu Il Elle* (1974) are apparent in *Last Address.* The film also nods to Clarke's 1959 *Skyscraper,* which surveys the construction of 666 Fifth Avenue in New York. Sachs has described *Last Address* as being “about New York” (Sachs 294), and his anamorphic attention to local queer communities through urban topology is rooted in a documentary tradition that decentres the human and even, for that matter, life, from film.

Sachs has been directing films since the early 1990s. He is the director of several feature films, including *The Delta* (1997), *Keep the Lights On* (2012), *Love is Strange* (2014), and *Little Men* (2016), and of a number of other experimental shorts, including *Lady* (1994), *10/26/00* (2000)*, Get It While You Can* (2002)*,* and *Untitled* (2002)*. Last Address* reinvents a commemorative style and a relation to loss that Sachs has already explored in former shorts. *Untitled,* for example, is a montage of the “Missing Persons” posters that were pasted up around New York City in the aftermath of 9/11. The film explores urban dynamics of recognition and anonymity in mass atrocity and the urgency of contingent loss. It also experiments with film as multi-media by appropriating posters as cinematic montage. *10/26/00* also incorporates other media and inhabits the grey areas between film and video with the use of surveillance-type images of men on street corners. The legacies of queer artists are also a repeated focus in Sachs's other films. *Keep the Lights On,* for example, follows a young artist creating a documentary about an avant-garde filmmaker that is never completed.

In that film, the legacy of the artist and the young artist's inheritance of the work is threaded into a series of other long-term relations to friends, lovers, and family. Sachs's films play with different experiences of duration, both inscribed structurally in his experimental shorts through repetition, long takes, and montage, and as lived temporalities, such as in *Keep the Lights On,* which follows a young filmmaker over several years and the transformations of his long-term relationships. The "long-term" relationship is a trope threaded through all of his work; Sachs explores the relationship form as a durational entity across relations between friends, lovers, mentors, family, and artistic influences, where "duration" is made to be an experience of relation not limited to, and even disruptive of, legitimized connections. Where "long-term," "relationship," and "duration" meet and diverge is a continued source of interest and conflict. Fittingly, *Last Address* is tied to Sachs's Queer/Art/Mentorship project, which creates working relationships between established and emerging artists in New York City. He has described the film as coming out of a reckoning with the lack of mentors for queer youth and the ongoing consequences of this absence for the *longue durée* of the AIDS crisis. This perspective on the generational impact of AIDS on queer communities is sometimes called the "AIDS Queer Artist Gap," or the "AIDS Gap."[59] The film has also enjoyed a life beyond the screen. Stills of the façades have been distributed as note cards and installed as window displays (Sachs 284; 285), and *Visual AIDS* describes organized walking tours of the dwellings. These remediations of the film comment on the particular formal conventions of the film, drawing them beyond the

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[59] This narrative claims that as a result of mass death during the peak of the AIDS epidemic, there is an intergenerational gap between younger queer artists and older ones. This gap (roughly between those in their thirties and forties) has severed intergenerational ties and has produced a cultural void. A significant consequence of this is a lack of mentorship and understanding between generations of queers. See Christopher Carbone's "The Velvet Silence: Mentoring Across the AIDS Queer Artist Gap" (2013) for an extended explanation of the gap theory and its connections to *Last Address*, and Levitsky's "To Fight Another Day: The Myth of the AIDS Queer Artist Gap" for a critique of its ideology. Sarah Schulman also describes an experience of a gap, although without using this language, between older ACT UPers and young queer artists in *The Gentrification of the Mind*, pp. 10-12.

cinematic and into the mixed media of the photographic (stills) and the architectural or performance art (tours).

The film's long takes of last addresses organized in a linear montage make it hospitable to these acts of appropriation, particularly its disassembly into stills, because the montage gives the impression of slowing down the cinematic speed into its component frames. It is both film and photography in stereo. Beginning at dawn and ending at dusk, the montage sequence also mimics a day-length tour around the city. Together, the last addresses reveal a hidden architecture in New York City, what Ricco refers to as “architecture outside architecture” or “minor architecture” (*Lure* 6).[60] That the film is felt to be so transferable to other media attests to its experimental form and to its connection to Sachs's social projects, which are themselves extra-cinematic. Audiences' manipulations of the film also attest to a veiled restlessness with the film itself, a discomfort with the film *as film.* This is not to say that the film was not well received. In 2010 it was featured on YouTube's homepage and was viewed over 100,000 times (Sachs 281). It enjoyed an incredibly wide audience beyond the circle of people who would recognize the names of the artists it elegized. My argument is that it was attractive for the same reasons it caused restlessness. The ease with which it gives itself to disassembly and its seemingly smooth appropriation by other media emphasize the democratic allure of the cinematic medium – rare for a short experimental film – and tie it intimately to its own deconstruction. *Last Address* can be easily and attractively disassembled, and this activity both allows the viewer to feel present to the

[60] For example, Ricco describes minor architecture in a subversive or refractive relation to “major architecture,” or that which calls into question the signification, substantiality, form, actuality, and containment associated with architectural norms. I include *Last Address* in the domain of minor architecture both because it is a film (rather than a building) that figures itself in relation to architecture and because the distributed architecture it features is itinerant, unfixed, and unremarkable from the outside yet only given to us as a collection of outsides, and because it constitutes an unmarked architecture of grief and loss.

reality it screens and lays bare the ease at which such a reality can crumble and break apart at the moment of closeness.

In the former section I reviewed Bazin's influential observation that photography is unique among the arts because it derives a benefit from the *absence* of the artist. Cavell, expanding on this point, shows how the lure of cinema is the ostensible view it offers of the world without the interposition of subjectivity. These are formal elements of cinema, but what does it *mean* for the artist to be absent? *Last Address,* which elegizes twenty-eight New York City artists who died of AIDS-related complications, asks us to reflect upon the role of the artist in queer communities by drawing our attention to missing artists. Thinking about the ongoing consequences of the “AIDS Gap,” the film turns to the production of art prior to and following the haunting absence of subjectivities. The short film materializes the absence of the artist in the production of film by proceeding directly in the wake of the death of the artist and the artist's absence in the present. What is at stake, it asks, to be a human artist absent from a world with film, which is an aesthetic domain activated in part by the automization of your absence? The spare craft of the film resembles something of the absences it foregrounds, and it resembles something of the emptiness of film itself, the view of the world free of subjective intervention. We are made to view the “gap” of film itself between a lonely world and a lonely viewer. There is the impression, in some shots, that the film is taking place at the end of the world, and worse: that the pedestrians and cars entering and exiting the frame go about their business not knowing that the world has ended. The theme of missing artists in the aftermath of the peak of the AIDS crisis also asks us to reflect upon classical postmodernist conditions such as the death of the author and the autonomy of the text. It should now be clear how Cavell's modernist study of cinematic automatism is exceptionally relevant to postmodernist critiques of film. Cinema is a

rich source of discovery and thought for postmodernist theory, as it can be seen to formalize some of the theory's hermeneutic practices. One task of *Last Address* is to bear witness to the absence of the artist through film, and by doing so the film calls into question how cinema itself, particularly in its testimonial uses, embodies postmodernist aesthetic principals that themselves suspend or challenge the interpretive significance of the auteur.

Cinema after the death of the subject makes the ideological discourses of authorship and subjectivity the subject of reflection on the material losses and absences in film. Photography and film are produced though a process that demands the recession of the artist from the moment of exposure and imprinting. The “nobody's gaze” of the cinematic image that identically produces meaning and meaninglessness gestures to Barthes's defining commentary on the death of the author in literature. After the death of the author, writing “ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systemic exemption of meaning” (“Death of the Author” 147). What the cinematic image preserves is the vacancy of the gaze even as the film is organized in the pursuit of a meaningful perspective. *Last Address*, for example, has been called a documentary film. Its minimalist treatment of vacant dwellings serves some goals of documentary cinema, such as turning the indifferent cinematic image into *information*, which is one way, writes Takashi, that televised news gains human meaning. The inclusion of each of the late artists' names and dates, and the hyperlinks provided to information about them on the film’s dedicated website, serves to convert these vacancies into information or meaning for the viewer. But the spare focus on empty dwellings, no longer even homes but *addresses,* preserves the meaninglessness of the cinematic image that cannot be entirely supplemented by meaning as information. The absences that render the world vacant contribute to the “nobody's gaze” of the withdrawn point-of-view. That the streets are occupied by cars and pedestrians and so many

pigeons seems only to deepen the vacancies on which the film turns, for as cinema teaches us there is a reality that is complete without the subject. Such is the pain of grief. These vacancies are also the sites at which the material activity of film is most apparent.

It is a common experience. You take a photo, and the image on the paper or screen looks nothing like what you saw, as if the camera (like the unconscious) were doing its own work. Benjamin's optical unconscious appears to be at work in rendering the plenitude of a world unmastered by authorial intention. Films appear to be making their own "gesture of inscription" (146), to use Barthes's phrase for literature after the death of the author. "Inscription" signals a clear divergence from "writing" and "literature" in that essay to refer to a separate activity or performative of language. What writing does to "ceaselessly posit meaning only to evaporate it" (147) has to do with this spare function he calls inscription. Here, Barthes shifts the embodiment of the author to the materiality of language and its activity beyond the labour of authorial meaning. "Inscription," with its industrial-sounding invocation of the motion of pen upon paper, points to language's material indifference to its human instrumentality. It points to the polysemous activity derived from writing when liberated of its limitations to the cult of the author's individuality or the meaning that gives it theological significance. Film's material nihilism, as Takashi calls it, could also be conceived as a form of light inscription by the cinematic apparatus. What we have observed about the significance of cinematic automatism to the generation of film suggests that cinema trades heavily in "gestures of inscription" through which an optical intelligence produces a text that cannot be reduced to the efforts of organization by the artists involved in its production. The recorded image is represented through none of the channels of meaning ascribed to it. Bazin references montage primarily when he suggests at the end of "Ontology" and a later essay that cinema is also a language. For him the resemblance of

montage to a grammar requires this further analogy to language to describe the organization of exposures. But cinema resembles a language also according to the logic or illogic of "inscription." The plenitude of the medium's materiality cannot be reduced to the human grammars of meaning imposed by the organization of images.

Despite its potential, Barthes cast the death of the author in literature to the side of automatizing technology for the latter's association with depiction and representation, although writing's "prerequisite impersonality" (143) is in essence an automatism in language.[61] It is the medium's indifference to its own conventions and instrumentality. It should not be surprising that photography and film have been the sites of controversy on the nature of art and representation. Sherrie Levine's re-photographed photographs, for example, attracted controversies of attribution and originality often provoked and courted by appropriationalist artists.[62] Photography and cinema bear, Cavell says, a natural relation to their automatisms, and their self-subtraction of the author challenges deeply-held notions of the intimate link between art's originality and the artist figure. Uses of photography in aesthetic movements such as Dadaism and appropriationalism reveal how the medium itself, if accepted as an aesthetic medium, presents a crisis for traditional and modernist concepts of authorship. Appropriationalist photographs produce appropriations of

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[61] See "The Death of the Author," where Barthes claims that writing can no longer designate "recording, notation, representation, 'depiction'" (145) despite the apparent automatism of such forms of inscription and their resemblance to surrealist experiments with automatic writing and dream-work that Barthes otherwise regarded as exemplars of the text's autonomy.

[62] In the 1980s Levine famously re-photographed a series of photographs by well-known male photographers, such as Edward Weston, Walker Evans, and Alexander Rodchenko. She titled the pieces using the original artist's name preceded by the word "after." Levine appropriated painting as well, and earlier projects involved the displacement of photographs (frequently of mothers and children) into new silhouettes. In 1982 Douglas Crimp characterizes Levine's style of "undisguised theft" into which the work of former artists "naively participates" as a reflection upon photography's instrumentality as a "tool of appropriation" that also rejects the atavistic gaze of the original artists (Crimp 30-1).

media that are themselves already appropriations, creating photographic appropriations *par excellence* and calling into question what counts as aesthetic media.

In an interview I conducted with him (see pp. 273-89), Sachs described to me his sense of personal loss from the deaths of artists during the epidemic, and how in coming to recognize their impact the film is in part addressed to himself. Indeed, *Last Address* speaks thoughtfully to the relationship between being an artist in the mode of creation and being one among the dead. Sachs's camera seems to withdraw from the *mise-en-scène* in the act of filming the dwellings. Its lack of movement and minimal movement before the dwellings and its conventional position facing each of their façades suggests a lack of engagement with the cinematic objects and an automatic perspective towards them. *Last Address* appropriates film's automatism as a feature of its representational strategy. Its minimalist approach to visuals and sound appeal to an image of the withdrawal of intervention and an absence of agency towards delimiting what passes before the camera. With these techniques Sachs organizes his own abstention from the film, an act whose paradox is apparent, but that embraces the particular condition in which Sachs implicates the artists he elegizes. If the twenty-eight artists are present in the film in the mode of their absence from the present of queer life, Sachs's own abstention hauntingly aligns the filmmaker and his apparatus with the missing artists. This is to say that he is immersed in the film in the way that they are – absent, only his own absence is not *seen to be* an absence as it is for the artists he elegizes. With this gesture Sachs does not so much place himself directly among he dead as he films the world as it would be were he and his camera not there. Sachs takes up the position of a natural relation of the camera to the reality it records, which is to say that he inhabits a pose of self-subtraction by which the camera erodes the visibility of its own traces in the act of rendering the image. This is a paradoxical condition, perhaps, but to repeat Cavell, the

experience of film should disrupt notions of common sense. As Derrida has said in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), one cannot distinguish between the trace and the erasure of the trace (136). Cinema follows this indifference between the trace and the erasure of the trace; a part of the mastery of the construction of good cinema is the subtraction of the "somebody's view" that establishes its lure. To film the world as if one were not there does not only adopt a natural capacity of cinema but, in *Last Address,* makes the provision for a wrenching commentary on the spectral absences of queer lives in relation to the AIDS epidemic. An absence is not only a physical death, but an absence in memory and in value, understood here not simply as a hole in the organized fabric of commemoration, but a practice of what Henry Giroux, after David Price, calls "organized forgetting;" that is to say, a learned or pedagogical use of the forgetting of public memory to eliminate the public's capacity to imagine its society otherwise (58).

According to Rosza Daniel Lang/Levitsky, *Last Address* also participates in organized forgetting insofar as it is underpinned by the AIDS Queer Artist Gap theory. The Gap theory, they say, is promoted mostly by white and cis gay men, and erases the artistic and mentoring activities by several queer artists, many of whom are women. To give space to their names:

> Jennifer Miller, Jenny Romaine, Carmelita Tropicana, Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, Deb Margolin, Jack Waters, Peter Cramer: all visible for decades as supporters of the cohorts that have come after them, and still very actively giving younger artists opportunities to present work as well as honoring them with advice and loving guidance. And, in most cases if not all, deeply involved in AIDS activism during ACT UP's crucial years and beyond. (Levitsky)

These absences from the Gap narrative, says Levitsky, are not incidental. Misogyny is "central to its appeal to young white gay men (cis and trans alike), and to its effectiveness at drawing funding from institutional sources" (Levitsky).[63] Levitsky's argument places *Last Address* within the amnesic culture it thematizes, exposing the limitations of the film's self-imposed "last" addressing and the instrumentation of lastness for organized forgetting.[64] As I said, the artists Sachs elegizes are seen to be absent in the film, and even Sachs's less visible absence is evoked in its organization. But perhaps the deepest expression of the gap on which Sachs focuses is those who are not seen to be absent because their existences are also unseen. They are, in this film, homeless. Their addresses (to queer youth and to peers) are pronounced vacant – more far-gone than "last" – and these vacancies are maintained to promote projects to which these artists already contribute. Levitsky does not deny the devastation of AIDS upon queer communities, but their critique points to the extent that discourses about mentorship and its lack are underpinned by particular learned or pedagogical notions about who should teach the next generation, and what gets to count as teaching and mentorship. Indeed, the culture of "organized forgetting" is often expressed by a pedagogy about pedagogy, or the learned absences that inform what will count as teaching and learning and who will count as a teacher. Taking into account the formal

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[63] See Juhasz's conversation with Jih-Fei Cheng, Lucas Hilderbrand, and others for an extended meditation on the split generational responses to the AIDS crisis and the involvement of queer women of colour in early video activism. Discussing the contemporary reception of 1990s AIDS activist video and the newer slate of documentaries on the inception and development of AIDS activism, Juhasz brings together what she calls "retrosexuality," the AIDS Crisis Revisitation era, and the disparities in visibility between white male, and women and people of colour PWAs. Nostalgia, she notes, is part of the affective complex with which those active in the initial era of the crisis engage with AIDS media, and the shifting dimensions of video production and AIDS-related concerns constitute new perspectives among the younger generation towards the stakes of AIDS activism. New AIDS media, as well as the older media that is more widely circulated and seen, also risks eroding knowledge of the early contributions of women of colour, as the most visible media on the epidemic often reproduces conceptions of AIDS as a crisis affecting white gay men. What Juhasz calls "being at home with HIV" signals shifting perceptions of living and living on with HIV/AIDS and the politicization of the domicile in different eras of AIDS video production ("Being at Home with HIV and Video").

[64] In our interview, Sachs clarifies that the group of artists featured in the film is selective, based on individuals with whom he is familiar (Sachs 292).

limitations of the film's ambit, the absences that are not seen to be absences are an important frame as we move forward with *Last Address,* as we hold that organized forgetting is itself a kind of dwelling in which we live and learn, and that the representation of absence is always performed over several layers of visibility.

Sachs's focus on dwellings is also a reminder of the fight for basic necessities and services, such as housing, that organizations like ACT UP and others took up for and with those living with HIV/AIDS. Access to life-saving medication may be a campaign that ACT UP is most known for, but it is important to remember that this project was part of a much wider effort to secure resources and recognition for those denied support, housing, education, medicine, and more when they or their loved ones were in need.[65] That one *had* a last address may have been the result of vigorous activist organizing by those who recognized that access to these basic necessities and the withholding of social support was part of the biopolitical logic that allowed HIV to spread and that determined who would live and who would die. The brutal ravages of capitalism were a necessary source of critique as drug companies took the crisis to be an opportunity for profit, and steep mark-ups meant that life-saving treatment was inaccessible to many. A social system based on profit, they saw, devastated communities in need and pushed activists to follow the interconnections between social supports. The AIDS crisis allowed them to see the effects of capitalism as a form of wasting that could otherwise be seen more intelligibly on the body. If abjected people were represented as wasting bodies, it was because public life was itself wasting under the predation of capitalist principles and practices.

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[65] See Deborah Gould's *Moving Politics* (2009), which describes the range of ACT UP's activism, and particularly its focus on housing in the early days of its organizational development. Gould explains that popular perceptions of ACT UP as being singularly committed to drug access elides its more holistic agenda and its internal conflicts (353).

The images of dwellings in the film are a reminder that having a place to live is a privilege, but the fight for it to be a public entitlement was an integral expression of activism and art at the time when many of these artists were working. The last address may have also been the site of estrangement, as many people in their final days moved back into family homes they had long left to pursue their own lives. The family home may have been a site of homophobia, or a place that refused to admit queer partners and lovers. Home for people in this situation was a form of homelessness. The return may also have marked a reconciliation with family or the beginning, if shortly lived, of a family's acceptance of truth. The significance of the family home is, to say the least, complex, for it marks a potentially divided site in which the provision of care coincides with the violence of homophobia. David Wojnarowicz's iconic stencil, “burning house,” is another widely-circulated image that succinctly captures these over-determinations of home. The last address might have also been a place of ferocious, experimental living for the development of new dynamics of care. *Silverlake Life,* for example, is titled after Tom's and Mark's last address, so central was that apartment and its environs to the narrative of the film. *Last Address*'s indifferent survey of vacated addresses also reinscribes the attitude towards those living with the illness by many politicians, clergy, and lay people. It was not until 1985 that Ronald Reagan spoke the word “AIDS” in an official capacity. Larry Speakes's now notorious exchange with a reporter is just one example of the derision and dismissal with which it was discussed once it became an object of federal politics.[66]

[66] Speakes, Ronald Reagan's press secretary, spoke with reporter Lester Kinsolving in 1982, when nearly 1000 people had died of AIDS-related complications. In the exchange, Speakes notoriously claims ignorance of the epidemic and makes jokes with the reporter and press corps. He again claims ignorance and makes jokes in a subsequent 1984 exchange.

Yet, as I pointed out earlier, seeing the world as it is without me is also a powerful lure to cinema, and it is a form of imagination that many AIDS activists needed to take up as they fought for changes they knew they may never live to see. The world as they saw it was a world that, in a sense, already imagined itself without them there, as numerous politicians and others openly wished for the eradication of queers and others at the hands of AIDS. For so many, those living with AIDS were not there, or would soon not be there, and if they were there they were not there in the way that queers and others saw themselves – in other words, as non-normative people with value, complexity, and lives worth cherishing. Civil society was a world on a screen that was indifferent to them. Wojnarowicz recalls his childhood in New Jersey being beaten by his father while their neighbours "pruned their gardens and mowed their lawns" (Laing 101). The child David lived as if in a separate reality, an America entirely different to the America of his neighbours. Gazing across his lawn must have been like beholding the screen of civil society, an America that existed without him and without the terrible knowledge of his family life. ("I'm the robotic kid looking through digital eyes past the windshield into the preinvented world" [Wojnarowicz, *Close* 63].) The title of one of the collections of his diaries, *In the Shadow of the American Dream* (1999), speaks to that sense of occupying the shade of a fictive world. Some queers sought to disrupt that world, and others would form minority communities and networks of care on the other side of that screen. The world was already a world without them, and for some this condition was a powerful lure to imagine social existence otherwise and to form modes of belonging outside a reality that was failing them. The "anti-social thesis," as it has been described by contemporary queer theorists such as Lee Edelman and others, is precisely motivated by that refusal to participate in civil society or "count" among its norms of recognition, and to reimagine queer forms of relationality. If the cinema is the world as it is

without me, I can imagine something different; I can imagine different worlds and different ways of being. I can also imagine the world in a mode of otherness, or as something other than a reflection of my own interests and thought. Film, and art in general, is one occasion to think beyond the reality of what Wojnarowicz repeatedly referred to as the "preinvented world." This capacity for imagination activates all art, and therefore part of what is celebrated in *Last Address,* but the repletion or precision by which films offer us views of alternative realities[67] can be a counter-measure to what Giroux decries, after Georges Didi-Huberman, as the "disimagination machine" (26-29) that limits the collective imagination to what is available only in the present.

In this milieu Sachs shows the winnowing life of the camera in a world that persists without it. This contradictory condition is a pleasure of cinema that is exactly like pain. Just as the human can be "dehumanized" while remaining human, so the camera can subtract itself while continuing to film. It is a solitary existence for the camera and for the world. The extended quietude of the montage of last addresses and the indifference of pedestrians and animals to the existence of the camera gives viewers the impression that the camera is alone in this world, and also that the world is alone under the unseeing gaze of the camera. Earlier, I said that what is startling about violence in film is not only the violence itself, but the adoption of the camera's "nobody's gaze" upon that violence. There is no obvious violence in *Last Address,* but part of the film's pedagogy is to alert viewers to the significance of buildings that would otherwise be

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[67] In other words, what John Mullarkey calls the "notable convergence peculiar to cinematic form and technology" (xiv) with respect to other media and sensory modes. Mullarkey argues that film's power is "based on both its synthetic function in art – the fact that it captures aspects of every other art form (literature, poetry, theatre, music, painting, photography, sculptural form, and even dance) – as well as its ever-enlarging incorporation of more and more of our sensory powers" (xiv). Cinematic convergence, he says, comes close to resembling our own multisensory capacity. This repletion, film's presence to us in excess of the visual and its relation to other aesthetic forms, uniquely provokes our imagination precisely because it always threatens to breach its own uniqueness by pointing to other media. *Last Address*'s indexical relation to the aesthetic creations of other artists may also be viewed as an expression of the convergent affinities or absorptions particular to film.

passed unnoticed, as they are by pedestrians and animals in the film. What is so powerful about the film's particular strategy of recognition is that in adopting the camera's recessive "nobody's gaze" the dwellings continue to be passed unnoticed, or by viewing them on film we see them in the mode of their solitude, their unfound existence. This strategy reflects an aspect of the presence of AIDS and its history in New York City; at the time that Sachs and I spoke he told me that there is no memorial devoted to those who died or continue to die of AIDS-related complications (Sachs 292).[68] The epidemic, and its ongoing life, is everywhere in the city, like in these last addresses, but like the last addresses it is embedded in structures that go unseen as such. Viewers are made to see "AIDS" in this way: in the ways it is unseen, in the ways it has been forgotten, or in the "optical unconscious" that only a camera picks up. The film precisely does *not* repair or compensate for the lack of public commemoration Sachs describes, as one of its gestures is to call into question what public commemoration does or performs, and how it might habour lacunae that hauntingly register on film.[69] The film picks up on the city's material archive of AIDS: the *inscriptions* that cannot (or are often not) seen consciously by us, but can be distinguished in the city by the camera's optical unconscious. This particular strategy of reverie-like representation is purposive. We are not being made to "see AIDS," but to see it as

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[68] There is now an AIDS memorial in Greenwich Village on 7th Avenue, across from St. Vincent's Hospital.

[69] For example, see Roger I. Simon's *A Pedagogy of Witnessing* (2014), which complicates redemption narratives of the value of public commemoration. Simon points out that public memory of atrocity can be used to justify further violence in the present. Efforts to display images of past violence are often motivated by the hope that such displays will prevent violence in the future, and yet as Simon observes, the greater willingness of public institutions to display these images has not resulted in less human-instigated violence. When addressing the loss of those, such as queers and people with AIDS, who are thought to be a threat to social and national cohesion, it is critical to recognize that public commemoration is often designed to structure remembrance, says Simon, "as a practice necessary for securing national and group identities and fortifying existing social bonds" (4). One of the legacies of AIDS activism is the demand to formulate renewed forms of memorialization that challenge social cohesion forged by the collective elimination of threatened lives and that disrupt the normative bonds that stabilize power. Public memorialization is an important political activity, Simon insists, but "skepticism in regard to the progressive prospect of historical memory is both warranted and welcome as long as it is not used to justify an injudicious dismissal of the social and political importance of the public practice of remembrance" (3).

what is and has been unseen, and to see this unseenness as part of the violence of the epidemic and how it was *addressed*. To put it another way, the unconscious object is not "AIDS" but its unseenness and the violence that that unseenness really is. What is at stake in being a "viewer" of AIDS? The organized gaze of the film is seeing AIDS not being seen. The greatest violence is not witnessed as violence, but the violence that occurs without being witnessed as violence.

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With its quiet, uniform survey of New York City streets in the aftermath of a period of mass death, *Last Address* gives the impression of taking place after something has already happened, after "the dust has settled," so to say. The "something" of the film's past is the height of the AIDS epidemic in New York City, and the film is intelligible as queer cinema in relation to this prior temporality. Indeed, the qualifier *last* in the film's title suggests that there has been a history of addresses that preceded these, and that the film imagines itself as coming at the very end of them, a place to dwell and an interpellation. In addition to the addresses of habitation, such addresses might also include NQC and Queer Theory as grounds of thought and action associated with a particular generation. The artists Sachs elegizes come from a generation, or a particular queer subset of a generation, that has been described as a last. Wojnarowicz, for example, has been called "the last outsider" (Passaro) and "the last romantic" (Carr 3-4). These tributes create the impression that we are encountering the irrecoverable end of a certain version of queerness or queer time, if belied by the recovery of romanticism in the present.

According to William Haver, an address is already, in a sense, "last." In a time of AIDS when a person's address is ever more so "fragile, tenuous, and contingent" (Haver 182), the

address book swiftly becomes an object of grief, a token of those who, having died or moved into care, are “out of place” in relation to the geographic fixity the address book would seem to offer. “[T]he address book,” he says, “is the register in which the death of the friend is inscribed *en souffrance,* both the suspension of a punctuation and a suffering” (182). The address book in a time of AIDS, like the addresses in the film, is already out-of-date, already past its utility and has become an outmoded object. *Last Address* situates itself in a time of afterness, a time after artists were producing their art and consequently a time of quietude because all has been said. This is not to say that Sachs couples the death of the author with the death of art. As I noted, *Last Address* is tied to Sachs's Queer/Art/Mentorship project and in this regard it is future-oriented, a feature I will return to shortly. By looking ahead to the productions of queer youth and investing in their development, the film engages in “afterness,” or what Gerhard Richter defines as “that which introduces, points forward to, explains, and situates something that is not yet present always already will have been preceded by what itself claims to precede” (1). *Last Address* gestures towards the common definition of queer theory as “radically anticipatory.” Premonitions of the future, the object of the film's implicit address, constitute it as a “before of an always indeterminate future” (52), what José Esteban Muñoz calls the horizons of queer futurity (*Cruising* 91). By looking ahead to what is not yet here, queer theory might be conceived as that searching gaze that has already come after the point of its own reimagining or dismantling. That is, queer theory is the tautological dream of its own simultaneous undoing and doing, life and death, formation and reformation. Theory after theory would be a redundancy, because theory is already the practice of its own dismantling. This is not meta-theory, but a laying-bare of the corrosive exercise of language and thought upon itself. The notion of an “after AIDS,” or for that matter an “AIDS Gap,” borrows many of the same obstructions that occupy Theodor Adorno on

the possibility of an “after Auschwitz:” the endless deferrals of an after, the impossibility of a present, and the metonymy of atrocity by a name or place. “Auschwitz” is an address that in its material and linguistic fixity inscribes *en souffrance* a “fragile, tenuous, and contingent” historicity. I miss them, Sachs has said about the artists he featured in his film, so I take his own conception of afterness to be *en souffrance,* in Haver's sense, or the temporal shape or logic that suffering takes to explain itself.

Afterness is also formally inscribed in the film to explain the kind of historical trauma on which it turns. In this way the late gaze of the camera provides a compelling formal analogy. As Takashi says, the cinematic image is already “out of date.” It is as if a world is seen only in its recovery. *Last Address* gestures to the lost time theory of trauma associated most closely with Cathy Caruth. Traumatic experience inhibits the assimilation of experience into conscious memory, so the subject has the impression of arriving “too late” to the event that has already occurred. In returning repeatedly to the traumatic moment, the subject has the impression of “being present at something that has already happened” (Cavell 26). For Caruth, as well, this dynamic is a temporal paradox: “traumatic experience,” she says, “suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness” (208). But violence, trauma, atrocity, and disease should also disrupt our notions of common sense. Caruth draws a connection between seeing, knowing, and belatedness in which the moment of seeing is experienced as a blind spot and felt experience in its afterlife presents and re-presents itself as nothing but seeing. But although there are compelling formal similarities between the lost time theory of trauma and photographic reproduction, one must be careful not to humanize the cinematic image by grafting to it the familiarizing discourse of human traumatic experience. To

do so would be to rationalize the rich alterity of film according to human pretensions to knowledge. The cinema's delayed temporality is no disordered cognition open to reparation, and is less of a process of recovery than it is the disassembly of the presumed object of recovery.

At the risk of returning to another psychoanalytic remediation of the film, I would like to briefly consider Freud's concept, *Nachträglichkeit,* and the non-human departures that have unfurled from its inception. *Last Address* is shaped in part around a narrative of queer trauma, and it binds itself to a sea-change in queer history that, in the film, reverberates again and again through endless last addresses. No address in the film is the very last address, and if the film itself is a survivor of this era, it is as Sara Guyer has put it, "a failure of ends" (13). Dwellings in the film, while they are no figure for trauma, displace the gaze from wasting bodies onto architectural ruins, deferring a sight too painful to behold. *Nachträglichkeit* is the name Freud gave to the psychoanalytic phenomenon by which significance is attributed to a moment only in light of a second, later moment. It is often translated as belated or deferred action, although Jean Laplanche argues that "afterwardness" more appropriately covers Freud's several uses of the word (264). Broadly speaking, it is a theory that connects two moments in time in which the latter event reveals a failure of ends. The trauma of the first event is postponed and becomes apparent in its *nachträglich* recovery, often through a traumatic reaction. *Nachträglichkeit* has several psychoanalytic interpretations and it has also been given aesthetic relevance. Charles Bernheimer, for example, has developed *Nachträglichkeit* as a literary theory, in which he claims the moment of reading is "displaced, shifted, postponed, hindered" in relation to the text's presence (4).

One of the most unique incarnations of this idea belongs to Derrida and the program of *différance*. Derrida develops a version of *Nachträglichkeit* as the supplement.[70] With the supplement Derrida saw in *Nachträglichkeit* the potential of deferred action to behave quite differently in relation to its prior moment. For him the supplemental moment behaves destructively towards the prior one, and meaning emerges not from the establishment of legible connection but from a process of dismantling. The supplement appends something originary; it "adds only to replace" (Derrida, *Grammatology* 157). Through both accumulating and eroding the supplement creates a kind of disaster for the original that came before. Photographic reproduction, as I noted at the beginning of my argument, seems to both accrete and erode my own vision. And if film can seem more real to us than reality, the cinematic image profoundly disasters the primacy and the reliability of my own vision. But as Khalip has said, disaster "isn't merely synonymous with the denigration of thought, but rather suggests new conditions of intelligibility and complex forms of non-triumphal, wasted life" ("Ruins"). With Khalip's vocabularies of disaster we can *dwell with* these transformative effects, for in *Last Address* the film's long takes and fixed perspectives demand the very act of dwelling upon dwellings. The dwellings address us even as their addresses are outmoded. Rather, they take on a new use, a use contained in the word "address" but only seized upon in the last moment of the disaster of the address. In the film, the address not only refers to dwellings but to the disasters that befall dwellings. Vito Russo's last address is filmed on the location where the dwelling has since been demolished. In the film, an address refers to both the dwelling and its dismantling, or to the presence of a standing home and to the sign of its absence. Or like Haver's out-of-date addresses,

[70] Primarily traced to his commentary on Rousseau's *Confessions*. The word supplement comes from *The Confessions* wherein Rousseau describes writing as the "supplement of speech." Writing remains Derrida's primary example of the supplement.

the address is a trace of the impermanence of relation and the impossibility of there being a moment of life or death that is available to be viewed by film. A facet of what Ricco calls "minor architecture," the address is that architecture "outside architecture" that includes its own destruction and deconstruction and the absences inherent in reference, another form of relation. The transformative effects of dwelling with dwellings in their disastered afterlife place them before an indeterminate future, exposing new conditions of intelligibility released by a radical disassembly. The late image stands before a future, a future of thought made possible not through reparation or recovery but the denaturing of thought and the potential for otherness in its afterlife.

As I noted, *Last Address* has been subject to several supplemental disassemblages. It has been partitioned into single frames and performed as walking tours. These acts are the supplement *par excellence,* for by supplementing the cinematic image, which itself is supplemental, they are the supplement of the supplement. I noted that these acts express, among other things, a restlessness with the film *as film*, as if the film were "something [that] cannot fill itself up by itself" (Derrida, *Grammatology* 157), these acts are "assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (157). The cinematic image that arrives late to our gaze and whose afterness dismantles itself is itself exposed in its emptiness, its out-of-dateness already bearing a rancid scent, the impression that it is all already over. This emptiness provokes acts of disassemblage, an attitude of destruction towards the film that does not destroy the film itself, but that releases new horizons of intelligibility. The technical simplicity of the film also makes it available for imitation and manipulation by the generation of young artists that it comes before. *Last Address* was shot over three days and cost $3000 to produce (Sachs 294). There is a future to behold by dwelling in the disaster of the remains, one not brought forth by restorative or

reproductive action, but by the denaturing of the film. When viewers create stills or tour the addresses, the film "cumulates and accumulates presence" (*Grammatology* 157), and viewers are brought close to the reality they wish to see. But this intimacy is only realized in the dismantling of that reality that is proper to art. As Khalip observes, "the aesthetic always stands for a category of thought that destroys as well as it creates" (*Anonymous* 21). These acts of disassemblage return viewers of *Last Address* to its focus on the ruins of artists and the encounters of aesthetics with ruination.

Beholding film is a disassembly of witnessing and a disassembly as witnessing. It is a witnessing of what remains unseen as well as a witnessing that is something other than seeing or sensing. It stages a denaturing of "what is" not to uncover truth but to create new conditions for what can be thought and to think as the dismantling of thought. When cinema does not allow us to see as somebodies and when it holds the image back from becoming pure information it permits us instead to *view* as "the last outsider," as it were, which is to look from a place outside of me when I am exposed to reality in its mode of disaster. Viewing without seeing, as I said, is a violence but it can also be a capacity for thought, if thought also means a radical anticipation of what is unthought. For example, Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993) is seventy-five minutes of blue screen and a soundtrack containing a poem – a prayer, as I have often thought about it[71] – over the sounds of a moving urban life. Jarman made the film while living with cytomegalovirus, a complication of AIDS that causes blindness, and the film addresses his experience of

[71] A prayer because of its rhythmic supplications ("O Blue come forth / O Blue arise") to a world behind and beyond the blue as well as inside the impenetrable numinousness of the blue. And because of its incantatory recitations from the dizzying blue screen I have also understood it to be a spell, and an effort to make spells of film, or expose film's spellbinding power as a summons to call attention to AIDS and to forms of violence that are beyond sight. The prayer or spell names a direct connection between being and what is beyond being, or the human's desired presence to what is beyond it without the rationalizing distortion of mediation.

sightlessness. *Blue* disrupts the satisfaction of the wish that Cavell claims is addressed by cinema to see the world as it is. As Gabrielle Griffin argues, "the desire for the gaze to be met by a visual object is unexpectedly re-directed" (14). Re-directed to blueness, to be sure, but also to the world "as it sounds" through the film's perambulatory movement through Jarman's world. *Blue* is a film one "views" without "seeing" for although there is not nothing to see (Roger Hallas's exploration of the influence of Yves Klein and the colour IKB on the film is noteworthy[72]), the film centres sightlessness as a condition of film and disassembles the normative estrangements through which we "look out" at the world and look on at film to reveal a new estrangement unthought or unacknowledged within the philosophy of film. That film could be about or enable sightlessness (not only as a theme) provides a form for film that disrupts form itself in the dissolution of boundaries. Film after sight proposes a radical de/re-composition of film that dwells in the disaster of film. The late cinematic image is an occasion for this denaturing of thinking and viewing because "afterness can be understood as the affirmation of a dismantling that does not merely destroy its object, but liberates what previously remained unthought within that object precisely through the process of its dismantling ... [A]fterness points ahead through the movement of dismantling that is proper to it (Richter 52-53). Another way to put this is Jack Halberstam's concept of the "queer art of failure," where failure is comprised of "modes of unbeing and unbecoming [that] propose a different relation to knowledge" (*Failure* 23). The failure of Jarman's sight is the painfully sublime occasion for an unbeing of film. Failure's afterness is also its beginning, wherein a failure to succeed decreates the relations between objects and knowledge – perhaps at once a failure to fail as well. "A failure of ends" is how Guyer identifies survivorship, and perhaps, too, a failure of lasts. In the epigraphic words with

[72] See Roger Hallas's *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image,* pp. 217-240.

which I began this section, the speaker of Wordsworth's poem commands me to “build thy house upon this grave.” Beyond relating to the imagery in *Last Address* of dwellings as graves or dwellings built upon the rubble of atrocity, “*this* grave” refers us back to the poem itself, exposing the art-work to be a disastered zone upon which dwelling occurs and through which dwelling occurs as disaster. A site of the yet-unthought, a coming-after of a past *en souffrance* and a coming-before of a new intelligence, the poem or the film is a shelter for vagrants: the building, its dismantling, and the waste that is proper to it.

Part 3: *Cinema Animal*

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

— from “Tyger Tyger, William Blake

In the previous section I made a distinction between “seeing” and “viewing.” This distinction, I said, turns upon the difference between a human gaze and an automatic gaze, which can be expressed by the divisions and overlaps between “somebody's gaze” and “nobody's gaze.” Because the human adopts the “nobody's gaze” of the camera when watching a film, the human and automatic gazes are not mutually exclusive, but overlap in ways that can be estranging and discomfiting. Alternately, because this overlap is the nature of all film viewing, it is our natural relation to cinematic images, and these images can feel more real to us than reality. We should not assume that a natural relation to cinema and that which draws us to it is not estranging, for estrangement is part of how we experience our own reality, and it can be a powerful lure to film. I borrow the German filmmaker Alexander Kluge's term, “cinema animal,” to mark the lure to

cinema and its inhuman features. Taken from his film *The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time* (1985), the cinema animal (*Kinotier*) names an obsession with film. The way film satiates a wish in us and that we feel present to it without the interposition of subjectivity characterizes our attraction to film as an automatic or primal reaction, even a misanthropic desire to see the world other than in the way the human sees it. The erotics of the cinema is the dispossession through which we view it.

Last Address breaks its serial focus on dwellings to draw our attention to several animals, most notably an orange cat that once belonged to Jim Lyons, an ex-boyfriend of Sachs whose last address on 75A Willow Street, Brooklyn, appears in the film (Sachs 293). I have argued that part of the labour of the film is to appropriate the profilmic gaze of the cinematic apparatus which provides views rather than vision, and indifferently embraces everything that passes before it without the benefit of human selection. Following the inhuman capacities of the camera, the film finds in non-human animals another analogy for itself. In the body of the animal, the film both explores the limits of witnessing that can be performed by a camera and it locates a figure of the film viewer, a figure made available for identification but one no human could rightfully occupy. The animal offered to us by the film is an impossible figure of relation and therefore also stages the impossibility *of* figure when the figure is a dispossession of the human. In this concluding section I will explore the cinematic function of witnessing through *Last Address*'s animals and disrupt the tautology of life and witnessing. If the late cinematic image participates in what we call witnessing, attestation, or testimony at all, it does so by transforming these terms into a kind of automatism of the human, or what inside the human is automatic, primal and inarticulate, unliving, and indifferent to the human's life.

Animals punctuate *Last Address.* They are the only living things upon which the camera fixates, rather than that fall under its gaze. Their inclusion is exceptional in a film structured in name and form by a montage of last addresses. What are they doing in a film that is otherwise highly programmatic? The orange cat, particularly, appears to pull the camera in a different direction, away from its objective, as if to show that a film will behave in excess of its instrumentality and pick up on things that thwart the director's gaze. Last addresses are the alleged subjects of the film, but the cat proves irresistible to Sachs. Its presence compels him to turn against the logic of his film, to shift the gaze from what is seen/scene unseen to what is seen to be seen, a charismatic body like so many whose images circulate on the internet like postcards. It redirects the view from the vacancy of the addresses to the creatures that currently dwell there, gesturing towards the film's own shared presence among unspoken narratives of continued dwelling. Unlike the address before which it sits in repose, the cat is impossible to miss. And yet in the spare criticism of *Last Address* there is no mention of the cat nor of the birds.[73] As irresistible as they are for Sachs, for critics and commentators they mark uncanny blind spots. There is a connection, surely, between their omission in the film's reception and their hypervisibility for Sachs, as if the animal is legislated under a regime in which it may only be seen in certain ways, and in which it may only be seen as an unseen and unseeing neighbour in the world. These animals are, similar to how Clark describes the appearance of a little dog who jumps at gunfire in footage of Holocaust murders, "plainly part of the footage's image substance but experienced symptomatically as invisible" ("Remains" 156). The animals are caught under

[73] Most notably, a paragraph that is devoted to *Last Address in* B. Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema: Director's Cut* (2013)*,* which is the only critical commentary of the film to appear in a monograph. Rich celebrates the film's "holding open the door all the while to new neighbours who continue to arrive (13) without referencing the animals, who remain here as a strange allusive inscription in Rich's description without being accounted for in the commentary as animals.

the “nobody's gaze” that records without seeing, and before the animals the human viewer is hauntingly aligned with that gaze, an anthropocentric corroboration with the inhuman nihilism of the camera. But the detour towards the cat, specifically, reveals a desire in Sachs, something automatic, a “cinema animal” that is simply drawn towards the orange creature. Despite the cat's absence in the criticism, it makes this scene visible, otherwise qualifying it as belonging to the visible as if the cat were a support to the act of filming. Its indubitable attraction exerts force upon the somebody's gaze of the camera, reminding us that there is a camera there, that the addresses are being filmed, and that what is happening is a filming. Some kind of registering, some kind of recording, is taking place, both by the camera and by a drive in Sachs that wants to focus on that cat, something unintelligible that is responding to the cat. Continuous with its ubiquitous presence on the internet, the cat has become in one sense a shorthand for filming itself – a sign that there is something to see and something to film.[74] The cat is a shorthand for the performative; it is always doing and always seen to be doing. In this film, the cat amplifies the stationary activity surrounding it, showing both the addresses and the film itself to be animated, even if their animation should take the form of a repose.

The cat's mute inexpression prevents these un- and under-determined some-things from becoming assimilated by a human rationality or a language that the film itself does not use. We look at the cat but the unfocused gaze it returns rejects the mutual acts of seeing and recognition. The cat indexes the otherliness of the cinematic image, for the human who looks towards it sees no reflection of itself looking back. In its homely presence among the addresses the cat

[74] For example, see Anat Pick's commentary on John Berger's argument in “Why Look at Animals?” that the diminishing presence of wildlife coincides with its increased media visibility: “*It is difficult [...] to ignore the inverse relation between diminishing wildlife and animals' enhanced visual presence. Fussed over, tagged, screened, projected, and surveyed, exhibited, simulated, incarcerated, conserved, even manufactured and invented, nature and animals are gaining an exclusive kind of cultural visibility” (Pick, Creaturely 105).*

paradoxically unsettles the homeliness of the image and inserts an uncanny figure into its midst. At no other time in the film do I experience more closely Cavell's assertion that the reality of the cinema does not include me. That said, the cat marks a point of continuity between my world and the one I am given to view. The addresses revert to the background, and in their place sits a creature that is both part of their milieu and set apart from it. Both at home and homeless among the dwellings, it dwells in that odd cut-out space of what Anat Pick, after Jakob von Uexküll, calls the animal's “dwelling-world” (“Animal Life” 221). For Pick the dwelling-world can be a place of encounter between human and non-human animals, and film's deracinating gaze generates a zoomorphic field that is one such space. Coupled with the foreign experience is *Last Address*'s acknowledgement that the world as it is is a world shared with others, even if the forms of being-with or coexistence that constitute world-sharing recoil from the anthropocentric dynamics of mutuality, transparency, and rationality.

Cinema is well-suited to exploring the dynamics of inclusion and abjection across species because in the same moment that I am absented from the cinematic image the image is a site in which everything is shared. Cinema is both the instrument of the human's brutal mastery of animality and the site at which that mastery is threatened by indifference, precisely because cinema's nihilism is itself inhuman and therefore potentially expelled by the anthropocentric. Animals were some of the first subjects of cinema. The de- and reconstitution of animal bodies helped to establish early on how the cinema would institute a dissectional or disassembling imaginary, one it did not invent but radically transformed and automated.[75] Eadweard Muybridge's stereo pictures of animals in motion helped to establish the capacity of the motion

[75] Nicole Shukin examines the cinema's material relation to animal slaughter as it required the rendering of animal byproducts to make film stock. See Chapter 2 of *Animal Capital*: “The cinema,” she says, “simultaneously encrypts a sympathetic and pathological relationship to animal life” (87-130).

picture to deconstitute movement and time and to reveal natural processes. Muybridge also applied his technique to the gait of a pig. This set of images differs from many of his other animals in motion because the pig's movements are not so apparent. Its thick oblong body retains its shape and orientation as the stubby legs almost inscrutably shift forward, giving the stereo images the impression of static repetition. Almost as if subverting the revelatory purpose of the motion pictures, Muybridge's pig set perhaps reveals something else about pigs in the Anthropocene that the photographer did not anticipate. Pigs are already rendered, already torn apart and bred to be torn apart as one of the primary food animals. The motion picture need not show the pig deconstituted because the animal's birth, life, and death are already a brutal process of rendering parts. Here, Muybridge's apparatus bears witness to a movement not of the human but of *humanity* in the body of the pig. Humanity is turned into a body given to kinetic disassemblage and laid bare before the inhuman automaton. That a ballet dancer and wrestlers joined in combat could also fall under this disassembling gaze suggests how cinema could indiscriminately lend the same scrutiny to the human, revealing not only its creaturely kinetics but its own annihilating motions towards material life.

The cinema's sensitivity to detail born of its incapacity for affective and ideological selection therefore does not only draw out differences and boundaries in material life but provides an odd levelling effect whereby what is exposed to the camera is given equal value, or where material differences do not translate into differential value. The cinema may draw out indifferences, or a disinterest in difference, where only difference can be seen by the anamorphic selections of the human sensorium. Consequently, anthropocentric exceptionalism is both shored up and threatened in cinematic realities, which risk, suggests Pick, “the absorption of the human figure within the leveled plain of the photographic world” (*Creaturely* 106). The same gaze that

captures the pig captures the boxers. The photographic trades in what François Laruelle calls "flat thoughts," its invention coinciding with "the massive emergence of thoughts of the automatic, blind or symbolic type, 'leveled' or 'flat thoughts'" (*Non-Photography* 29).[76] On its flattened interface, bodies are decreated into the kinetic activity, sound, and form that are not only not proper to only one kind of life but that may not distinguish between what is life and what is non-life. The human becomes creaturely and the dead hauntingly animated in a medium that is itself spectralizing. Capacities thought proper to the human, such as witnessing, are shared across the level field, not insofar as animality is elevated in its status or capabilities, but in that what is proper to the human is seen to be performed or practiced outside of the human's exceptional specificities. Discussing the implications of Bazin's realism, Pick suggests that "cinema thought to its photographic realist conclusion wants nothing more to do with the particularities of species, be they human or animal" (*Creaturely* 110). Such radical disinterest disasters the boundaries between human and non-human animals, but this disassembling gaze extends further to the dwellings that are the subjects and the ruins of Sachs's film. "[W]hat is the meaningful difference," continues Pick, "between a wall and a man from the point of view of cinema?" (114). As Pick notes, a wall can also disintegrate and reconstitute by the progression and rewinding of the film. When the human shares space with an animal or a building, the image subjects all to the potential for dismantling and reanimation.

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[76] Photography and film have been an important source of development for Laruelle's "non-philosophy." A central feature of non-philosophy is the strategy of "non-decisional" thought, an alternative to "decisionism," which is a structure of thought he attributes to philosophy. Decisionism is a split and subsequent synthesis of immanent and transcendental terms that are imposed upon the world, from philosophy, to allow the philosopher to think about the world. Photography and film are therefore a compelling source of potentially non-decisional thought, as Takashi has observed, "The camera itself does not make selections" (126). In other words, the cinematic gaze does not make decisions towards the subjects that fall before it.

Sachs's apparatus expresses a playful affinity with animals that is unmatched by its austere treatment of the dwellings. Following author and filmmaker Vito Russo's last address, whose building is now gone, the cinematic image focuses on a small group of birds in flight over the horizon, and lilts according to their movement as if joining their murmuration over the skyline. This act of following the birds is one of the film's rare takes containing camera movement, and at no other time does it allow itself to be so visibly persuaded by objects in the *mise-en-scène*. As Sachs is drawn towards the cat he is also taken by these birds, playing with the camera's own animality rather than becoming the object of some Hitchcockian plot. A symmetry is created between a moving camera and a "bird's eye view," a symmetry that is not principally invested in the erasure of boundaries between itself and the birds, so much as displaying the dwellings from two perspectives. We do not view them through the birds' eyes, but we view them being viewed by the birds. The camera's sympathetic connection to their view routes the cinematic image through their inscrutable gaze and becomes emblematic of what Derrida identifies as following the animal, a reckoning with that under-discourse, text, and signature by which one takes account of the fact that the animal "could *look* at them, and *address* them" (*Animal* 13). Why is the animal's address the last address? Perhaps because it will always outlive me; my address will never be the last. Through the otherness of the camera the film makes room for other views without inhabiting those views. By doing so it also acts out a dynamic seen in human witnessing, in which the human bears witness to the witness who retains the trace of presence in her body.

Being included in a film that traces itself to the AIDS crisis, the animal is seen to be sharing a world with those who died and are absent, and the camera lends its levelling gaze to both figures. We are not offered a comparison between the two figures; rather, our gaze is

aligned with an apparatus that levels boundaries between species and is therefore capable of illuminating the details of shared existence. What can the animal teach us about the artists who died and the legacy inherited by a new generation? The animals' inclusion gestures to a certain kind of animal life that, in some of the dynamics of its coexistence with humans, embodies a violence done to beings deemed disposable or inimical. I said above that the worst kind of violence is a violence not seen to be violence. I implicated deaths occurring during the height of the AIDS epidemic in that type of violence for the silence and indifference, even the anticipation, directed towards the marginalized people who were dying and at risk for contracting and transmitting HIV. For Derrida, animals are subjected to a violence expressed not only in their killing but in the means of their survival. Animals are not only killed but their overproduction is organized as a part of the program of their annihilation.[77] Killing them and breeding them for the purpose of being killed is performed non-criminally, a violence that is not collectively witnessed as violence. What is it to think about the fact that the last address of billions of animals is an abattoir?[78] Drawing associations between animals and AIDS deaths and, as Derrida does, genocide, is not meant to compare events, but to show that each has occurred in the same world, and therefore can; we are capable of each of these atrocities. Simply by existing in a world that includes us the body of the animal is paradigmatic of the disposable and the forgotten. It occupies Barthes's *punctum*, or the wound in the film that pierces through its ascetic appearance to remind us of the on-going stakes of AIDS.

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[77] In *The Animal That Therefore I Am (Following),* Derrida observes that the annihilation of food animals differs from most other atrocities in that their annihilation is organized not only around killing, but by the overproduction of animals for killing through artificial insemination.

[78] I suggested in the previous section that the simplicity of *Last Address* makes it available to imitation and manipulation. I have often imagined a film called "Last Address" that is comprised of long takes of the exteriors of abattoirs.

Given the animal's precarious life and the erasure of its death as a violent one, it is in a singular position to "speak" to the erasures in *Last Address* that we have discussed through the powers of its own subtracted voice. The pigeons are itinerant inhabitants of the sites of the last addresses – perhaps capable of the perambulation between them that the film constructs – but the orange cat, who may still live at 75A Willow Street and who knows and is known by Sachs, is the lone survivor – the "last outsider" – of the time followed by the film, and in its own way witnessed the time inside the gap. "Strange witnesses," is what Derrida calls figures like this cat, because "they are witnesses who do not know what they are witnessing. They keep a secret without knowing anything about it" ("Promise" 392).[79] Like Muybridge's apparatus that keeps the open secret of humanity in the stereo images of animals, the orange cat carries something of the AIDS crisis in its body. That burden is invisible, even and especially to the cat itself, but like the virus it lives and acts inside the body without being seen from the outside. It could be 75A Willow Street's dream of the time of the crisis, or its dream of Lyons. Animals are some of the figures through which *Last Address* finds substitutions and deferrals for itself and for the kind of attestation it is performing. They perform an act of witnessing even if the act has no content. Bearing witness by an animal involves a dismantling of anthropocentric notions of presence, knowledge, and seeing, and an appeal to "forms of attestation that are irreducible to the psychic, intentional, conscious, or experiential" (Clark, "Remains" 168). Hallas, for example, explains that for a human to testify her act of perception must be transformed into a speech act. If images

[79] Derrida's statement contradicts the logic of the secret that he himself has argued in the phenomenon of "hearing-oneself-speak." In short, the secret is a "de-negation," or *dénégation*, a French translation of Freud's word *Verneinung.* To have a secret one must first negate it: "I must not tell the secret," but to accomplish this negation, one must first tell the secret to oneself, or de-negate it. Denegation is a negation of a negation (a negation *par excellence*). In the gesture that I negate the secret I also confirm that I have it. The animal cannot therefore keep a secret without knowing anything about it because to keep a secret one must hear oneself speak it to oneself. Whatever the animal retains of what it witnesses is stranger than the secret, and functions otherwise than through the psychological processes and impasses of negation.

produced by a camera are given as evidence, an external human interpretation is needed to name what has been perceived (14). Yet Pick identifies the act of witnessing in the cinema against its utility for rationalization as the withholding of the verbal supplement. When a film "refuses to speak" it belongs to the "realm of witnessing" (Pick, *Creaturely* 143). *Last Address*'s refusal to provide a voiceover denies the rationalizing imperative to name what is being seen, honouring the cinematic image's inherently inhuman modes of revelation and demonstration and its capacity to reveal not what the human did perceive and not what it did not perceive but precisely what remained unperceived in what the human did perceive.

The cat's unknowing and inarticulate body is key to how the film understands bearing witness, placing in the role of the witness a being that cannot testify to what it witnesses, yet whose presence acts as an incitement. Cavell argues that cinema satisfies a human wish for presence to reality even as the cinematic image shows something that has already happened, yet in what way does this wish intersect the wish to be able to witness and to testify to what one witnesses? Derrida suggests that a synonym for witness could be presence, but quickly changes that to "self-presence." He says,

> A witness can claim his having been present at this or that, having been witness to this or that, having had the experience of or having experienced this or that, only on the condition of being and having been sufficiently *self*-present *as such,* only on the condition of claiming, at any rate, to have been sufficiently conscious of himself, sufficiently self-present to what he is talking about. (*Sovereignties* 79)

Self-presence reverses the desire for presence, as self-presence re-inserts the human's subjectivity between it and reality. As we recall, the human desires presence to reality because its stifling subjectivity is all that is present to it. But self-presence, also doubled in this passage as self-consciousness, is a condition that Martin Heidegger notoriously denied animals. Self-presence is thought to be necessary to the infrastructure of witnessing, for if one is to testify as a witness, that testimony must in turn be witnessed: we must bear witness to the witness. It is only by witnessing the self-present witness that we hope to yield truth and redemption, and yet the animal is not permitted to produce these things for us or for itself. In his commentary for Paul Celan's poem, "Ashenglorie," Derrida asks why we read, cite, and interpret this poem when "we don't finally know *to what* it is bearing witness?" (87).

> What we have here is a compulsion to cite and re-cite, to repeat what we understand without completely understanding it, feeling at work in the economy of the ellipsis a power more powerful than that of meaning and perhaps even than that of truth, of the mask which would manifest itself as mask. The reciting compulsion, the 'by heart' desire stems from this limit to intelligibility or transparency" (87)

As readers, we are in the position of the animal: consuming without understanding, obeying a compulsion, and expelled from the economy of meaning and truth. As the animal, according to Descartes and later Lacan, we are more "reacting" than we are "responding" (Derrida, *Animal* 84;123). Yet as I noted, it is presence and not self-presence that is thought to yield an unmediated view of reality. Here is the incoherence that obstructs the logic of bearing witness: I must be able to bear witness to the self-present witness, but her presence to herself is the source

of my scepticism. To put it another way, I desire in her an ideal self-present witness to become fully present to what has happened, but this ideal is bound up in anthropocentric criteria of the human's rational relation to reality and the expectation of its intelligible presence to reality that cannot tolerate the otherness, the various gaps and estrangements and indifferences, that mark our relation to what is outside.

Derrida's evocation of non-human behaviour in his commentary on Celan's poetry makes gestures to his own twinning of the non-human animal and the non-human poem. How Celan's poem itself bears witness is a question implied by the poem that Derrida fleshes out in his commentary. Its final words, "*Niemand / zeugt für den / Zeugen,*" (no one / bears witness for the / witness) suggest for Derrida a host of possibilities, no less the role of aesthetic encounters in the infrastructure of witnessing atrocity. If no one can bear witness for the witness, then "the poem bears witness" (*Sovereignties* 87). But "no one" is also the grammatical subject, aligning the poem with the "no one," or as I have been saying in another context, the "nobody's gaze." The poem bears witness in the midst of the subtraction of the subject, not in spite of its asubjectivity but because its aesthetic automatism retains the impersonal.

Citing and repeating are synonymous with automatism in the human, what in the human's relation to poetry is present without being self-present. Like the viewer taking up the nobody's gaze of the camera, citing and repeating mark an alignment with what is outside of the human that takes the form of a representative art. These behaviours are the mark of the poem acting from within the human rather than an authorial subjectivity or a somebody's gaze acting from within the poem. The animals' inarticulateness does not set them apart from the elegized artists whose voices, even and especially after death, are strong, but it indexes a relation to art in the animals' symmetry with the camera.

Film's intelligence manifests in kinetics, frames, scales, light quality, colouration, and sound quality, to name only a few items. It is affected by what is outside of it in ways that are often visible. In the long take of Klaus Nomi's house, the image shakes with the impact of the wind. For Titi Nguyen, this shaking is reminiscent of the filmmaker and the filmmaker's relation to the addresses and to the city. Nguyen says, "I am reminded of the video maker, Ira Sachs, as the camera shakes slightly in its framing. He is witness, rememberer, mourner. He seeks clues, contact with these artists he respected or loved" (qtd. in Fleischmann). That the shaking should be traced back to Sachs tellingly suggests how Nguyen locates Sachs's subjectivity through a cinematic motion that falls outside his agency. As Clark writes in another context, "a momentary loss in the image's clarity non-representationally 'photographs' [the photographer's] reaction" ("Remains" 154). Sachs is not responsible for the shaking, although he is hospitable to it and allows it into the film. His organized abstention from the *mise-en-scène* is disorganized by the film's own "photograph" of his presence. The wind's impact on the filming marks a point of contact between the camera and its subject that is registered by the non-cognitive mediations of the film's sensitivity. Nguyen registers Sachs's symbolic, respectful, and loving contact with the artists through the film's purely material response, the reaction serving as a kind of thrownness of the film's structure. We could otherwise call the film's material contact the unsymbolic, unrespectful, and unloving proximity supplemented by its translation into meaning or information. The film can be seen here in its mode of attestation, not because Sachs has turned the camera upon itself in reflection, but because a gesture of inscription by the camera encountering the subject and with the filmmaker insists upon its presence and its responsiveness to what is exposed. What bears witness for Nguyen, what exposes Sachs's relation and his "somebody's gaze," is the inhuman transfer of energy between the wind and the camera. The

shaking exposes a material relation in which Sachs is not directly interposed but that stands out above all for Nguyen as the image of witnessing.

The camera's shaking makes an impression on Nguyen because it is an impression – one he recognizes as an inscription of grief that moves through his own body. The shaking resembles an autonomous response in the human to what recoils before language. Subjectivity is inscribed autonomically, becoming subject to a process of transcription that converts expression to a kind of kineticism in which the apparatus does not attempt to mimic or represent human expression but derives from it a reaction without self-consciousness. The shaking camera of *Last Address* recalls another scene from *Silverlake Life* when Mark holds a shaking camera over Tom's dead body. Mark's grief and shock and fear are transcribed into a shaking that originates in his body. While the cinematic image is focused on the body in front of the camera, it bears witness to the body behind the camera. Mark's involuntary shaking becomes the camera's in-expression of grief. Mark is an actor and his job is to express and control his expression. In this moment there are no words and no expression proper to the event, but as if still an actor in this moment he embodies an inscription of grief made visible to viewers.[80] Recalling *Silverlake Life,* the camera takes over from Mark to reveal an automatic reaction of the human, registering something from the body that comes from an unreflective place. I noted earlier that the film's multiple handlers detach it from personal ownership, and here the camera also shows itself to take responsibility for the film. Matter plays tricks on the camera, Benjamin says, and here the camera registers the human's ephemeral affect as *matter.* Mark's subjectivity is not overwritten in this moment so much as Tom's dead body is given a kind of resonance, even a life as a *moving image,* as it is

[80] Curiously, the last address before which the camera of *Last Address* shakes belonged to Klaus Nomi, also an actor.

caught under the gaze of the shaking camera. The movement originates in Mark, but it belongs to Tom insofar as it is his body that resonates through Mark and shows up in the image.

Last Address operates to the side of such direct imagery, but by calling attention to the non-human world in which it resides the film relies upon these recessive forms and figures of witnessing to decentre the human as the sole bearer of history. Whereas a poem's language sounds or pacing may inscribe traces of its outside, a film's equitable hospitality to movement registers human activity in the sinews of matter. If what is shown in *Last Address* is what is unseen, perhaps the shaking is all the attestation there can be to register what occurs after sight. The non-living movements of a camera shaking in the wind are affecting in part because they resemble our own shaking before destabilizing phenomena. Shaking images reveal an affinity with the camera other than its resemblance to human vision. Shaking is something one can see in the image, yet it resonates not as a form of sight but as a haptic expression of the human's vulnerability to what it does and does not see. The image also shows an ontological shaking. Shaking is what happens at the limits of vision, of speech, of knowledge, and of thought when we are among the mute witnesses to history.

Positioned inertly before the addresses, the camera treats the cat as a queer witness to AIDS. Queer, because for film to witness we need a concept of witnessing that includes the non-human, the non-psychological, and self-subtracted presence. Concepts of the animal or film as witness require that a trace remains upon the indifferent, not in spite of its neutrality but because its anonymous saturation in the world exposes it to contingency. The unsubjugating view makes us both hospitable and vulnerable to the violence of alterity. What is perhaps most queer about the film is that it does not exclude the human; it points to the human's exposure to its own inhumanness before the presence of atrocity.

Conclusion: Seeing After the World

One of us, each says to himself, the day will come when one of the two of us will see himself no longer seeing the other and so will carry the other within him a while longer, his eyes following without seeing, the world suspended by some unique tear, each time unique, through which everything from then on, through which the world itself—and this day will come—will come to be reflected quivering, reflecting disappearance itself: the world, the whole world, the world itself, for death takes from us not only some particular life within the world, some moment that belongs to us, but, each time, without limit, someone through whom the world, and first of all our own world, will have opened up in a both finite and infinite—mortally infinite—way.

— "The Taste of Tears," Jacques Derrida

These words belong to Derrida mourning Jean-Marie Benoist. The mourner becomes his own screen when in grief he does not merely not-see the other, but sees himself not seeing. Each loss, Derrida implies, is the loss of a world or a reality opened up, and therefore I see myself not seeing a world. The weeping eyes follow but they do not see, and grief is not expressed through what is or is not seen but through tears and quivering. Derrida's parataxis, "the world, the whole world, the world itself" and then "our own world," reflects his halting uncertainty of committing the world to speech. Maybe whole? Maybe itself? Maybe our? Or maybe just "the." What is our restlessness with the world such that we speak of it with such heterogeneity? What is a world, particularly when it is disappearing?

Films address these anxieties concerning what our world is and its relations and non-relations to us. The world "as it is" is not mine and does not need my vision to be seen, and just like a world closes up when a life is lost, the world one desires to see at the cinema is a world given to one through an other sight. I have argued that the cinematic gaze is indifferent to what wields it and to what falls before it, and the human who finds herself on either end of that gaze is caught up in an inhuman context she is compelled to share with others. Certain modalities of cinema decentre my sight, and in losing nothing inside its frame the image shows me a shared

world that includes me as an impersonal creature among others. I am anonymous before the screen not because others in the theatre may not know me (but that helps) but because the world embraced by the cinematic gaze views me as it views others. At its most extreme there is no difference for the camera between a cell and a human, and so the human that falls before the cinematic gaze is not a subject but a *resident* of a shared address.

The potential for queer thought and queer being through cinema's indifference is significant. What could sexual difference mean, for example, laid before an undifferentiating gaze? What is queer when *all* that falls before the lens is denatured, decreated, and subject to a homo-genizing force? The world's material heterogeneity cannot be eliminated from the image, but neither can it be *our* heterogeneity or our perception of difference. This radically levelled plane presents us with a further query: if there is no difference from the point of view of the camera between me and a cat, or between a dwelling and its demolition or disassembly, then does the camera distinguish between presence and absence – or for that matter, between presence and self-presence? As Cavell points out, at the cinema we are present at something that is absent, and this condition is part of the challenge to common sense conveyed through film. In film we are made to view the deep absences inside presence, and the abiding presence of absences everywhere. We can witness what has already happened and is not there through film because we can accept that we see the unseen and the self-subtracted reality and that we are never co-present with our radically othered world.

In film we are drawn to a world that is not ours, and yet we are not worldless, poor-in-world as Heidegger says of animals. We have a world in the mode of not having it, a series of unsubjugating, anonymous relations. As Richter notes, the photograph's afterness, or the afterness of photographic thought, puts the self in an estranging relation to itself, a relation "as an

other of which it cannot fully take account, a self that is as much invented as it is mimetically reproduced by the click of the camera, and a photograph that is as much an other-portrait . . as it is a self-portrait" (127). The self in the photograph is me and not me. We are caught up in a series of shifting and mobile relations and estrangements. In photographic space the self encounters a self to which it cannot bear responsibility, yet the self is also continuous with the photographic self, not as a version of the self in the midst of performance, but as if the self's image and its after-image occupied the same space.

In this chapter I have also tried to show that automatism informs human perception. The human views as a subjective viewer, but her subjectivity does not erase the automatism of all vision. The human's own modes of witnessing turn on the non-cognitive inscriptions, affectations, and kineticisms that are available to film. "The tears say that the eyes are not made primarily for seeing but for crying," says Derrida (*Hospitality* 115). Tears, a subject on which Derrida speaks so movingly, disrupt vision, and this autonomous suspension of sight asserts something inhuman in the human's response to grief. Like shaking or quivering they mark a limit of speech and sight in our modes of reaction and response. Our subjugating sight is arrested, and the resulting blur is how tears demand to be seen and command us to stop looking when we witness our own pain and the pain of others. Tears are a way to see oneself not seeing and to bear witness otherwise. In the space of indifference, perhaps what we could also call exposure, between the camera and the world, the human and the inhuman, the image and the after-image, and the viewer and the screen, is a queer unthought that is yet to be.

Chapter Three: Dreams After All

1. There was absolute destruction, and I was part of the world and of all people, and therefore I was being destroyed ... 2. Then there was absolute destruction and I was the destructive agent. Here then was a problem for the ego, how to integrate these two aspects of destruction? 3. Part three now appeared and *in the dream* I had awakened. I knew that I had dreamed both (1) and (2).

– D. W. Winnicott

In the process of writing a review of Carl Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962), D. W. Winnicott discloses this dream of his in a 1963 letter to Fordham Press. Winnicott's review contains a controversial psychoanalysis of Jung, but it also discloses a great deal about Winnicott's personal relation to Jung's writings and to the practice of psychoanalysis. Winnicott claims that he dreamed this dream *for* himself, for Jung, and for his patients. This generous and "hospitable" dream indeed conveys much about dreams themselves, unsurprisingly a subject that looms large in Jung's thought. It is, first of all, a dream about a dream. Staging the dream-self's awakening from a dream inside the dream, the dream clearly presents dreaming as part of the dream's image substance. Reproducing an image of itself within, the dream keeps watch over itself, performing what Maurice Blanchot calls the dream's vigilance ("Dreaming" 264). Winnicott's experience of absolute power and absolute passivity in the face of total destruction is paradigmatic of the unfixed positions of agency that tend to characterize dreamlife. He is both the perpetrator and the subject of extreme violence, and the dream supports these contradictory positions, with destruction as the link between both. The self's dream destroys the self's identity and its rational relations to the world, if only for the night, making the dreaming self the naïve subject of its own work. At these impossible limits the dream is suspended on the border of its

own possibility, its own difference, and its own darkness. In other words, the dream-within-a-dream is the dream of dream's destruction and the destruction that *dreaming is*.

Our unfixed relations to the dreamworld are among what Sharon Sliwinski perceives as the dream's "queer kind of agency that outstrips our conscious control" (*Dreaming* xxi). While they are unique to dreams, these paradoxical relations also reflect our unfixed relations of subjectivity and subjugation in the waking world. In *Dreaming in Dark Times* (2017), Sliwinski introduces a new frame of humanistic study for dreaming as a political exercise and as a political concept, making a case for dreams' relevance to the public sphere and the individual's unconscious capacity for action and imagination in times of crisis. What is a "queer kind of agency," and what could queer theory both contribute to this revitalization of dream studies and learn from scholarship on dreaming? This chapter examines Sliwinski's claim and dwells with the idea of dreaming as a site of specifically queer thought. Dream's queerness, Sliwinski suggests, is linked to its unfixed relations among various subject positions, but dreams are also queer in their profound otherness. As she notes, we experience dreams as if they come from somewhere else. We do not make our own dreams; our eagerness to compare our dreams to films suggests that we feel as if we occupy the position of spectator in relation to them, even as we are often, if not always, a player in their dramas. Is the dream really mine? Did "I" have it? Winnicott's repetition of the third-person "there was" gives the impression that his dream belongs to an impersonal authorship. Indeed, dreams seem to assume their own sovereignty. According to Blanchot, the subject does not have the dream, but must take possession of it "upon awakening [when] we hastily and greedily take possession of the night's adventures, as if they belonged to us, it is not with a certain feeling of usurpation (of gratitude as well?)" ("Dreaming" 141-2). Here is where the significance of Winnicott's claim about the dream's hospitality

becomes clear. His impression that he dreamed his dream *for* himself and for Jung and his own patients suggests that if one "takes possession" of a dream for oneself one must also be able to refuse or share possession and offer the dream to the other. Dreams are invariably connected to the other. They take their form and reasoning from the material world outside, making them *structurally* hospitable. That is, they do not rely on an ethics, or, as Immanuel Kant would say, "the rights" of hospitality, but a constitutive relation to otherness. They are exposed to and they expose us to the unknown.

One might point out that dreams are composed of internal perceptions and memories, and so do not reflect true otherness so much as the self's perception or projection of it. Seeing and remembering are already, in some sense, automatic and beyond the subject's command. In fact, dreams often display just how alien and uncontained memory is. As dreams tend to draw upon material that is unavailable to the conscious mind in waking life, they are an index of encounters for which the individual was present but not self-present. In other words, dreams attest to the non-traumatic (and in some cases, traumatic) moments when experience breaks with the subject's command of knowledge of itself and its relations to the conditions of its existence. "Existence" contains the sum of counted and uncounted knowledge, in which the "I" that can assume an identity and relations to others is a necessary by-product of a saturation in material life that it cannot properly assimilate. Therefore, dreams retain a trace of the dimension of non-spectatorship in our encounters with material life. We take possession of our dreams as spectators because we are drawn to what was unseen. We are sites of things that were witnessed but unseen, in which our *ways of seeing* are not reducible to *what* was seen.

Across the imagined gulf between the waking and sleeping selves, the dream brings us in contact with our own alterity, showing us to be anonymous to ourselves, and evidencing a

strange impersonal intelligence inside the person, something that is a part of me only to the extent that it disrupts and unmakes me. Yet these disruptions do not eliminate but create images, sounds, affects, and narratives. They are *generative*. Thinking through dreams can affect how we think about alterity, impersonality, and disruption. My aim is to show that dreams are not personal but impersonal, which is to say that they unmake the person and they find what in the person is already unmade. They contain personal references, but they are not reducible to reference. Like it is for Winnicott, the dream is a force of destruction, and yet just as he insists that his dream was not distressing or nightmarish (Winnicott, "Dream" 228), the dream's destruction is not synonymous with devastation, but with new forms of thought and living made possible by destruction.

It is the potential effects of destruction at the limits of the self and of normative logics and intelligences that I think is behind Sliwinski's claim that dreams possess "a queer kind of agency" (*Dreaming* xxi). Dreams are a non-normative form of thought that unsettle the very notion of what it is to think. Sigmund Freud's conflicting descriptions of dreams with regard to the work of thinking ask us to reconsider what counts as thought and show us how thought can resist easy translation into human cognition. As one of the most striking instances of creative automation in the human, they evidence the deviant mutability of thought as it makes and unmakes our relations to ourselves and to others.

Part 1, *"First Violence:" Queer Dreaming,* begins with a consideration of thought's deviant mutability with regard to dreaming. I review a selection of political, clinical, deconstructive, queer, and biomedical theory to argue that dreams are sites from which we can read the incoherence of the subject, or how the subject's relations of knowledge and perception contain their own potentials for non-spectatorship, uncontainment, and estrangement.

Specifically, I route theoretical material through the political turn in dream studies, organized largely by Sliwinski, and I ask how contemporary political theory of dreaming transforms our understanding of dreams as figures of otherness. Freud's dream book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1899] (2010), has provided a standard for modern understanding of the generation and interpretation of dreams. I consider Freud's humanist approach within a wider context of dream science throughout this study, and I ask how non-interpretive theories, as well as Freud's own conclusions, complicate popular beliefs about dreams' relations to the human subjects from which they spring. In this section I also explore dream's capacity to reify or make "things" out of language and identity. In the following section, I show how this phenomenon defines our impersonal relations to the material world. Part 2, *Dreaming in Disaster: David Wojnarowicz's Dreams,* shifts to the diaries of David Wojnarowicz and the significance of his dream narratives for queer studies as witnesses to the AIDS crisis. This section puts the humanist schools of dream theory to the side and looks at Wojnarowicz's dreams in the context of a class of more marginal dream theory that breaks with the principles of psychoanalysis. Specifically, I challenge the disciplinary divide between the interpretive and the cognitive or biochemical models that limits our ability to tolerate the dream's alterity and automatism. In addition to the cognitivist dream theory I draw on Jacques Khalip's essay, "The Ruin of Things" (2011), to suggest that dreams are a form of ruin or waste produced in the wake of the subject's destruction. Destruction does not entail disappearance but the production of rubble and debris brought on by processes of ruination. Can witnessing, I ask, coextend with destructive relations to the outside that produce ruin rather than restoration? In this section I also situate my claims of dream's destruction in the context of the oneiric (related to dreaming) as a plane of images, exploring the stakes of reading dreams as a form of image as we have come to understand images in art and culture. In the *Coda*

I conclude with a brief meditation on Stephen Andrews's photographic installation, *Facsimile* (1990-1993), to revisit the photographic metaphor for dreaming and to complicate the tautology of dream and image. Insofar as dreams queer relations of resemblance and memory to the material world, what does their "queer kind of agency" mean for our assumed distinction between dream and non-dream? Do their unfixed relations unfix their very existence? Finally, if the nature of the dream is to denature relations, we cannot be sure that we know what the dream is, whether it obeys the relation of reference we use to identify it. We must always be open to the possibility that there is no dream.

Part 1: *"First Violence:" Queer Dreaming*

I have claimed that dreams have an impersonal relation to the dreamer, and that this "non-relation" between dream and dreamer yields queer disruptions of the present. To make this argument I begin by looking at a selection of contemporary movements in dream studies that focus on dreams' political nature and their transgressive relations to normative subjectivity. Dreaming and waking divide consciousness into two modes, and so they reveal potentialities in the human that remain without being put to use or acted upon in conventional ways. They are a recessive form of embodied experience that exists without coming into being, and yet dream experiences evidence material encounters that existed without being experienced in conscious thought. This oddly suspended state between presence and absence, activity and passivity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and self and other, powerfully disrupts the rigid relations between the human, its action, and the material world beyond.

Contemporary movements in dream studies treat the dream as a site of political resistance. In “Fichus” (2005), Jacques Derrida's eulogy for Theodor Adorno, Derrida wonders, “Could there be an ethics or politics of dreaming that did not yield to the imaginary or to the utopian, and was not an abandonment, irresponsible and evasive?” (168). Sliwinski's recent studies of dreaming respond with a resounding “yes.” Dreams build their sensory fullness from perception and memory, linking them directly to the material world (Sliwinski, *Dreaming* 3-4). They feel the forces of socialization and keep watch over desirous life. The project at the core of *Dreaming in Dark Times* is to recuperate the dream as a political object. Dreams are sites of “freedom of thought” (19-20) that can powerfully disrupt restrictions on the imagination imposed by chaotic political situations and states of conflict. Sliwinski follows Hannah Arendt, whose work pursues a life-long interest in the significance of imagination to ethical judgement. According to Arendt, political authoritarianism induces forms of self-coercion that bind the imagination. In heightened political conflict, our capacity for imagining things otherwise and for representing the experience of others is limited to what is offered to us only in the present. In such airless conditions, Sliwinski argues, dreams are rarified, albeit ordinary and accessible, spaces of conditioned freedom that both reflect and refract struggle in times of scarcity.

At the core of *Dreaming in Dark Times* is the imperative to take dreams seriously as objects of study that have relevance to the public sphere. Dreams are fundamentally ephemeral media, unshared experience that the modern subject does not normally take seriously. Sliwinski notes that while dreams were a source of important knowledge for the ancients, “the significance of this inner landscape has diminished” (*How To Do* 6). Even Freud suspected that one cause of forgetting dreams is that “most people take very little interest in their dreams” (*Interpretation* 75). Your dream is always more important to you than it is to the person in whom you confide.

Not only is a dream's very status as “media” suspect, but its narrations tend to decrease the respectability and aesthetic value of texts that host them. In his *New York Times* book review of Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Are You My Mother?* Dwight Garner suggests that the author “recounts the content of any number of dreams – rarely a promising sign in any sort of book” (Garner). Dreams have an alienating effect; even when wakefully narrated, they are not seen to fully detach from the individual psyche from which they spring. Treating them as objects of study displaces one uncomfortably from the role of reader to that of psychoanalyst. In their privacy and their obscurity, they appear to lack relevance in the public sphere, and insisting upon them resembles indulgent escape rather than confrontation.

And yet Winnicott’s conclusions about his own dream suggest that it has a function for himself *and also for others*. What does one’s dream *do* for someone else? For Arendt, ephemeral, unshared experience is the seat of imagination that she finds so crucial for civil life. One of the few places dreams appear in queer studies as dreams rather than as code for desires and aspirations is at the end of Michael Cobb's short essay, “Lonely,” in the collection *After Sex: On Writing Since Queer Theory* (2007). A dream belonging to Anne Carson is Cobb's concluding suggestion for an example of solitude as a non-heteronormative stance. Singlehood, as I reviewed in Chapter One, threatens the primacy of the couple as the chief expression of compulsory heterosexuality. What might be gained, Cobb asks, from thoughtful consideration of postures of solitude that provide alternatives to coupled and collectivist norms of relation? Dreams reveal themselves immanently just to me, but as the example of Carson's dream implies, dreams provide occasions in which the world also dwells in solitude.

> My earliest memory is of a dream. It was in the house where we lived when I was three or four years of age. I dreamed I was asleep in the house in an upper room. That I awoke and came downstairs and stood in the living room. The lights were on in the living room, although it was hushed and empty. The usual dark green sofa and chairs stood along the usual pale green walls. It was the same old living room as ever, I knew it well, nothing was out of place. And yet it was utterly, certainly, different. Inside its usual appearance the living room was as changed as if it had gone mad. ... I explained the dream to myself by saying that I had caught the living room sleeping. I had entered it from the sleep side. ... [I]t was and remains for me a consolation to think of it lying there, sunk in its greenness, breathing its own order, answerable to no one, apparently penetrable everywhere and yet so perfectly disguised in all the propaganda of its own waking life as to become in a true sense something *incognito* at the heart of our sleeping house. (Carson 19-20)

Encountering the living room in her dream, Carson gains an impossible glimpse of the world at rest, a world that is at this moment indifferent to her presence. She imagines that she is, as Stanley Cavell has claimed about the lure of film, seeing the world unseen. As if in a film, the familiar room is made utterly strange through the ulterior lens. The experience is an encounter with the other witnessed in its own otherness in a vulnerable pose, rather than an escape from reality. She witnesses what I can only think paradoxically to call an agency or a personality belonging to the room, what Carson calls *incognito.* The something *incognito* recalls Winnicott's identification of something *incommunicado* at the heart of the individual that refuses to become

known by the penetrating gaze.[81] Perhaps in sleep and dreams the world can refuse the human's gaze, as the patient can refuse the psychoanalyst's. The singular autonomy of the individual in sleep, and of the world *incognito,* expose the human to a reality that exceeds her mastery. If the world can rest, does it also dream? Carson's dream is one example of a dream-within-a-dream, in which the dreamer dreams of a world that is also dreaming.

How could such an object embody a queer stance? Carson's dream satisfies a wish, as dreams often do, for a self-subtracted form of perception, and it tells us something about the lure of the dream. Dreams cast the world and the self as objects of estrangement. We encounter our dream never as ourselves, but as a commuted version of the self. We witness our estrangement to our own perceptions of the world, ways of seeing that belong to us but that we do not own. In dreams there is no subject present to witness the bizarre goings-on, nor even to recognize such scenes as bizarre; instead, dreams host non-subjective recreations of the self that interact with dream content outside the limits of subjectivity. These encounters can be generative even when they are not intelligible. For example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's memoir of her psychotherapy during cancer treatment, *A Dialogue on Love* (1999)*,* features many dreams, recounted both by her and the notes of her therapist, as one element of several genres of communication pieced together. She confronts this complex time in her life with several voices, as if the memoir were only partially hers, and more accurately belongs to a polyvocal assemblage. The dreams bear witness to struggles of a life lived with cancer, as well as to the psychotherapy itself, but with a gaze that, like the others, provides a counterpoint to Sedgwick's. She encounters her life, as it were, from the sleep side, where it looks utterly strange and yet generatively funny and bizarre

[81] Recall my discussion of the human that does not wish to be found in Chapter One (pp. 73-7), which Winnicott addresses in his essay, “Communicating and Not Communicating” (1963).

and violent. Dreams are opportunities to view as beings other than ourselves. They are extravagant phenomena that confront the self with its own alterity. In their midst we embody a radical otherness that is generously hospitable to the world that lies before us. This otherness does not belong to the body of an other, human or animal, but to a no-one or a non-subject modified to be hospitable towards limitless alterity.

As we can see, dreams exist as an interval between the public and the solitary, not as a hybrid event but as an ulterior expression of being that can be reduced to neither state. In this interval "between me and myself" ("Dreaming" 142), as Blanchot puts it, the subject is radically unmade. Dreams' particular way of unmaking the subject is palpable in the forms of thinking that are proper to dreaming. Sliwinski begins with an important footnote added to Freud's *Interpretation* in 1925: "At bottom, dreams are nothing other than a particular *form* of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep [original emphasis]" (n510). Dreams, she elaborates, are a form of thought operating differently than waking thought by "reus[ing] and recombin[ing] bits and pieces of material from the dreamer's diurnal perceptions and the vast storehouse of memory traces" (Sliwinski, *Dreaming* 5). This strange form of recycled thought is what Sliwinski calls, in an initial essay, "a queer kind of thinking" (*Mandela's* 7).[82] By focusing exclusively on this particular addendum of Freud's, Sliwinski excludes an important aspect of Freud's developing theory of dreams. Freud claims in Chapter VI of *Interpretation* that the dream-work "does not think" (510) and, in the 1925 footnote, that dreams are a form of thought. Sliwinski focuses on the latter statement to argue for dreaming as a unique and incomparable form of free expression and inner dialogue in the midst of human suffering. While I can hardly

[82] The phrase, "a queer kind of thinking," which appears in the publication, *Mandela's Dark Years: A Political Theory of Dreaming* (2015), is revised in the subsequent monograph, *Dreaming in Dark Times,* as "a queer form of agency" (xxi).

rebut her elegant conclusions, it is my sense that the singularity, difference, or perversion of dreaming's own “form of thought” is intractably linked to a certain crisis of thought in dreams, or that which in dreams recoils from what we normatively regard as “thinking,” that which refuses and rejects thinking. Does the latter statement supplement the former, or is the paradox itself something of a symptom of the dream's illogic? If dreams both think and do not think, this extant paradox suggests that dreaming demonstrates a crisis of thought that calls into question the very nature of thinking and therefore the very queer potential of the dream not simply to queer thought, but to queer the connections between thought, action, sense perception, and memory.

In his essay, “The Dream-Work Does Not Think” (2011), Jean-François Lyotard points out that Freud's conflicting statements function to distinguish dream-thoughts from dream-work and to emphasize the opposition between thoughts and work. If dream-thoughts constitute a discursive text, he says, dream-work is the sum of the non-linguistic operations performed upon that text, what Freud identifies as condensation, displacement, considerations of figurability, and secondary revision. In this intricate essay, Lyotard argues that dreams are not language or discourse, because dream-work “is intrinsically different from the operations of speech” (246). Rearranging and disguising text, he observes, requires that the text exist in a spatial plane larger than the text itself.

Put briefly, the processes of dream-work are driven by the destructive force of the figure (image or form) upon language, rather than a progressive process that begins with an intelligent text that is then disguised with distortive operations and figures. Dreams are hybrid things composed of both discourse and figure, which at bottom emerge at the same time: desire emerges at the same time as repression, and repression emerges at the same time as the return of the repressed. There is a fundamental and primordial indifference here between language and image,

between the text and its disguise. They are not the same, but they emerge together in the timeless space of the dream-text. Therefore, dreams are not not discourse, but a timeless simultaneity of discourse and figure, or hearing (language) and seeing (image). As such, Lyotard claims, dreams resemble phantasms, a capacious term in Freud that describes primal *scenes*, which is to say images that predate the lived experience of the individual and that structure imagination. Images are present in psychic life from the start, and like dreams' figures, primal phantasies are not modified discourse but an original mix of hearing and seeing, image and language. Dreams demonstrate this simultaneity by reifying language: "Desire does not manipulate an intelligible text in order to disguise it; it does not let the text get in, forestalls it, inhabits it, and we never have anything but a worked-over text, a mixture of the readable and the visible, a no man's land in which nature is exchanged for words and culture for things" (267). Dream's language, in other words, cannot be reduced to reference because intelligible language is intermixed with visual media.

For example, in one of David Wojnarowicz's recorded dreams, he describes entering a ramshackle house where his brother informs him that his son has arrived. Wojnarowicz repeatedly asks after the son's name until his brother announces that the name is Hun or Huné. Huné, Wojnarowicz recalls, is the name of a bookshop in St. Germain and Hun is the Attila he read about in a history book (*Shadow* 107-8). Here, the son is an image and the image is a word (or a combination of two words). As a mixture of language and form the dream-son scrambles the seen and the heard. The son is a word and the word is a thing. Dreams create images of language, providing a surface where, as David L. Clark observes of an illustration by William Blake, "the process of reading writing is imagined to be one of seeing scenes" ("Blake" n.p.). This hybrid surface countermands our expected interaction with images as representations of

meaningful text, for the dream makes images of the materiality of language itself, that which in language is irreducible to the use of language as reference. The strange and obscuring "translations" of language into dream-image inhibit the reverse-engineering of the dream into anything like an original and intelligible text, because they circumvent language's referential function and reveal language's own "inhuman operations" (n.p.) as Clark says, or the thingness that emerges when words are taken as themselves rather than as signs or as semantic assemblages. Dream-work makes and unmakes thought into a doubly rendered plane that strips words of their waking significations, and this force of figure upon language is what Lyotard describes as "first violence" (267).

Dreams, I have suggested, have a quality of afterness in that they scramble and reuse residual impressions from the day. But as "first violences" they are an after that, according to Gerhard Richter, "both remains attached to what came before and, precisely through an analysis of that abiding and yet often invisible attachment, departs from it in ever-new directions" (4). How is that attachment a kind of violence or force? After Freud, Lyotard weaves dreams' scenes with primordial scenes. As I noted, these are original enigmas that animate psychic life, dramatizations that respond to questions about where we come from and who we are. Freud's notion of a limited number of scenes inherited phylogenetically rather than through lived experience, as Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis put it (333), is controversial and leans on assumptions about the universality of experience that may exclude a great many people. Yet in a broad sense, the individual inherits structures that exceed her own life and she is a product of familial and generational histories. She bears history without history, past without past. Scenes can be the language of this inheritance, figures that collide with our present understandings. Dreams speak to us personally in an impersonal language that exceeds our lived existence; their

figures distort our lived experience and mutate learned discourse. These embody a kind of violence we've known from the beginning, and from before the beginning, when we inherited histories from which we did not ask to descend. We continue to experience this crisis of our thoughts – thoughts that seem simultaneously to be ours and not ours – as the force of figure challenges the intelligible world we've made for ourselves.

Following Lyotard and Clark, I have described the crisis of thought in dreams as the simultaneous emergence of language and image that reifies thought, rather than the accumulation and translation of referential thinking. To this I must add that "thought" is a specific word in Freud's writing that is made possible by an internal set of processes. According to Freud, thought is made possible by binding the ego. Binding corrals free energy by linking instincts to ideas. In the next phase, ideas are linked together, which enables the work of thought. Binding moors instincts to ideas and ideas to each other, and it is this mechanism of relation and restriction that structures our thinking. Binding is one part of an economic system whose counterpart is the unbinding of instincts. Bound energy accumulates and seeks release, and this excess of energy generates a retransformation that unbinds instincts into free energy. What happens to thought when we are unbound? More importantly, what is *generated* by unbinding?

The abstract concepts of binding and unbinding undergo several revisions over the course of Freud's writing, but a late description in *An Outline of Psycho-analysis* [1940] (1964) consolidates the concepts in his understanding of basic instinct: "[We] have decided to assume the existence of only two basic instincts, *Eros* and *the destructive instinct* ... The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus—in short, to bind together; the aim of the second is, on the contrary, to undo connections and so to destroy things" (148). While binding supports the life drives in unifying and preserving, unbinding

serves the death drive by disrupting the cohesion and order of Eros. Unbinding undoes the bonds of intelligibility, playing counterpoint to the rigid formations of the self. Destroying things, as Freud calls it, is one way to make *things* of language.[83] If thinking in dreams can be said to include the unthinking of bound thought, unbinding (and the dream that does its work) queers thought with unthought, and unworks the unifying work of thinking with the very excesses inherent to it. Perhaps this is why Sliwinski revises her statement about dreaming's queerness to clarify that dreams contain a "queer kind of agency." Agency suggests work rather than thought, but this work would be a form of rendering – which is to say what is generated by dismantling – proper to the mind's unbinding.

This thought that is a kind of demobilizing work is difficult to tolerate. Dreams strike us with their crisis of thought. Perhaps because they pose a dramatic problem for thought we experience them symptomatically as distasteful objects of study. For example, Derrida suggests that dream-thought is anathema to philosophical thought. At the beginning of his beautiful eulogy to Theodor Adorno, he poses the question, "Could a dreamer speak of his dream without waking up?" While the poet, the musician, and the painter, he says, may tolerate the possibility of a discourse on dreams in the dream, the philosopher's hard "no" "links the responsibility of the philosopher to the rational imperative of wakefulness, the sovereign ego, and the vigilant consciousness. What is philosophy for philosophers? Being awake and awakening" (Derrida, "Fichus" 165-6). Derrida's philosopher is stiffly inhospitable. Human vigour, and not the self's dissolute unravelling, is imagined to supply the force of thought. Even in feminism and critical race studies, the political power of "woke" thrusts the body into the public sphere bearing the full weight of consciousness. The intellectual and moral standing given to the body's alertness and

[83] In *Interpretation,* Freud notes that dreams tend to turn words into things (313).

presentness, its penetrating sight, supports our claim to humanity, and to our very selves. Derrida calls the dream-of-speaking-of-the-dream lucidity, or light. Dreams beam light into the void of sleep; however, their strange thought obfuscates as well as it illuminates. To speak of the dream in the dream is to encounter thought in the pit of darkness. We encounter it, however, without recognizing it as thought because there is no light to support recognition. Thought in the dream's darkness would unbind the philosopher's idea of thought, her thought of thought, and make her hospitable to the dark, not as the transcendent beyond but the ineluctable unfurling of her own claim to strength and command, clarity and rectitude. The dream incites "thinking thinking differently" (168) as Derrida puts it, because it allows us to think about "the possibility of the impossible" (168).

As we learned from Carson's dream, postures of rest permit us to view and think as beings other than ourselves. It is in these unravelled states that we occupy a posture of the other and bear a profound relation to alterity. Seeing the world, as she did, in its own othered state, we encounter the outside as truly strange, rather than as our own projection of its otherness. This kind of sight cannot be wakefully willed, nor does it obey an ethical desire towards the other, because the very exercise of will already imposes a representation of the unified self. The body's vulnerability to the outside, not its defense of sovereignty, is what marks the encounter with the other as other. Or as Paul Harrison summarizes, it is the "extreme or radical passivity of the corporeal subject, its exposure and its susceptibility beyond and outside activity, purpose, and will, which defines its rapport with alterity" (439). This is to say that the body's wakefulness does not confer unique access to social or political truths that elude us in times of decline. Rather, the subject's passivity contains its own vigilance to the outside.

The imperative to be present to the world is predicated on a particular idea of wakefulness. Dreams pull us into the past and the fixations that refuse to pass. The problem they pose for time is that they seem to escape it. In the *Arcades Project* [1972] (2002) Walter Benjamin observes that the dream "strikes the dreamer" (908). It happens to us. So one is never quite ready for the dream. It never comes at the right time and we always lag behind it. Even as we feel caught in the dream's action in its own timeless present, we are never quite co-present with it, and we know of our dreams only as they withdraw from us in the light of day. At a certain point, gestures to dream's "light" can seem like a defence against the strike. The delay between the having and the knowing of dreams poses a problem for our knowledge about them. When we refer to dreams we refer to the remembrance of dreams, or the having-been-dreamt. But dreams' having-been-dreamt is elementally different from the dream as such. Speaking of the dream is always speaking of the having-been-dreamt, in which case Derrida's philosopher does not speak of the dream at all. There is the question of how we would ever know of the dream as such. How could we know, unless knowing from inside it? Derrida's speaking-of-the-dream-in-the-dream is a particular fantasy of knowing the dream outside its having-been-dreamt. The dream-within-the dream, as it were, shelters the division between the dream and the having-been-dreamt, creating a doubly braided edge that borders the dream and the non-dream. The dreamer is permitted both dream and wakefulness, occupying the *partage* or the space of shared-separation[84] where dream becomes non-dream.

The dream-within-a-dream, as Derrida proposes, is a certain fantasy of philosophy, perhaps *the* fantasy of philosophy, to speak of the dream as such in the bound language of the

[84] See John Paul Ricco's *The Decision Between Us* (2014), where he develops the concept of the space of shared-separation from the French verb *partager*, which means both to share and to divide (1-2).

woken. To dream and to abandon the dream in the same moment is to come after the dream (in the having-been-dreamt) within the dream, which creates a temporal duplicity that preserves the imposition of co-presence in the place of that which comes too soon before withdrawing. The nested dream is not the fantasy of the poet but the fantasy of Derrida-the-philosopher who dreams of the poet as a figure of authentic presence. Speaking of the dream as such is a certain dream of wakefulness whose work is to unify the subject in the face of its unravelling and its irreducible heterogeneity. In other words, the imperative to be present to the world returns even, and perhaps especially, in imaginative and critical thought *about* dreams when through constructions like the dream-within-the-dream we attempt to implant ourselves back into our waking agency. Dreams become such a crucial site for this action, the will to sleep with eyes wide open, because we may not be able to distinguish between the dream and the having-been-dreamt, which means that we may never know what dreams are, *and whether or not they really exist*.

For Judith Butler, bodily experience is a chief expression of the heteronomy dreams introduce to experience. The body wakes and it sleeps; however, as Butler shows, in the course of waking and sleeping there is no body, only bodies. As she argues in a conversation with Bronwyn Davies, dreamlife multiplies the reality of the body and draws attention to the discontinuities of the body over time. Regarding dreams, she suggests that

> there are two bodies at issue – the figure of one's body in a dream and then the waking to the body in the bed, and there is an extraordinary kind of discontinuity between the two: that was my body in the dream, that was not my body in the dream, this is my body on the bed, but what body was that in the dream? Of course, many commonsensical people will tell you to understand the body in the bed as the real one, and suggest that the body

in the dream is merely psychic or phantasmatic. But how do we know how a body becomes real? (*Judith Butler* 12)

Experience of the body in dreams is a powerful example of the central problem of Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993), that of theorizing the materiality of bodies (2). How shall we fix the reality of the body when the corporeal body is not a self-evident entity, but a product of discourses about the body?

Butler goes on to explain how, in a psychoanalytic context, the body becomes “real” through its representation and establishment as a projection of the psyche, which determines what we will consider to be a normal morphology. As we just saw, Lyotard argues that dreams turn language into things. For Butler, this oneiric transformation logically extends to the body and the “I” we use to name it. If the “I,” as she argues in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), is a product of the accounts we make of ourselves, the “I” is part of the discourse that meets the force of figuration.[85] With the apparent doubling of the authentic body and its image, Butler's real body is already an image given to the various embellishments, substitutions, and spectralities that characterize image-life. Dreams, in fact, may not care if the subject matches the body. In *Fat Art, Thin Art* (1994), Sedgwick observes that “In dreams [members of my family] are interchangeable” (32). Bodies are unbound in the dream. They are itinerant and fungible, which is to say that they become “thinged.” But this experience serves to show how the body is already a thing, already mired in the contingencies of binding and unbinding.

[85] See *Giving an Account of Oneself* for a detailed description of the “I” as a product of self-narrative. “I am giving an account of myself,” Butler says, “but there is no account to be given when it comes to the formation of this speaking ‘I’ who would narrate its life” (67). Butler does not speak directly about dreaming in this publication, but her theory extends to what I recognize as the “I” in the dream.

Contrapuntal notions of the body's existence come into play when the body in the bed and the body in the dream occupy the same space. Dreams' contradicting bodies first separate the body and the body's image, only to force them into the same space, showing the body's uncanny traversal of its own presence and absence to the self and the movement of the body through multiple forms of generation and re-generation. Dreams reveal the body to be an effect of multiple and dynamic exchanges between psychical and corporeal realities vis-à-vis one's own projections and other bodies in the world. It may be paradoxical to suggest that the body exists at all in dreams, but our contradictory experiences while asleep and awake should challenge commonsense notions of reality and the prescriptive norms of embodiment underwritten by deferrals to common sense. If the body in the dream exists in the way the dream does, which is to say that maybe it does not exist, and maybe existence must be thought differently, then we must consider that our embodied experiences of existence are ephemeral, unfixed, and emergent. If the body in the dream can be imagined as real, and we are to take seriously its realness, perhaps the dream does not need to exist for it to be real.

For many cognitive and biomedical researchers, the very function of dreaming is to unmake the self. Biomedical theory of dreaming has a long history of investigating a controversial claim: the purpose of dreaming is to forget. Remembered dreams are failed dreams that we retain when we wake in the course of dreaming. This cluster of theory begins with the premise that the brain accumulates excess patterns in the course of daily life, and must be pruned to function efficiently.[86] Every night, therefore, we must be a little unmade. I go into more detail

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[86] See Giulio Tononi and Chiara Cirelli, et al. "Ultrastructural evidence for synaptic scaling across the wake/sleep cycle" (2017); and Graham H. Diering, et al. "Homer1a drives homeostatic scaling-down of excitatory synapses during sleep" (2017). These recent studies support concepts developed in prior studies, while revising and updating the science, that a function REM sleep is to prune excess neural connections. See also Francis Crick and Graeme Mitchison's "The Function of Dreams" (1983). These theories, however, by no means represent a consensus in the

about this claim in the subsequent section, but it bears mentioning alongside the humanistic and clinical theory because it entertains an inhumanism belonging to the dream that may be elided in humanistic treatment of dreams as objects of meaning. Whether or not forgetfulness is a proper function of dreams, our frequent forgetfulness with respect to our dreams suggests a disquieting possibility, which is that the dream does its work without needing the human's witness. Does it make a difference to the dream whether or not the subject remembers it? The fact that we forget the majority of our dreams suggests that the dream is performing work that does not depend upon the subject's involvement or surveillance. Having dreams, as it were, does not require that we remember dreaming nor, for that matter, that we have any idea of what we have or of what it is worth. As bearers of unremembered dreams, we are what Derrida calls "strange witnesses" to our dreamlife, which, as we reviewed in the previous chapter, are witnesses "who do not know what they are witnessing. They keep a secret without knowing anything about it" ("Promise" 392). We dream without knowing it, and our bodies bear traces of these nocturnal events of which we cannot speak. Perhaps even this statement assumes too much, for if when speaking of our dreams we refer to the having-been-dreamt – the memory of the failed dream – how do we know that the memory of the dream resembles anything like a dream as such that has not been remembered? The dream is in some sense indifferent to the subject and the subject's own interest in witnessing, remembering, and knowing. This does not mean that remembered dreams cannot be put to work, but if dreams do exceed our mastery, as I have said, perhaps they go as far as to counter a fundamental assumption about human exceptionality, which is that our experience is organized around knowing and understanding and giving voice to these.

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field.

That said, dreaming's link to the material world makes it a witness to our lives and to the political conditions in which we live. Dreams address us with records of experience we may not be able to speak to ourselves. If dreams do indeed witness, they witness in a mode that challenges and unmakes known experience. They record experience as a means of forgetting it. I take my point of departure from this paradox that dreams bear witness to the material world and to inner life in a mode that unmakes the witness and the witnessed. Dream's destruction is the vehicle of its representation, and the accounts it delivers do not reveal what has occurred in the world, but dismantle and rearrange the rapport between the self, others, and the world.

Part 2: *Dreaming in Disaster: David Wojnarowicz's Dreams*

Dream narratives serve as witnesses to social conflict throughout David Wojnarowicz's diaries, and they exemplify his ongoing interest and experimentation with Surrealist aesthetics. In her accounts of his life-long journaling, his biographer Cynthia Carr reveals that dreams were a primary source of Wojnarowicz's early visual vocabulary. He dreamed vividly and prolifically from childhood and would document, she says, sometimes up to three dreams per night (Carr 93). In the final years of his life, Wojnarowicz continued to document his dreams, many of which are reprinted in his published writing. His visual art features several sleeping figures, which Carr suggests serve as an index of dream imagery, and among his oeuvre are stencils and mixed-media collages (blending stenciling and photography) used to illustrate dreamlife, such as *Bill Burroughs' Recurring Dream* (1978), *Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St. Sebastian* (1982), and *History Keeps Me Awake At Night (For Rilo Chmielorz)* (1986), which is also the

name given to the retrospective of the artist's work at the Whitney Museum on display from July to September 2018. These creations offer a counterpoint to some of Wojnarowicz's other work.

For example, in *Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St. Sebastian* (see Figure 1), Peter Hujar's unconscious face pre-echoes the close-up black and white photograph taken of Hujar just after his death, which would become one of Wojnarowicz's most cited depictions of Hujar (see Figure 2). The latter image's singular, accusing gaze upon the undignified corpse is typical of many of the artist's visceral, unflinching approaches to the epidemic. In the former image, Hujar's unconsciousness inspires unrealized possibilities in the midst of a crisis. Wojnarowicz created the stencil before Hujar was diagnosed with AIDS, but it speaks to us now as a complex meditation on illness, death, and dreamlife. Together, the stencil and the photograph provide mutually disruptive accounts of the person with AIDS and the use of the AIDS body for representation.

In the stencil, Hujar's profile is turned in the opposite direction framed by Saint Sebastian's robust chest, while a tiny masturbating Mishima sits above Hujar's head. The martyred saint appears in a range of contemporary art and writing as an emblem of male homosexuality, including other Wojnarowicz images. The Japanese writer Yukio Mishima was drawn to him as well, as Mishima's ritual suicide by seppuku is seen by many as a gesture to Sebastian's martyrdom by arrows, a death that has been eroticized as part of the saint's appeal as a queer icon. In this image, Sebastian is masturbating as he is martyred. Arrows penetrate the nested figures, and the trio is suspended in space enveloped by a bright glow. The nested figures urge us to question who is dreaming of whom. Does Hujar find respite in the jacked body of the patron saint of the ill? Or does the saint have a wet dream of Hujar and Mishima as he is martyred? Perhaps this is how Wojnarowicz dreams of Hujar's dreams. The layered images

depict a playful ambiguity, in which Hujar's face is the dream and the dreaming, not yet bound in death by the camera but a site of potential for Wojnarowicz. The dynamic image joins the body in the bed to a cosmic constellation of other bodies imagined and imagining each other. Layered upon each other, Hujar, Mishima, and Sebastian are strangely fungible and temporally unfixed, living out a dream of dying each other's deaths without bringing these cross-identifications into the domain of the real.

In what follows, I focus on Wojnarowicz's dream narratives rather than his depictions of dreamlife, although it is clear that dreamlife infiltrated a great deal of his art. Dreams feature in nearly every genre of Wojnarowicz's creations, and so it is an especially striking testament to critical resistance to dreams as aesthetic objects that they are mostly absent from critical commentary on his writing and visual art. In this section, I frame Wojnarowicz's dream narratives within a biomedical history of dream theory that has described dreams as meaningless, or as neurological junk. This theory, I argue, provides a compelling context for the inclusion of dreams in Wojnarowicz's oeuvre and helps to explain how dreams' disposability establishes a basis for the significance of dreamlife in the artist's work. Before addressing Wojnarowicz's dreams, I will explain the mechanics of this strand of dream theory and clarify how dreams can be regarded as junk.

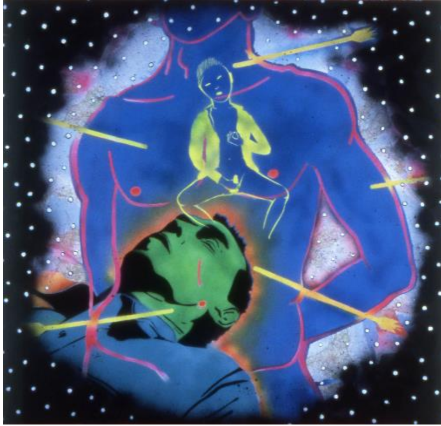

Figure 1: **David Wojnarowicz**
Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St. Sebastian, 1982
acrylic and spray paint on masonite
48 x 48 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and
P•P•O•W, New York

Figure 2: **David Wojnarowicz**
Untitled (Peter Hujar), 1989
Gelatin silver print
30 1/2 x 24 3/4 in.
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and
P•P•O•W, New York

Much of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is devoted to challenging the idea that dreams are meaningless and that their content is trivial, in favour of arguments for their synthetic function with regard to memories and the significant material that has been withdrawn from consciousness. At stake for Freud was the argument that dreams could be interpreted with a view to psychical content, and his task was therefore to provide evidence that the seemingly trivial content of dreams and its arrangement had a rational relation to infantile wishes and unconscious observations. Part of this task was to challenge the argument, which continues in several versions today, that the function of dreaming is to rid the mind of useless information collected during the day, or as Nobel Laureate Francis Crick and his colleague Graeme Mitchison quip in a 1983 *Nature* article, "We dream in order to forget" ("Function of Dreams" 112). This view was popular in Freud's day, and Freud considers it in the literature review section of *Interpretation* among what he calls the somatic or the medical theories of dreaming, which he challenges with the interpretive theories he would radically expand. For Freud, the conflict between these

positions belongs to “the remarkable preference shown by the memory in dreams for indifferent … elements” (*Interpretation* 52). Dreams pick up on “day-residues,” as he calls them, and through processes of distortion and association use these residues as a support or a “form of expression” for meaningful content. “Dream-work” is the process of converting the repressed ideas into the indifferent material (the manifest content) that is made available to the dreamer during sleep.

The later discovery of REM sleep contributed to earlier somatic theories and bolstered the argument that dreams are “cognitive debris,” or run-off from the brain’s diurnal activity. In a later article, Crick and Mitchison suggest that their thesis that dreams are an “accidental by-product of this [REM] function” disproves Freudian psychoanalysis and the validity of dream interpretation (“REM sleep and neural nets” 148). The dichotomy created, both by Freud and the neurobiologists, relies upon an unexamined conviction in the self-evident futility of “garbage,” or that which remains unassimilated into selfhood. But as Peter Schwenger argues in his comparison of dreams and narratives as debris, “material residues give rise to certain narrative arrangements, which are never so thoroughly assembled that they escape from under the sign of debris” (75). Debris exists within fields of unfixed relation and remains tied to processes of disassemblage even while transformed in projects of restoration. Freud, at least, was open to the possibility that dream-work, in addition to providing a mechanism for interpretation, remained an unfinished and somewhat inefficient process that routed energy into an excess of the unknown that bore no reference for the interpreter. This element of dreaming he called the “dream's navel:”

> There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at

> that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. (*Interpretation* 528)

Navel (what Julia Kristeva translates as "umbilical" [84]) refers to the dream's origin, and hence its generation from a primordial unknown. As Lyotard traces the dream's mixture of language and image to the originary phantasm (the first of the violences), Freud observes that dream-work's obscurity is tied to the early transformation of desire into images, or things in the world, that drives the contortions of information that produce dreams' manifest images. The dream's navel marks the stumbling block that forestalls the dream's resolution and coherence and prevents its total escape out from under the category of "thing." It holds the dream back from assuming a wholly referential relation. Freud observes early on that "words are treated in dreams as though they were concrete things" (313), and he suggests that for this reason, "they are apt to be combined in just the same way as presentations of concrete things" (313). As in the case of Wojnarowicz's dream-son, objects and words are produced indifferently in the same plane. My argument is not that the intelligible interpretation establishes subjectivity while the remainder is extra to selfhood; rather, that the dream-as-thing, as that which is in some sense indifferent to signs and to the self-identical being, reflects not only the human's psychical organization or coherence, but the human's "thingness," its own anonymous relations to the material world that uncannily reintroduce themselves to the human as dream. In other words, the dream cannot only be conceived as an effect of the organization of human relations, but also of the disordering of its relations of knowledge and consciousness.

We can see some of the cultural and aesthetic significance of dreaming's disorder in Wojnarowicz's stencil, with the irreverent recombination of historical causality and the fungible

deaths. In their 1983 article "The Function of Dreams," Crick and Mitchison describe the neurological production of dreams as a process of "reverse learning" or "unlearning" (111). They speculate that this is an active neurological process that occurs during REM sleep that has the effect of regulating or "tuning" the neocortex so that it functions more efficiently.[87] REM sleep attenuates the excitations that support "parasitic modes" (unimportant patterns) so that these patterns are not retained by the organism and are less likely to reappear in the future. In other words, dream patterns are composed of things not so much "related" or intelligibly connected, but continuous in their shared existence at the limits of the human's littered horizons. Association, as opposed to symbolization, bears witness to the shared existence of objects, language, and beings in the world, even when such things have no relation among themselves. These are things that are brought together as *things* not because they are exchangeable or similar but because they already co-exist. Association is an index of a heterogeneous domain in which existence is shared among forms of life and non-life whose differences have been flattened in view of human encounters with material life.

To sum up the neurobiologists' model, dreams are by-products of a neurological disposal system designed to compensate for the multitudinous connections we forge throughout our complex waking activities. In this model, dreams have no reference other than themselves; they relate to themselves as their own relation. For the neurobiologists, the disposal theory has consequences for memory and provides insight into the body's own interest in remembering and forgetting. They caution their readers: "attempting to remember one's dreams should perhaps not be encouraged, because such remembering may help to retain patterns of thought which are

[87] In other words, dreams are the consequence of the neocortex receiving signals from the brain stem that weaken neurological connections that have been forged during the day. Dream content is not "stored" in the brain, but the images and their organization represent patterns that have been created that the brain can strengthen or weaken.

better forgotten. These are the very patterns the organism was attempting to damp down" (114). To put it in other terms, unlearning is a form of the reparative predation of memory, a neurological process supporting the cultivation of forgetting to sustain the life of the individual in addition to the cultivation of memory. In this model, traumatic dreams reoccur when the parasitical pattern is too impactful to flush. Memory imposes its tyranny upon the subject, which needs to forget and to let loss be loss. Forgetting can be the form unlearning takes when we are moored to the practices and prescriptions of memorialization. Freud suggests that the purpose of dreaming may be to remember, considering how dependent upon memory dreams are. But if Derrida is correct in observing that "one cannot distinguish between the trace and the erasure of the trace" (*Animals* 136), remembering and forgetting may be indistinguishable corrosive actions of the organism's treatment of its own associative relations with its outside.[88] Who or what determines which patterns are parasitical and therefore worthy of disregard? The designation of waste is itself the product of a system of meaning and value. This neurological process contains no "supervisor," as the neurobiologists call it, so any one of the human's many encounters could be subject equally to the category of waste and the failure of waste in oneiric recall.

Some recent theory supports these general findings with varying explanations, although the disposal theory has not reached consensus in the field.[89] Cognitive and biomedical theory continues to dominate the study of dreams, and yet I do not believe that it necessarily opposes humanistic inquiry. Whatever its particular neurobiological validity, Crick and Mitchison's

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[88] It is Freud who discovered that remembering and forgetting are not always antithetical. His concept of "repression" describes how we remember in the mode of forgetting, or how we shelter something in the form of its disavowal. This phenomenon occurs more casually as well.

[89] For example, see Giulio Tononi and Chiara Cirelli, et al. "Ultrastructural evidence for synaptic scaling across the wake/sleep cycle;" and Graham H. Diering, et al. "Homer1a drives homeostatic scaling-down of excitatory synapses during sleep."

speculation attests to the human's saturation in material conditions it encounters but cannot contain. Dreams connect the organism to the material world of the day, but they are also the mechanism through which those relations are disordered, reorganized, and eroded. “Unlearning” is not always synonymous with forgetting, but also describes a transformative action upon built systems and established structures – whether these be established synaptic pathways in the brain or social organization. The production of waste from the unlearning of worldly experience is not the lacunae of human life but gives rise to visualizations and intelligences that reflect upon the co-existence of humans and others. The associative logics or illogics that compose dream's visual substance penetrate economies of meaning that are dominant during the day and re-present the subject as an othered figure, an unlearned re-creation of itself.

Unlearning need not oppose the existence of dreamwork, but may constitute an expression of its hospitality. Leo Bersani examines the unbinding work of psychoanalysis, in which the analytic cure operates not in the pursuit of affixing psychical impulses, but “unbinding the structures that already impoverish our mental life by positing a knowable reality to which it would be desirable that we adapt” (“Dream” 32). In other words, rigid psychical structures must be unlearned if the subject is to adapt to her conditions, to go on living. Unbinding operates through associative thought that allows the subject to transgress its prefabricated pathways. Bersani continues,

> The luxury of associative thinking in analysis is that of enjoying unrealized fantasies, of moving among our potentialities without the constraint or the compulsion to make them materially real. The comparatively unbound thinking in dreams is unjustly devalued if we think of it only as containing secrets about waking thought, as exposing the hidden instability of the structures of conscious, more or less rational, thinking. (32)

Association is transgressive not because it reveals the psychic hinterland, therefore operating in a complementary relation to conscious and rational thought, but because it is capable of negating (saying no) to the negation of conscious structures; that is, it unmakes even what the psyche has designated as the unmade and the division between the form and the unformed. Bersani calls unbinding "a project of psychic freedom" (32). Relations that compose our unique psychic structures run deep but are never fixed, and the sum of those relations encompasses the realized and the unrealized potentials that need not come to be materially expressed. Our freedom lies not in the actualization of potential, but in the excesses of the real with which we dwell without becoming.

Let us turn now to the work of Wojnarowicz with the objective being to treat dreams as practices of unlearning the social conditions that he found so oppressive, and as a form of expression that unbinds aesthetic conventions. For Wojnarowicz, associations, rather than "literary forms," best convey what he wanted to capture in his artwork as "the pressure of what I've witnessed or experienced." "How do we talk," he asks, "how do we think, not in novellas or paragraphs but in associations, in sometimes disjointed currents ..." (Wojnarowicz, *Shadow* 235). In the last few years of his life before his death from AIDS-related complications, Wojnarowicz's journal entries are increasingly colonized by narrations of his dreams. Dream narratives gather up with increasing frequency in the final pages of his published writings, like they are themselves shards finally released from under the pressures of experience. Wojnarowicz records a number of dreams but not once does he offer an interpretation, refusing to name what is being read and leaving his descriptions to associate with the surrounding material of the text.[90] For

[90] One might argue, however, that in wakefully describing the oneiric experience, Wojnarowicz's narration (of the having-been-dreamt) is the interpretation of the remembered dream.

Wojnarowicz, dreams not only disorder formal modes of expression, but are themselves emanations of an already-disordered world. Several of his dream narratives, including two that I am about to discuss, are included in the collection of his diaries, *In the Shadow of the American Dream* (1999). This phrase, and the repeated reference to the "American dream," appears in other diaries as well, and it provides a basis for Wojnarowicz's philosophy of modernity, what he iterates as "the world," "the other world," "the preinvented world," and mortal existence in and between them (*Close* 87-88). Wojnarowicz's dreams, in other words, occur in the shadow of another dream – the American dream. His dreams are dreams-within-dreams. That is, they gesture to something about dreams themselves, not because they necessarily feature dreams as part of their image content, but because by remaining vigilant of the insidious American dream, they are intractably linked to the desires and fears of American late capitalist life. Dreams always emerge from a world already drawn with dreams.

Dreams like the American dream are "shared dreams," and they can function to manage populations and produce productive subjects as well as normative embodiments and behaviour. Like the oneiric dream, the shared dream's synthetic capture of deeply-held wishes and material objects works to order collective life and represent individual *habitus*. And yet the disciplinary ordering or re-ordering of the shared dream is its own hallucination. "The Dream" is a figure for the structure of racial oppression that reoccurs through Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* (2015), and functions to hide the brutality of the American dream that it "rationalize[s] and justif[ies]" (Gordon 199). "For so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream," Coates says in this epistle to his son,

> to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies. And knowing this, knowing that the Dream persists by warring with the known world, I was sad for the host, I was sad for all those families, I was sad for my country, but above all, in that moment, I was sad for you. (Coates 11)

Coates's Dream unmakes in the most brutal sense of that word, and is itself made from black bodies whose continued subjugation drives its reproduction. Like Wojnarowicz's Dream, it persists through the vicious excoriation of life deemed disposable, hallucinating a vision of progress at war with the world and with the bodies that are unmade in its name. As it is for Coates, the American dream is itself a disordered expression of life in Wojnarowicz's America. Late capitalist America, as he will say in so many words, lays waste to lives deemed disposable or inimical. That humans can be made "things" doubly attests to their anonymous relations to the world and to a late capitalist ideology that differentially consigns some to the category of waste in a way that is not identical to but continuous with the unstoppable generation of profit that produces waste in so many forms. No one is left untouched; for all the uneven distributions of disposability, these systemic categorizations are never so contained or managed that anyone categorically escapes exposure. The American dream filters through the human's unconscious metabolism, re-presenting itself to the human as the unlearned associations and disjointed currents of America's insidious curriculum. Dreams imbricate wish fulfillment, but the wishes we bear are never just *ours*: they arise from encounters in a social milieu already structured by wishes and the valorization of particular wishes that are deemed worthy of harbouring and cultivating.

How did Wojnarowicz dream in the time of AIDS? How did the shared dreams enfolding him create a context for his oneiric dreams? As I said, it matters first of all how Wojnarowicz lived if we are to know how he dreamed, but living could be experienced as its own dream. "Living in America during the Reagan years," he reports in *Close to the Knives* (1991), "had the same disorientation as a texture dream; that sense you get at times lying with your face against the sheets with your eye open, millimeters away from the microscopic weave of the linen, and suddenly your body freezes up and your eye is locked into the universe of textures and threads and weaves, and for an extended moment you can't shake yourself from the hallucination" (*Close* 173). Dreaming offers a vocabulary of both desire and estrangement. It serves as a familiar reference for the instability of the subject position, which is to say the unique expansion and dislocation of the subject's perceptual powers and the subject's sudden seizure in the grip of that uncanny world. Wojnarowicz's writing has been described by others as cinematic (Casarino 149; Chisholm 81-2), and cinematic metaphors proliferate across his work. However, his style also reflects Surrealist aesthetics and themes often associated with dreamlife and its peculiar intelligences. Perhaps because "filmmaker" provides more agency as a subjectivity than "dreamer," commentators are hesitant to characterize the artist's vertiginous experiences as oneiric. Throughout his writings, dreaming and dream imagery capture a range of perceptions of both internal life and external violence. The diaries contain his rage and bewilderment at a country whose elected officials openly wished for his death, a country that appeared to him to hate women, people of colour, gays, and sex workers, a country at war oversees, a country he saw as leaping towards its own demise. The Reagan years were like a lucid dream, as if he were living in a horror only he knew to be a delusion. This dazzling horror was its own baffling hallucination for Wojnarowicz.

The "Reagan years" were a disaster for Wojnarowicz as a person living with AIDS. Neoliberal economic values (coined "Reaganomics") and staunch social conservatism led to stunning indifference to the toll of HIV/AIDS among the administration and intense social stigma attached to sufferers and those initially branded as belonging to at-risk groups. Anti-gay animus and the withdrawal of social assistance in favour of military spending and corporate tax cuts fomented the crisis before it became apparent as such, and the death toll climbed as politicians alternately laughed at sufferers and heralded their speedy deaths. For Wojnarowicz, who was beaten by an alcoholic father (*Close* 152), hustled in Times Square as a boy, and nearly died while living on the streets during his twenties (32), HIV/AIDS was not a sudden effusion of disaster but a brutal extension of the forfeiture of social responsibility. Medical care was not, and continues not to be, insured by the State, and the demand for care brought about by the health crisis triggered a flare of medical activism that targeted long-standing principles of rugged individualism and self-regulating free markets. Illness does not define the disaster, because like Benjamin staring at those forgotten and vanquished by modernity's current rulers, Wojnarowicz recognizes "That things are status quo *is* the catastrophe" (Benjamin, *Arcades* 473). Along with the social obstructions, Wojnarowicz's body was intolerant to AZT (Wojnarowicz, *Shadow* 225), then the highly toxic primary treatment for extending the life of one living with HIV/AIDS. There would be no cure for AIDS in Wojnarowicz's lifetime, nor since, and so for Wojnarowicz and others like him, life, love, art, and activism would have to persist without the horizon of a future. And indeed, I argue, it was precisely the condition of living in a time of disaster without hope that fuelled Wojnarowicz's resistance and its expression in dreams.

As I argued in my discussion of the somatic theories of dreaming, dreams are not merely a response to or a reflection of disaster, but are somewhat made of disaster themselves. To

understand how Wojnarowicz dreamed is to consider the nature of the wasting world he inhabited without hope of its recovery. “Dwelling in disaster” (Khalip “Ruin”) is how Jacques Khalip describes the demands of living in a wasting environment with no future. Turning away from responses to disaster that characterize a singular, recognizable catastrophe that destroys our ability to persist, Khalip claims that when old ways of living are no longer viable, we can dwell in an environment that has no future. Khalip describes literary junkspaces in Romantic poetry that subvert Enlightenment concepts of “disaster triumphant” by exploring the mutability of persons and things to create renewed conditions for dwelling in the ruins and waste left to us by disaster. Against notions of the disaster as discrete event to be repaired or resolved for dwelling to proceed, Khalip explores un-restorative orientations towards disaster as an excess lodged in the past and extended through the continuities of the present as the indifferent conditions of wasted life. Dwelling does not require the resolution or transcendence of what Martin Heidegger calls “harassed unrest,” he argues, but the imaginative potentials inherent in ruin for restless modes of persistence.

Dreaming in a time of AIDS is one such instance of dwelling in disaster. This concept of disaster regards AIDS not as a distinct cataclysmic event, but as a disarray dispersed in known and unknown ways throughout the continuities of the present. AIDS as disaster helps to explain the practical and ethical difficulties of announcing an “after AIDS,” when disaster is not temporally contained and when even the scope of its continuing destructive energy is not starkly revealed nor even acknowledged by all. If AIDS, for example, is also to be conceived as the varied temporal outcomes of the initial epidemic and its causes into the present day, the illness constitutes a scattered terrain of extant ruins that continue to exert their force upon the present. Dwelling in AIDS also counters a necrological narrative of people living with AIDS as tragically

dying of its complications, when in fact each seropositive individual lived with the illness for a certain time, even when old ways of living had to be left behind. Currently, sophisticated cocktails of medication allow those who can access them to live lifespans comparable to the lifespans of their seronegative peers, but long before the development of these drugs those who became infected and their loved ones dwelled with the infection and forged possibilities of, as Rei Terada says in her description of Thomas De Quincey's grief, "living a ruined life nonpathologically" (180). They dwelled in the ruins left to them by the disaster, and such dwelling was meaningful not in spite of but because it was organized around modes of being other than redemptive or reparative relations to the future. Such modes of being are often characterized as an extension of dying rather than in their own right as deviant modes of being; yet such pathologizations of the ruined life exclude occasions to, Terada continues, "imagine a life the possibility of which is not acknowledged socially, and therefore seems 'against nature'" (180).

Dreaming is one such deviant mode of being practiced in the ruins of the AIDS epidemic that makes "living beyond the worst," as Terada calls it, "a queer project" (180). As Sliwinski demonstrates, dreamlife is a domain of conditioned freedom or "freedom of thought" that can address the limitations to thought and action imposed upon the individual in the "dark times" of atrocity. As Bersani and the neurobiologists suggest, dreams unlearn or unbind rigid psychical patterns that constrict mental faculties. Dreams may feel like a "break" from reality as they replace the rational terrain of waking life and commute identity, but dreams draw from a temporally uncontained store of established patterns and fashion their strange visualizations from temporal debris as it collides with psychical conditions of the present. Dreams appropriate the visual material of memories that have been both accessible and inaccessible to consciousness,

and they experiment with the mutability of the dreamer and its identity so that we may be transformed “against nature.” The “break,” therefore, is a form of imagining amid the conditions of the present with the support of the lingering ruins of the past. The dreamer itself becomes one of those appropriated “things” the dream employs to fashion experience. Dreams do not merely reproduce the past; they mutate and recombine its material impressions to address the present. The oneiric gaze bears witness through a split vision aimed towards the then and the now, showing how present experience keeps watch over the past and history's rapport with the present moment. Dreams do not provide salvation from the past nor a way to break from its influence into a future beyond. Rather, they speak in the language of the lost, the unresolved, and the wasted to change us so that we may dwell in these spaces and forge paths of persistence among them.

Wojnarowicz's dreams are a salient example of dwelling in the disaster of AIDS, in part because they are a significant feature of his life writing on being a person with AIDS, and because they often feature ruins and waste as a form of expression. Where the material traces of these ruins originate is a question I will address shortly. For the time being, Wojnarowicz's dream ruins occur in the context his thinking about mortality and America's own obsolescence during the time of AIDS. Turning to some of the recorded dreams, I wish to attend to the degenerating visualizations and oblivious “things” that linger in Wojnarowicz's accounts. When encountering these dreams, it matters how we treat the fragments and refuse left to us by them. Their plenitudes include a mute array of human bodies and wasted objects. Intimate experience collides with strange impassivities in language. The contributions of modern psychoanalysis have inducted dream content into a humanist tradition that accords it various ambitions such as personal understanding or memorialization. However, I ask what might be gained from

considering the inhumanness of dream content, or the indifferent objects and replete terrains that not only present us with environments meaningfully recognized as waste, but with humans becoming things? Further, what would it mean to take seriously cognitive refuse as such, not as images from which to turn away and disavow, but as images that turn our attention towards uncounted loss?

Although Wojnarowicz says little about his dreams, he shows how oneiric postures animate certain indirect modes of witnessing that keep watch over what gets lost or left behind. In this preliminary example, Wojnarowicz relates his own form of bearing witness to the withheld or anonymized posture of the self in the dream as the dream becomes the site for details that accumulate in the body:

> Dreamt I was in a club of sorts. Tom was there, a show was about to take place onstage and I'm sitting near Tom and he is acting a bit strange. I'm not sure about the situation but it feels public in the way that has always made me tense. We are in a relationship, but some emotional part of the relationship has never fully connected, maybe because of my need to be a stranger to all events so that I can witness them without complicated emotional connections. So I can lay back in my fantasies in the process of witnessing, something extremely self-conscious in the act of witnessing, as in evidence of various elements – wind, rain, rust, decomposition, of plaster, etc., and also the evidence of sex acts and bodily functions such as human shit and tissues balled up with the same and occasional pairs of underwear or socks or T-shirts sometimes covered in shit or lying overcooked and abstractly human in piles of plaster and lumber or pools of rainwater – and then suddenly I'd come across two or five naked men in the throws of various

> leanings of sexuality, a glimpse that takes all the details in then I move on, away from the source of heat and flame. (*Shadow* 227)

This dream narrative shifts between observations in such a way that it is hard to discern what is dream and what is a kind of *mise-en-abyme* in the text. The catalogue of objects from wind to rainwater may belong to the dream of the club, or to many dreams, or to an extended description of Wojnarowicz's process of witnessing. Nevertheless, the narrative's blurred boundaries do not evoke confusion or hypnogogic vagueness, but a sense of continuity among the visualizations that characterize his dreams, and between dream elements and extra-oneiric relations. Dreams and reality are distinct states of consciousness, to be sure, but experiences, memories, and perceptions are shared between them. These are an important part of the "process of witnessing" the AIDS epidemic that is so closely associated with Wojnarowicz's writing and art.

Wojnarowicz's dream holds tight to a random catalogue of things, the by-products of humans and human development. The catalogue is connected grammatically to Wojnarowicz's explanation of his own somewhat detached relations to others. The oneiric connection with Tom that has never been fully assimilated into a relationship, and the itinerant relation to reality, provide context for the objects or "details," as he calls them, that iterate the act of witnessing in glimpses. The things themselves hold tenuously to the human. They are parts of human-made dwellings or other structures dissolving in the inclemency of the elements (which are themselves some of the details). Some even come to "abstractly" figure the human being, associating continuously with the source of heat and flame that blends into the stream of details. Just as the random objects come to resemble humans, the humans resemble the inhuman piles of stuff that uncannily sharpen the humans' own inhumanness in the margins of Wojnarowicz's material life. Witnessing produces a series of glimpses, which come together on the strength of their

associations for the dreamer. These details mark the space of what John Paul Ricco calls the "space of shared-separation" (*Decision* 163), where they do not so much mediate a transition into or away from one thing or the other, but flag a suspended terrain of sociality that defines our co-habitance as simultaneously shared and separated. Wojnarowicz's dream-ego is embedded in the social milieu of the club in the mode of his emotional detachment from its dramas. Like the dreamer himself, the dream ego is connected to a busy social space outside and he is also alone as he "looks out" in glimpses. Like a camera, he records all the details on the strength of his subjective withdrawal, which is to say that he behaves like a recording device that captures impressions mechanically without need of the human's intervention. Trash occupies this undecidable realm belonging neither entirely to him nor to what is not-him.

Wojnarowicz goes on to describe hostile interactions between him and Tom in the dream. The stream of associations juxtaposes various parts of his life and things seen and felt in that life, showing Wojnarowicz reorganizing fragments of modernity into a world now in the midst of a spontaneous invention. Modernity is hospitable to him *as parts* always exposed to the forces of mutation and disassembly. In the dream, as Schwenger notes, the world is never so coherent that it entirely escapes out from under the category of debris, and it remains available to Wojnarowicz as residue for the unconscious mind to rearrange. The world before him may be preinvented, but it touches the sensitive tissues of the artist's mind as parts to be broken down and uninvented. As if always suspended between invention and decay, Wojnarowicz's dreams often feature ruined structures and terrains of strange objects and waste, like the decomposition of plaster and rainwater in the club. As Benjamin found in urban ruins, modernity is the site of catastrophe in which progress materializes in processes of decay and fragmentation that refuse history's closure and transcendence (*Arcades* 473). The march of progress is conditioned by

history's ongoing catastrophe that produces suspensions and refuse in the present. Progress is always in a state of unlearning its ambitions, and Wojnarowicz seized these fragments of rupture for his inventions. As I will argue, the dreams "unlearn" modernity as Wojnarowicz knows it, and they contribute to a greater effort in Wojnarowicz's art to unlearn normative patterns of life, what he refers to as the preinvented world. If unlearning is an element of the process of learning, or the breaking down of knowledge structures to create new conditions for intelligibility, the dreams unlearn narratives of the progressive accumulation of capital and the expansion of enterprise to dwell in the debris of the American dream and its movement into obsolescence.

It is the experience of living in the midst of obsolescence that Wojnarowicz invokes in this rich narrative of a dream documented in 1991. Recorded just over one year before his death, and just prior to his last major trip out of New York City, the dream arrives at a time when Wojnarowicz is thinking vehemently about his own mortality, and when he has become an established artistic voice in New York City's queer community and a founding member of the Manhattan chapter of ACT UP. As we saw in Ira Sachs's experimental film *Last Address* in Chapter Two, themes of wasting and loss rivet on images of buildings, but where *Last Address* sets its dwellings apart from viewers who are to see them through film as unseen scenes, the ruined building in Wojnarowicz's dream is cautiously inhabited in the midst of its destruction. What this dream stages *as dream* is the tenuous possibility of *living in* destruction as a non-exceptional condition of dwelling in the time of AIDS.

> A house, a building, a barnlike structure or a gutted loft or a store on street level, broken wooden slats, windows, walls broken out in the interior, men, five or more young men, nude, seminude, communal, lying around. One of them is talking to me, engaging me in conversation. It's late, lights are turned on, actually its going towards sunrise. At first the

scene looked possibly dangerous but the guy is sweet and earnest. They all look poor and just in the building, crashing. Trucks outside like circus trucks. These guys workers? The one guy, built and half naked standing up clutching a silly costume of some sort wrapped around his waist like a dress made of gold gilt fabrics dyed turquois/silver/gold/yellow like cleopatra 1980s floor show uniforms but now treated as blankets for sleep. At times I think this is my place or vague echoes of Patrick, maybe his friends or just his energy, vague connections to energy of university students. Waiting like someone will return to dwelling and disrupt the writing process in the dream.

Guy I'm talking to and walking with finally says, I wish you would lay down and bunch up with me, meaning embrace me, snuggle, etc., and I'm delighted. I take off some clothes, turn him over and kiss his ass cheeks and see/feel a rash or dirt, hope he is not ill or with a weird disease, then it looks more like grime that one gets lying naked on an unswept floor. I kiss his naked sides, his arm, his mouth. Later he talks a lot. I wish lights would be shut off so I can have privacy with him because all these other guys are awake and watch from lying positions around the room. At some point wandering around the place, floors covered in layers of refuse, objects, clothes, torn fabrics, etc., a coffee machine or water bottle or something with wires plugged in the wall, waiter trying to put water in machine and water spills and spreads like a rain puddle beneath clothes, objects, water raining down onto electric outlet, a dull buzz of electricity building muffled whoomp inside wall, afraid to go near it all, afraid of electrocution or fire. Everything is quiet. Waiting.

> One guy asks me if I remember my past, if anyone has ever told me of my past. I'm trying to figure out that question, it's such an odd question. Guy I was kissing says he found out his diagnosis in '88 or something like that and he's relieved he knows I have the disease. I was afraid to kiss him too extensively before telling him. Feel a bit emotional towards him and it feels clear and good. Wake up. (*Shadow* 231-2)

The derelict building, the squatters, the costume, the tryst, and the latent explosion in the wall accompanied by the disintegration of Wojnarowicz's prose move this dream through various postures of "dwelling in disaster." Wojnarowicz follows a course through vivid hazards that sharply define this place. Unnamed forces of destruction corrode the building's function and identity, marking the contingent dwelling as an act of recycling and remediation that extends from broken shards of wall littering the interior. The building decomposes inwards, the description suggests, filling the rambling and porous space with scattered accumulations. Plenitudes of life and non-life crop up together. The squatters laying around are oddly continuous with the rubbish, which itself is animated in its threatening interaction with the fragile structure. They are all "just in the building," as Wojnarowicz describes it, inscrutably plucked from a past the dream forecloses but restlessly invokes as a time out of reach.

In what way is this constellation of fragments and bodies an example of dwelling in disaster? While the disaster aesthetics in this passage paint the bleak picture of ruin, it is the dreamer's own orientation towards his aesthetic environment that asks us to read its disintegration as other than a traumatic eruption. Turning towards this place is an occasion for the dreamer to, as Khalip says, "meditate on the deviant mutability of persons and things" ("Ruin"). Disintegration effects a dissolution of boundaries, which does not make the space unreadable, but produces excesses that draw together conditions of the present with fugitives

from the past. The man in the gilded 1980s Cleopatra costume, for example, exists halfway between dwelling and drag, which is to say that the costume is being used for shelter as well as for performance. He engages in a doubled relation to the costume as persona and as thing. Clutching the costume, he is in the midst of what Elizabeth Freeman calls “temporal drag” (62). By donning the costume he performs the era, and the era is personified in the figure of Cleopatra. A character is a figure already suspended between person and thing, and indeed a *figure* also occupies that undecidable realm. Cleopatra is an interesting selection for a fugitive era, as the character is reincarnated in over twenty films throughout twentieth-century cinema, herself a rogue signifier for the opulence of each generation and a temporally unfixed cinematic nomad from an inscrutably ancient past. And yet in the last moment of the performance the figure is defigured into a blanket to provide shelter for the wearer. The past wraps around the present, neither preserved, sentimentalized, nor memorialized, but repurposed as shelter for vagrants. The gilt trimmings and bright colours are made startlingly grim as their opulence survives past its initial value and function. The man's drag is his dwelling, not by being triumphantly rescued by its legitimacy but as part of a “narrative of non-development” (“Ruin”), as Khalip says, that does not restore life but releases new possibilities through processes of dissolution and refiguration.

The dream engages in the “deviant mutability” (Khalip “Ruin”) of language as well, for in addition to aestheticizing human bodies around the building, this dream, as Freud observes, “turns words into concrete things” (*Interpretation* 313). The occasion of snuggling with one of the vagrants is initiated by his request to “bunch up,” a term Wojnarowicz clarifies in the narrative. This term is an unusual but not an unheard-of characterization of snuggling, and it seems to strike Wojnarowicz as especially precious or queer. Additionally, it associates strongly with the menagerie of objects and anonymous bodies sharing the space. “Bunch” is a word that

describes a collection of things associated among themselves. It may also contain an anxiety and a desire. As a “bunch” the dreamer becomes part of the building's substance and his human interaction is lateralized among the broader act of falling apart and coming together in the shared space. Intimate encounter is like a heterogeneous collection of objects, with language one among them. It brings people and things together where they may otherwise be isolated.

Among the things that knit humans and things together, poverty is common to all the anonymous men in the building. The man Wojnarowicz “bunches up with” first appears to have an illness, but upon closer inspection the dream overrides that observation – a possibility perhaps too painful to tolerate in this imaginative space – and instead the man bears signs of his own poverty, of lying on the ground with nothing to protect his body. Poverty is a ready sign of a condition in which the category of humanity blends indifferently with that of waste. That some people are disregarded is a constant reminder that people can be disregarded, and that the privileges afforded by the category of humanity can, under a host of conditions, be swept away while the human remains human. Wojnarowicz knew these facts all too well. He nearly died while living on the streets for a time in his twenties. His brutal childhood at the hands of his abusive father and his experiences hustling in Times Square as a young boy taught him the human's easy disregard for its own exceptionality. In the dream, impoverished bodies, detritus, and opulence all occupy the space not because they are the same thing, but because each exists in the same world. Dreams have the ability to draw connections between items in the material world, as I said, not because such items can necessarily be compared or exchanged, but because they already exist together, and they can exist together, and that knowledge never ceases to instruct us of the possibilities of our world. Whatever structures of meaning we observe, dream's convergent intelligences create new configurations of the material world and inner life that exist

beyond our ability to see them. Dreams create a flow between person and thing that reflects a world in which we are immersed but do not fully see.

Wojnarowicz's passive acceptance of this domain thrusts him into its milieu where he is one among the other anonymous men. He is one of the "bunch" and, like the others, he has an unfixed relation to the place, being unsure if it belongs to him, belongs to someone else, or is simply affected with familiar energy. Earlier, I observed that the subject does not reside in the dream but that an othered recreation of self, perhaps a different version each night, interacts more freely with the dream content without the strictures of subjectivity. Dreams enable this type of impersonal relation to alterity, I argued, because they host an "I" that is not coextensive with the body in the bed. The "I" in the dream contains an assortment of knowledge, memories, and identity belonging to the body in the bed, but like the other appearances in the dream it blends into an associative milieu that takes responsibility for its role, knowledge, and actions. This dream of Wojnarowicz's tell us much about his sense of dispossession and about why the ruined building appears nonetheless intimately connected to who he is. In the dream, Wojnarowicz keeps watch upon this place as a *res nullius*, which is to say not as a building dispossessed but one belonging neither to him nor not to him because there is no one there to whom it could belong.

Let us consider the associations that compose this dream of dwelling in disaster thus far and how they come together through the vise of the shared dreams Wojnarowicz inhabited. Ruins and trash appear in Wojnarowicz's dreams likely because of places he frequented in his waking life. Ruined buildings played a significant role in his professional life as an artist and in his personal life as a gay man who cruised. In the decade before his death, Wojnarowicz was a regular visitor to the neglected structures on the West End Piers. These ruins bore a history that

span twentieth-century urban development in New York City and the transformation of the city's role in global commerce, cultural production, and international relations. By reviewing this history, I explore a context out of which the dream emerged, rather than make a case for its referent. Because much of the history of the piers was apparent up until their eventual demolition, that history is relevant to aesthetic and experiential impressions of the West End Piers and the residue of experience left in dreams.

The West End Piers' (now called Chelsea Piers) history follows trajectories of urban gentrification, functional redesign, and resettlement that, for Sarah Schulman, frame the urban consequences of the AIDS crisis in New York City.[91] Plans to develop the Hudson riverside to make it suitable for large transatlantic ocean liners began thirty years before the grand opening of the piers in 1910, and the development itself spanned the next decade. The "Chelsea Improvement" ("New Steamship Piers" 8), as it was called, expanded the City Beautiful Movement to New York's waterfront, and the development realized a long-held effort to eliminate the "deplorable conditions" along the shoreline and improve the general appearance of Manhattan ("New Steamship" 8). The city hoped its investment would expand its role in transatlantic trade and passenger transport in response to the needs of increasingly larger ocean liners. The new piers were not "open" for commercial use, as the city financed the costly project through ten-year leases to the steamship lines (Schilchting 150). Whitney Warren, who designed Grand Central Terminal, received the commission, and in that fashion replaced the ramshackle structures along the waterfront with granite façades decorated with ornate embellishments (Schilchting 149). As part of a wider trend towards urban beautification and the expansion of

[91] See Schulman's *The Gentrification of the Mind* for her extended critique of gentrification initiatives activated by the AIDS crisis in New York City and the corresponding effect of urban resettlement on the psychical lives of residents.

Atlantic commerce, the redesign aimed to generate considerable cultural cachet for the city as a world player, the *New York Times* describing the new piers as “so imposing that the foreign visitor will no longer find false impressions of the great city – no tawdriness in the way of the piers” (qtd. in Schilchting 149-50). For the next fifty years, the most luxurious ships on the Atlantic docked there. Chelsea Piers was to be the destination of the Titanic's maiden voyage; ships carrying immigrants often docked there, where passengers were then transported to Ellis Island; and during WWII, soldiers heading to war departed from its berths (“Chelsea Piers”).

During that time, the piers also became a site of significance for the visual culture of the golden age. Throughout the 1920s and into the later half of twentieth century, film stars were photographed posing on the docks, and their pictures were often reprinted as postcards. Elizabeth Taylor, who played Cleopatra in the 1963 film, has a photograph taken on the piers. Athletes returning from the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were also excitedly photographed as they arrived at the docks. Photographs of Jesse Owens upon his return depict the stunning reception as he disembarks the Queen Mary and strides triumphantly across the pier.[92] In many of the images, athletes and actors lean against railings as the Hudson looms in the background. Tall beams rising out above the luxury liners are often visible, and the docks and the various infrastructures that support port activity are a repeated sign of achievement, status, and global mobility. They display the prideful return of the nation's hope in wartime and economic downturn, and they frame figures of the nation's success against the seemingly unlimited horizon of the water. Like the beams, they embody an optimistically *straight* path towards national success. From the 1920s

[92] Owens had not been the only black athlete to return from Berlin decorated. Seventeen other black athletes completed in Berlin, including two women.

into the 1960s, the piers are a familiar visual context not only for the city's cosmopolitan dreams but for the visibility of black and women athletes in the nation's global triumphs.

But as passenger ships got larger and air travel overtook sea travel, many of the steamship lines moved to New Jersey and the piers no longer served such a central function for the city. After falling into disuse in the 1960s, the city had plans to demolish the piers to make room for a highway, but that project fell through, and abandoning the site remained cheaper than demolition for some time.[93] The riverside resembled its tawdry incipience, but the visual culture cachet it had established over the last six decades unexpectedly transformed. By the 1970s and 1980s, the buildings along the waterfront were disintegrating from disuse, and the West End Piers became a compelling canvas for the city's young artists, most of whom came from the East Village gallery scene. It also became a central cruising ground for the city's queer communities. Some of its visitors belonged to both groups, and the decaying façades and layers of debris became an experimental and contested ground for queer art and community.

Photographs from that era resembling Wojnarowicz's dreams document anonymous encounters that took place along the piers and cave-like drawings and sculptures on and against the crumbling structures. Pier 52 was the location for Gordon Matta-Clark's most famous act of "anarchitecture," *Day's End.* Matta-Clark's interest in the aftermath of de-industrialization led him to the abandoned buildings along the West End piers, and these became experimental canvases for what he called the regenerative abilities of art. His interventions responded to the architectural obsolescence of New York City's golden age, and the retreat of silent film and other forms of dramatic performance. His interventions involved carving highly strategic cut-outs in

[93] Portions of land were given over to municipal departments for storage. The Department of Transportation owned the property and turned Pier 60 into a Tow Pound, Pier 59 into a repair station for sanitation trucks, and Pier 62 into a U.S. Customs Impound Station ("Chelsea Piers").

the walls of abandoned buildings that let tunnels of light flood the rooms and reorganize the spatial experience from within.

Photographs taken by Alvin Baltrop document several of these illegal interventions in buildings along the docks (see Figure 3). In an image of Pier 52, an imposing aperture of bright light hangs on the wall like a painting and, hitting multiple surfaces, its terminus below stretches along a textured ground. Below it, the smaller light of the doorway frames a man’s body while another man walks towards the adjacent wall. Like the apertures, the casual visitors to the piers cut into these obsolete structures illegally, marking an indefinable point of transition between the city's industrial past and pre-AIDS queer culture, and towards a new wave of architectural and social development. Baltrop's black and white images emphasize the multiple textures of the piers and their lure for visitors as a meeting place of accumulation and dissolution. In *Pier 52,* the warehouse seems both empty and replete as light echoes across the vast space and illuminates the interior. Comparing this image to the earlier celebrity shots, the similarly angular infrastructure and bright light refocus the human within the industry’s undone future. Showing two visitors, one with his head turned towards the other, the image emphasizes the minimal relation between them and not a cultish personalization. Even their movement suggests their easy occupation of the space and its transmuted function as an area continually under construction and not a node between destinations. Yet simultaneously, the bright cut-out transforms the space within by providing a new flow between it and the outside. Captivated by the sentimental saying that each human being emits a unique light, Wojnarowicz wonders in *Close to the Knives* whether humans are then projectors casting images onto their environs. He disregards the sentimentality of the adage, imagining illuminations as disfiguring cut-outs thrust into unwitting worlds. Similarly, Wojnarowicz's dreams function as twin cut-outs adding spectrally to Matta-

Clark's radical interventions, themselves shortly lived and quickly overwritten by the city's restorative efforts. In 1992, the year of Wojnarowicz's death, the piers were developed by producer and developer Roland W. Betts with 120 million dollars of private money. The land is now known as the Chelsea Piers Sports and Entertainment Complex ("Chelsea Piers").

Figure 3: **Alvin Baltrop**
Pier 52 (Gordon Matta-Clark's "Day's End" building cuts with two men). Silver gelatin print, 1978. Photograph used courtesy of The Alvin Baltrop Trust, © 2010, The Alvin Baltrop Trust and Galerie Buchholz. All rights reserved.

What had been a central hub for the flow of capital and people in and out of the city became, in Wojnarowicz's time, a wasteland of capital's industrial past and a symbol of obsolescence. The city's abandonment of the land as both a logistical and a cultural edifice suspended the piers between states of plenitude and scarcity, which provided cruisers and artists with an autonomous space already partly furnished with material for expression. It was not a utopia. It could be dangerous and people had been murdered there (Carr 132). Olivia Laing

emphasizes that the grounds were always not hospitable to women, who could be excluded from gay male spaces (119-20). But for many, the West End Piers were also one of the last safe spaces to go. Many queer homeless youth of colour began arriving in the 1980s after facing rejection at home. Gentrification efforts beginning soon after targeted the young black and latinx populations, and clashes between the youth, the white residents in the West Village, and police, continued through the redevelopment into the new century.[94]

Poised at the junction of danger and intimacy, the piers became a commons for a range of sexual and aesthetic practice that flourished in the shadow of capitalist oversight. Wojnarowicz first discovered the West End Piers in 1979 and was a frequent visitor throughout the 1980s. He founded the Pier 34 Project with Mike Bildo, which involved artists such as Peter Hujar, Keith Davis, Kiki Smith, Luis Frangella, Rob Jones, and others. Large empty warehouses along the waterfront provided spaces of "conditioned freedom" (Khalip "Ruin") in a terrain of scarcity. They were an ideal location for the young artists' autonomous activities, as Wojnarowicz and Mike Bildo explain:

> We chose the warehouse to start in by the fact that it straddled a tunnel that was a route for things arriving and departing from the city ... There is no rent, no electricity, no running water, no dealers, no sales, no curatorial interference. There is 24-access, enthusiasm, deep sudden impulse and some sense of possibility for dreaming ... This is something possible anywhere there are abandoned structures. This is something possible everywhere. (qtd. in Stosuy 459)

[94] See Donovan Lessard's "Queering the Sexual and Racial Politics of Urban Revitilization," pp. 565-573, for a detailed commentary on the gentrification of Christopher Street Pier and the displacement of queer youth of colour.

Displaced from formal structures of surveillance and provision, Pier 34 nonetheless retained architecture of its material past that was now available for reimagining in another's image. Pier grounds and walls became anonymous screens colonized by the contingent population. Large sexual images were common illustrations on the walls, what Wojnarowicz referred to as “thug frescoes.” He recalls one day helping the “artist in residence” Tava carry cans of paint for his towering illustrations of nude men with erections (Carr 141). Images on the walls such as these reflected activity on the ground, constituting displays of legitimation for the itinerant community. Wojnarowicz viewed the displays in a phantasmatic continuity with the human visitors, and he described their own animacy in their interactions with light and shadow. “[B]riefly framed,” he says, “in the recesses of the room ... in various stages of leaning ... flesh of the frescoes comes to life ...” (*Close* 22). In their use for the artists these environments start to function, as I suggested earlier, as a surround that takes on the quality of an agented subject. Alongside human images were large animal designs and provocative quotations. Images were a feature of pier life as visitors were reproduced on walls, and as “flesh of the frescoes” appeared party to the activity.

While dreamwork is an ambiguous and ultimately invisible process, the ruins and their history of capitalist development and abandonment are a compelling source of imagery for Wojnarowicz's dreamlife. In the dreams he reports traversing decrepit buildings and desolate gatherings of waste peopled by interlopers likely because these had been a significant feature of his material life. Found objects were already the material of his innovations, and this style of innovation was arguably an extension of Wojnarowicz's artistic practice. As his friend and early art critic Carlo McCormick claims, “david was very much into scavenging. That's part of the aesthetic that developed out of Civilian Warfare and other East Village galleries: it was taking the detritus of the city and using it as material for art” (qtd. in Lotringer and Ambrosino 13).

Wojnarowicz's early sculptures were fashioned from pieces of found driftwood, material forged by passage through water. His dreams render what was already a series of rendering activities in the city: the breakdown of the triumphs of capital into condemned land, the repurposing of abandoned structures for public art, and the replacement of global commerce with public sex.

Photographs and documents of frescoes and Situationalist art remain as a record of activity along the waterfront during its period of neglect, but so do Wojnarowicz's dreams, which repurpose the piers in their own way and re-present them to the community in the diaries. If the West End Piers can be considered a palimpsest of twentieth-century commercial development in New York City, Wojnarowicz's dreams carry that history in their visualizations. His dreams, as all do, reach down into the unknown and disrupt relations of reference with plural temporalities. But the condemned building in the dream associates powerfully with the significant role such buildings played in Wojnarowicz's life, and the history of such buildings that gave them over to the precarious inhabitancy of underserved populations.

As Schulman argues, “spiritual gentrification” quickly follows urban gentrification, brought on by the removal of the dynamic heterogeneity that defines urbanity and the myriad cultural transformations that suppress knowledge of past radicalism and diverse, defiant voices. What she calls the “gentrification of the mind” is the amnesia and conformity that accompany the ratiocination of diverse communities and damping of individualized expression. It is clear from Wojnarowicz’s accounts that dreams bear the weight of urban history and physical replacement; they derive materials for expression from the dreamer’s surroundings. Whether we live in diverse neighbourhoods, have access to housing and public space, can benefit from others’ gifts and distribute our own, has a profound effect on dream-work processes and how our minds will populate oneiric experiences. Wojnarowicz’s dreams expose his deep connections to

New York's urban space and they give us an impression of how the arrangement of cities gives rise to particular values and experiences that are infinitely individualized. Wojnarowicz's dreams bear witness to a particular ideal of urbanity defined by, as Schulman writes, "the familiar interaction of different kinds of people creating ideas together" (22) that would transform and largely disappear from public consciousness with the physical gentrification of the piers.

Descriptions and impressions of the West End Piers have a prominent place in Wojnarowicz's writing, and so these provide a guide for how we should treat the waste and ruin in his dreams. Many thinkers have discussed the significance of the West End Piers in Wojnarowicz's life and his writing as an index of capitalist obsolescence and as an experimental zone for impersonal relations with others, but none of these thinkers has considered the dreams as a further source of meditation on the piers as their own experimental rendering of the ideas and feelings it evoked. Carr names the West End Piers a "temporary autonomous zone" (132), a term coined and popularized by anarchist writer Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson) to describe both a space and a psychospiritual state that resists capitalist totality (Bey x-xi) and that splits from normative rhythms. The piers certainly hold this function for Wojnarowicz as a refuge that could shelter his dreams and displace him from the preinvented world. One of his phenomenological relations to the piers is a "cinematic" relation to himself, in which he regards himself in their milieu as a spectator watching images. "There are times I see myself from a distance entering the torn, ribbed, garage-like doors of this place from the highway – I step away from myself for a moment and watch myself climbing around and I wonder, what keeps me going?" (*Close* 187). The experience of self-displacement permits a respite from the world and from himself in its midst. Pier life was a liberated and liberating place to both be and to not-be.

But the piers were also too much of the world. Wojnarowicz describes them as “dying structures” and as “symbols of what was essentially a dying country” (Carr 140). He often saw his country in the midst of a trajectory towards oblivion, a loss he both seemed to mourn and eagerly anticipate. Strains of apocalypticism are evident in his writing, and the waterfront offered both a refuge from and a fulfilment of these designs. The piers superimposed the autonomy that facilitates anonymous relations upon the bitter traces of a country with no future. They hosted a series of creations and experimentations that nonetheless shared the imagined fate of their greater context. Unravelling around undervalued and even illegal connections and innovations, the piers visualized their own dissolution. For Wojnarowicz, they were defined by the future disintegration that would take hold of them, which is not properly a paranoid stance, but a relation that, in Khalip's words, “fails to imitate a relational stance towards salvation or redemption” (“Ruin”).

Towards the end of the 1980s the West End Piers were overrun by visitors and Wojnarowicz developed an ambivalent attitude towards them. “Deep in the back of my head I wish it would all burn down,” he admits, “pier walls collapsing and hissing into the waters. It might set us free from our past histories” (*Close* 187). The dream imitates his desirous relation to ruin as well as his disillusionment with the piers. He wishes the ruin would itself be ruined, an expression of the complex interactions made possible at a meeting place of dissolution and accumulation. A place of accumulation eventually confronts you with what you have accumulated. Wojnarowicz's desire to ruin the ruins suggests the tension marking the inevitability of the conflict between the somatic and the interpretive schools of dreaming. For when does an archive become pollution? When do meaning and meaninglessness enter their own

dialectical exchange? Through the dream perhaps Wojnarowicz is unlearning the piers and his history there, subjecting them to the first violence of his dreaming mind.

Wojnarowicz imagines that the dissolution of the piers contains the possibility of freedom from collective histories of the visitors. Memory is also a type of accumulation, and as Fiona Anderson observes, Wojnarowicz's interactions on the waterfront were encounters with the "cumulative architectural memory of the piers and warehouses" (143). Wojnarowicz's wish is a fantasy of an aesthetics without a direct reference to the past. The inscriptions left in the ruins would neither be eliminated nor would eliminate history but, in freeing the artists, the ruins would not be reducible to the artists' history. As the ruins retreat further and further from their origin, they begin to refuse the references inscribed in them. Personal and collective history were vexed categories of knowledge for Wojnarowicz. Even, and perhaps especially, in his desire for freedom the question of his history returned. At the end of the dream one of the vagrants asks him, "Do you remember your past?" This is exactly the type of question we might expect a dream to ask. But the question, while it seems probing, baffles Wojnarowicz, and it serves more as an element of incoherence in the intimate interaction between Wojnarowicz and the man than it does to reveal anything to him concerning his own past. One possibility is that the question reveals the cross-temporal prospects of cruising on the piers. As Anderson notes, "alternate times were accessible through cruising" (143) the piers, which is to say that encounters among the temporally layered ruins were, like the interaction in the dream, at once encounters with a past or pasts. Like the man with the Cleopatra costume, this conversation is at once a personal relation to another person and an impersonal relation to a foreclosed past that encloses them both.

I have wondered if the question posed in the dream could be interpreted as "do you remember your passed?" and if it bears witness to Wojnarowicz's friends and lovers who had

passed. Dreams, as we said, turn words into things, and Wojnarowicz interacts with the questioner as he might have interacted with a friend or a lover who had passed. Any specific history is put out of view and frees the dreamer to encounter the passed without the past. The obscure phrasing would point towards the dreamer's uncounted loss without burdening him with its memory. Thus, like how Benjamin explores historicization through allegory, Wojnarowicz's dream does not revive history but aestheticizes history into scenes, generating from history's catastrophes a denatured nature, or as we could say in this context, the waking world seen in its ruin and fragmentation. What remains, for Rebecca Comay glossing Benjamin, is "history [that] thus appears as a … play of mourning, play for the mournful" (123), which is to say a mourning of loss that takes the form of the aestheticization of loss in scenes or dramatics.

Both past and passed, the dream's question gives the impression of being linked to thoughts about mortality, from which the individual's own past is becoming continuous with history's past. The dream comes, it seems, at a crucial moment between a past and whatever follows. Perhaps the question itself is this passage. Between the warm interaction with the lover and the embrace of an environment that may explode in an electrical fire, the dream feels like a complex last address to the lover and to the building in which they meet. Wojnarowicz waits and waits for an inevitable something, but the dream suspends him in this betwixt state before the address resolves into an intelligible finality, an inhabitable after. Through the interlocutor's question, the dream also makes a last address to Wojnarowicz. Although the question perplexes, it locates him in a temporal context with no future, reminding him that he has a past, and therefore a life – even when he does not remember – in the midst of disaster.

By addressing Wojnarowicz in this crumbling place with this odd temporal probe, the dream produces a complex temporal experience. Wojnarowicz desires the ruins' destruction, but

in the dream that destruction never comes. Dreams put the past to work to address the present, but the sense of waiting that Wojnarowicz mentions several times lodges the narrative in the anticipatory moment of the not-yet. The temporal experience is reorganized by this suspended posture aimed towards the unknown. The dream posits a future that is not separate or distinguishable from the disaster, but that arrests any finite temporality that could determine a beginning or end of the disaster as an identifiable event. Understanding the dream, and indeed understanding it as a disaster, paradoxically occurs in an aftermath the dream forestalls as the not-yet of an unresolved future. This paradox is the temporal shape taken by the dream to address its dreamer: a claim to proceed a past that precedes the definitive moment of understanding. Dream interpretation follows this paradox, for the subsequent effort to understand is posited in the not-yet of the dream's resolution into meaning. This temporal experience imitates the mourner's melancholic relation to loss, what Benjamin notes as the problem of responding to a past that it seen to be "at once irretrievable and incomplete" (Comay 106) and in which aestheticization, as I said, addressees this paradox of loss as "irredeemabl[e] yet not securely so" (106). If time is the element that has been disintegrating the building all along, it is destroying the very trajectory of progression that would place this dream in the future of the past of which it is composed. The temporal condition of the last address is positing a disaster whose potential is never actualized as materially real, or as ever reaching a future that detaches from the present mode of persistence.

Wojnarowicz's fantasies of a dying country could never be too far from the reality that by this time had burned through his consciousness: He was dying. Much of his life was consumed by the need to learn how to dwell in disaster. For the last five or six years he had buried his friends and lovers, and he saw that the country supposedly angling towards oblivion hardly

blinked at the loss of life. Describing his idea for the "political funeral," he reports that a television commercial for handiwipes seemed to have a greater impact on America than the death toll of the AIDS epidemic (*Close* 122).

In his political responses to the health crisis, Wojnarowicz was already familiar with the figurative practice of turning people into things. His 1989 manifesto, "Live Fast, Die Young, Leave a Useful Corpse," constitutes a bitter reflection on the utility of the body with AIDS as an instrument of protest. In that essay he visualizes a demonstration in which friends, lovers, and neighbours toss the dead bodies of their loved ones onto the White House steps. In 1992, ACT UP took up the summons and organized Ashes Action, where dozens of activists marched through Washington with ashes of their loved ones in hand, and proceeded to deposit them on the White House lawn. One year later, friends of Tim Bailey processed the transparent coffin containing his body towards the White House, although never arriving at the steps that had symbolized for Wojnarowicz the seat of power that bore responsibility for the crisis. As Lauren DeLand explains, Wojnarowicz's essay proposes a protest strategy imitating cultural attitudes implying that the person with AIDS "is being more useful dead than alive" (35). The manifesto turns on a bleak display of ruined hope. Its affirmation that the body of the person with AIDS "would be acknowledged by the general public as a corpse, or not at all" (34), abandons any expectation of social recognition save that of the figures being protested. For Wojnarowicz, protest would have to proceed in the airless chamber of an utterly impoverished social setting that provided abjection as the only position available for recognition and resistance.

Such instrumentality of the body existed superimposed against the profound intimacy of anonymous flesh that Wojnarowicz experienced in his encounters with others. The dream's ambiguous oscillation between comfort and danger, poverty and plenty, gnaws subtly at the

worldly difference separating each mode of objectification, which is not to say that that the difference is insignificant in the waking world, but that in dreamlife one may unlearn boundaries and limits dominating rational existence, if only for the night. In Wojnarowicz's *Untitled* (1990), the following words lay printed in red upon an image of a ghastly grave of disinterred skeletons:

> When I put my hands on your body on your flesh I feel the history of that body. Not just the beginning of its forming in that distant lake but all the way beyond its ending. I feel the warmth and texture and simultaneously I see the flesh unwrap from the layers of fat and disappear. I see the fat disappear from the muscle. I see the muscle disappearing from around the organs and detaching itself from the bones. I see the organs gradually fade into transparency leaving a gleaming skeleton gleaming like ivory that slowly revolves until it becomes dust. I am consumed in the sense of your weight the way your flesh occupies momentary space the fullness of it beneath my palms. I am amazed at how perfectly your body fits to the curves of my hands. If I could attach our blood vessels so we could become each other I would. If I could attach our blood vessels in order to anchor you to the earth to this present time I would. If I could open up your body and slip inside your skin and look out your eyes and forever have my lips fused with yours I would. It makes me weep to feel the history of your flesh beneath my hands in a time of so much loss. It makes me weep to feel the movement of your flesh beneath my palms as you twist and turn over to one side to create a series of gestures to reach up around my neck to draw me nearer. All these memories will be lost in time like tears in the rain. (Wojnarowicz *Untitled*)

Across a series of contradicting ripostes, history takes shape through a process of attrition, a history without history or a body made abstract through its movement into disappearance. History is explained as the afterimage of the body's loss. The narrator unmakes his lover through the brutal inspection, and this act of dismantling carries the fantasy of eroding the difference between the boundaries of each body, and a certain cinematic fantasy of depersonalizing the self to gaze through another's eyes. The passage is still unflinchingly brutal in its forsaking of any expectation of social redress. Yet by aestheticizing the connection until it disappears into dust, it follows a narrative of non-development that refuses the transcendence of the dead body, and of loss amid the epidemic more broadly, so that nothing is redeemed and nothing is made useful in conditions of mass suffering. There is no useful corpse here, because there is no instrumental utility in memories aimed towards decay.

As Wojnarowicz conveys in his narrative, the dream was not a nightmare; it resonated with warmth and affirmation, and not the cynical utility of the useful corpse. The intimate connection seems to provide something the dreamer needs, and Wojnarowicz is, as Blanchot says, filled with gratitude. In scarce conditions, the dream fulfills a clear wish for the dreamer who says that "[h]aving this virus and watching guys having sex and ignoring the invitation to join in is like walking between raindrops" (*Shadow* 244). The dream unlearns something of his disillusionment and shows him something else. The man speaking to Wojnarowicz at the end of his dream says he was diagnosed in 1988, which is the year that Wojnarowicz received his own diagnosis. Carefully displacing the dreamer from this part of his past, the dream provides a buffer between the self and its reality, replacing a story about the dreamer so that something else can dislodge, even if what is released has come undone without design or overarching intention.

This undetermined something else is the dis-regarded, or what was seen without sight and heard without hearing. For what, but *images* and *sounds*, is released by the dream?

Blanchot points out that any being or object in a dream is a resemblance, or likeness (*Space* 268; "Dreaming" 145). Providing encounters with strange echoes of things seen and felt, dreams saturate us in the becoming-image of the lifeworld. But turning our world into appearances shows how things are already appearances, already dynamic exchanges of seeing and sensing. If we live in a world already saturated by appearance, dreams contain images of images, the slow degradation by which image makes *things* of all things. Because the dream never presents itself to me (only to my appearance in the dream), when I wake I appropriate it as my own. We said earlier that the dream as such is distinct from the having-been-dreamt, which is what I describe when I refer to dreams. So I only ever behold the dream as a kind of after-effect; I only behold it in its withdrawal from its own presence. As a subject, I am never co-present with the dream. In my taking hold of it in the midst of its withdrawal from presence, the dream is ever oriented towards its disappearance. Always only mine in the act of withdrawal, it is subject to the disappearance to which all things are subject. As dreams retire, they express how the world of things as images is already captured by the retreat into absence.

It is no wonder that Wojnarowicz dreamed of desultory piles of human stuff while he was facing his own disappearance from the world. Continually witnessing the disappearance of his cohort, Wojnarowicz lived in a perennial circuit of disappearance. If Derrida is correct to say that the loss of a person is the loss of a world, then towards the end of his life Wojnarowicz had already suffered the disappearance of many worlds. As I noted, Wojnarowicz multiplied his environment into several worlds to explain the experience of abjection. The existence of many worlds and his uncertain passage between them expressed his sense of the contingency of his

world, and, I argue, the looming possibility that there could be no world. If a world can be an image and an image can disappear, there remained for Wojnarowicz the possibility of the world disappearing. Imagining dreams as worlds yields the world to the domain of things, and things decay into no-things. Dreams document what was lost from consciousness, and as soon as they are presented to me (to my appearance in the dream) they continue on the path towards disappearance. In appearing to us (appearing as appearances), they draw us back towards what was lost, what was splintered out of conscious sight into cognitive debris, in the span of our own and others' mortality. Trash confronts us with loss without remediating the lost object.

I have read Wojnarowicz's claims to witnessing by turning to this dream that opens Colin Dayan's critical memoir, *With Dogs At The Edge Of Life* (2016).

> My life, what I remember of my childhood, began with a dream. I dreamed that I was in a dump, out there in the dirt with broken footstools, cracked dishes, and piles of toys. No one else was there. I had been dropped off and left alone just before the sunset. I do not remember myself – how I looked, what I felt. All I see even now are things. The things in the dirt are not garbage, not like the stuff you throw in trashcans. They are weighty, extravagant, and intemperate in their height and clutter. That is the feeling I have when I call up the dream. I am there thrown away in a heap, in the midst of junk that, treasured once, still seems effervescent with love, imprudent in excess.
>
> What are things that get left behind, disposed of, forgotten? In heaps they pile on, one on top of the other, a clutter of dead bodies that somehow hold on to life: in the limb thrown softly onto the back of its neighbour, in the mouths held open, not quite ready to turn away from the life they knew. This held breath, the hot blood and flesh of abandoned

> stuff, matters to those who live. To know our easy disregard is to hold fast to the sight of what we push aside. Only then do we come to know what we have lost. (15)

In her moving accounts of her life with dogs, and her horror at the mass non-criminal disposal of animals, Dayan does not so much rescue the dog from the category of possession as she begins with the image of trash, herself reified and tossed into a heap of collective loss. She imagines herself as wasted life blending into the loss to which she clings. As we said, no one and nothing is immune to becoming-thing. Dreams are one of the only places where we come to know what we have lost as we face our own disappearance from the world: not only our physical disappearance, but the disappearance of our consciousness and of our self-same subjectivity from the rational world that lies before us. If we experience social death, we exist in the mode of our absence from sight. Dayan dramatizes her removal from a collective gaze while endowing her own small gaze upon the wealth of rubbish that has similarly been cast out. The things we push aside, the things that we have removed or that have been removed from our sight, attract a particular kind of sight of their own. The sight of the lost, the sight of what has passed out-of-sight (or dis-regarded), is a sight oriented towards disappearance. And if appearances fundamentally require sight, disappearance requires the undoing of sight that is itself a form of sight. For Dayan we know what has been lost only on the strength of its impossible presence, or the impossibility of our presence to it. Dreaming in the time of AIDS, Wojnarowicz understood that his own witnessing was caught up in the flow of presence and absence proper to sight. There was the type of hypervisible witnessing organized by political funerals, and then there were glimpses of uncounted loss that would never quite establish the presence or legitimacy of what was lost and ambling on the path to disappearance. These are the pools of rainwater, the piles of clothing, and fiery bodies lingering on the edge of sight. What the dreams communicate is the

limit to preservation, memory, and recovery that such activities as memorializing pursue. Processes of dissolution are inherent to the fate of images, and so learning to live with images and with loss as images is to learn to dwell in disaster.

What comes after an image, if an image already comes after? With the example of the thought-image, according to Gerhard Richter, images come after images, what we call the "afterimage" (139). A thought-image, what dreams are made of, is that which reproduces itself in the process of its retreat from presence. We give ourselves an image, but this act of giving already encodes the retreat of the image, for as Richter argues following Benjamin, the image "encrypts the futurity of a decline or decay, a ruinous absence, the trace of a withdrawal that is already silently at work within it" (143). Dream images offer us something like an after-without-future, a shoring-up of loss that promises no redemption or salvation, but indeed something other than a static repetition of what came before. While dreams do not promise us a future, they furnish a harried shelter for continued mortal existence. Let us regard a final dream of Wojnarowicz's from *Close to The Knives* that has also been reproduced and illustrated by James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook in the concluding pages of a graphic book of his work, *7 Miles A Second* (2012) (See Figures 4 and 5):

> DREAM: I woke up and stepped out of a room into a second floor hallway dark with morning. All along the hall, ending at the top of the staircase that leads down, are all these street people: poor people lying in beat-up sleeping bags or under old frayed and dirty blankets. Some of them stir slightly as I pass them, walking towards the stairs. It's a mansion with huge ceiling-to-floor windows and behind the windows there is the clearest wintery kind of light I have ever seen, and it is coming through the bare branches of large

> trees growing just outside. The light comes through the windows, and as I turn to follow its path into the enormous room, I see a grizzled and filthy vagrant. Under the large chandeliers he is dancing this odd waltz-like dance, his arms upraised in a classical elegance, slowly turning in the rays of light. (*Close* 251-2)

The spacious, illuminated place opens hospitably before the extravagant vagrant and his coterie. They are allowed to dwell, as they are, under a shelter that demands nothing of them and that permits an affecting freedom of movement in scarcity. Like Wojnarowicz's lover's skeleton revolving until it becomes dust, the vagrant turns slowly under the dreamer's spellbound gaze. And like the Cleopatra costume, half living and half dead, the vagrant clings to a queerly extravagant avoirdupois, mesmerizingly suspended between states of being. The vision opens with a sense of waking up into the dream, as if this place were both dream and reality, there and not there, the image and its afterimage. With this motion the dream reaches towards the limits of its own possibility. The dream begins with waking up to what exists beyond dreams.

Dreams do not map a future, but in the dis-ordering of the world they contain possibilities of things yet-unthought. They mobilize temporal debris lodged in past impressions and released in the after-life of the mental image. After dispelling fears of what the discovery of unconscious desires may reveal about human moralities and future behaviour, Freud refines his effort and asks, “Is the ethical significance of our suppressed wishes to be made light of – wishes which, just as they lead to dreams, may some day lead to other things?” (*Interpretation* 614). Jacqueline Rose glosses this obscure thought by arguing that “although dreams are not prophetic, they are generative, forward-looking, not in the predictable but unpredictable sense. Precisely because they lead us back into the deepest recesses of the psyche ... they lead us forward into something

else" (Rose 121). This undetermined "something else" is not necessarily a future or fissure that makes a difference. Just as disaster, as Khalip characterizes it, makes no definitive rupture in the present, only extending through the continuities of the present from its lodgings in the past, dreams are fuelled by recessive energies flowing backwards and flooding the present with their demands. "[Dreams] are after all leading us into the future," says Freud, "[b]ut this future, which the dreamer pictures as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into a perfect likeness of the past" (*Interpretation* 615). Dreams do not promise a future, but they do provide a field of wasted life in which there is the possibility of persisting in disaster. From the deviant mutability of the past the present forges potentialities that may undo the world without becoming real themselves. These provide a dwelling for tarrying with the movement of appearance as it winnows towards oblivion.

Figures 4 and 5: **James Romberger, Marguerite Van Cook, and David Wojnarowicz**
Pages 36 and 37 of *7 Miles a Second* (2012)
Courtesy of James Romberger, Marguerite Van Cook and the Estate of David Wojnarowicz, © 2018

Coda: Dreaming in *Facsimile*

To conclude, let us revisit the relation between dreams and images. The dream as resemblance, as Blanchot calls it, forces us to revisit assumptions that underlie resemblance and the relation between the thing as such and the resemblance we perceive as belonging to it. Particularly, we must question our assumption that the dream hosts likenesses of the material world, and that we belatedly take possession of the night's adventures in their aftermath. As I said in my discussion

of Lyotard, dreams are not only image but a mix of figure and language that makes the dream irreducible to a photograph or film. Resemblance must also be responsive to the dream as language. Turning to Stephen Andrews's *Facsimile* (1990-1993) as an opening into the dream, I suggest that we can approach Andrews's installation as a meditation on the mutability of resemblance in practices of mourning and the emergence of the image as an effect of the ruination that is proper to dreaming.

As I have emphasized, dreams can be an engine of forgetting, and their particular relation to us as things that we typically forget should require a far more careful view of the relation between the dream's resemblances and forgetting. In *Facsimile*, the medium of photography undergoes a process of degradation as the image is repeatedly reproduced. *Facsimile* is a series of portraits of men who died of AIDS-related complications that appeared in an obituary column called “Proud Lives” in Toronto's queer newspaper, *Xtra,* between 1990 and 1993. The portraits had been faxed to the newspaper, and Andrews enlarged and reproduced the faxed images on graphite-and-oil-rubbed wax tablets. According to Deborah Esch, Andrews was away at the time the publication ran, and received the images via transatlantic fax (qtd. in Düttmann 5-6). Having been transmitted via fax a second time, grain is highly visible and the faces are partially obfuscated. Whether the now-anonymous faces are trying to be remembered or forgotten is unclear. They are made more obscure by their encounter with photographic reproduction. Each intervention appears to further unravel the relation between person and image that already so precariously binds the process of mourning. As if to run to ground their status as “low-resolution” images, they refuse to resolve the spectator's expectation of presence and instead they meet her gaze in an unresolved state between presence and absence. Removed several times from their context in “Proud Lives,” the pictures re-perform a function of the photographic, which is

to displace the subject from its time and place in history. This function is redoubled with "obituary" as the initial context. Out of context, the images are removed from their stated purpose as obituary and disrupt the supposedly fixed mimetic relation between the photograph and the world. They become, in one sense, non-related to the obituary as well as to their previous lives prior to publication. This growing chain of dislocation reminds the spectator that the images' temporal and spatial location as obituaries is itself a site of dislocation from the original exposure, challenging the very concept of an original available to be recorded. In *Facsimile*, technological mediation has not preserved a rational relation between world and image but become the force of its dissolution. Andrews displays the portraits in the mode of their photographic disappearance, showing how photography dismantles that which it depicts as a form that memorial takes.

Facsimile (see Figure 6) puts the *techne* of photographic reproduction to work as an agent of ruination. Coming out of the AIDS epidemic and its practices of mourning, such as *Xtra*'s obituary column, *Facsimile* draws attention to the use of "simile," and like-ness more broadly, in the practice of mourning and its concomitant projects of remembering and forgetting. Let us recall now that Blanchot's chosen figure for resemblance is the corpse. In Blanchot the corpse both is and is not the dead body, but a kind of overdetermined sign for that which is absolutely there and absolutely not there. The corpse "resembles himself" (*Space* 257) which is not to say, Blanchot clarifies, that it resembles the person that was once known, but that it resembles "nothing" (258). What does this mean? The present corpse gives us an image of what is not there, what is displaced and displacing, what roams without a firm location and what points to the unknown. There is no "original" nothingness the corpse resembles, but by some terrible

confidence it is what to us unquestionably resembles it. That is, the corpse does not imitate the known person, but the impersonal relation of the vacant body to the unknown.

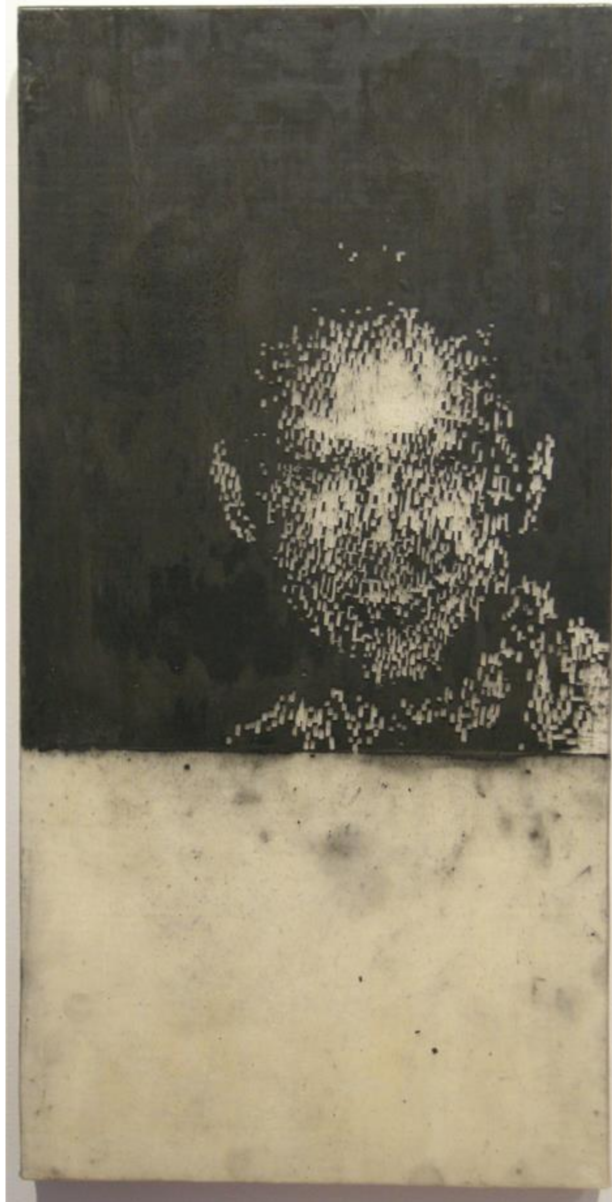

Figure 6: **Stephen Andrews**
Detail from *Facsimile, Part II,* 1991, (Peter F. Tanguay)
graphite, oil, beeswax on board
Courtesy of Stephen Andrews and Oakville Galleries

Returning to *Facsimile*, the progressively mediated resemblances produce a disquieting effect, what we can identify as the relative mutability of the person, not in the idealized image of the once-living, but the automatized metabolization of loss. This is what Terada calls in her discussion of De Quincey's grief "the worst" (177), which to put it briefly is a response to profound loss that we cannot tolerate and must tolerate. The worst requires us to understand what cannot be understood, and our metabolization of this harsh demand creates changes in the normative order of things, an inherent mutability of bodies, forms, categories, and what Terada identifies as species and gender, that emerges from living with ruination. This is to say that metabolizing the worst creates new possibilities from ruin rather than the recovery of or even the moving on from what was lost. *Facsimile*'s stream of dislocation, as I noted, suggests that at the core of this chain of fac-simile, or making likeness, there was never an original from which the resemblance came. Moreover, the installation's "similes" relate its photographic *techne* to the dramatic device in language. Simile turns language into images, naming a dream-like process of association where what is heard, as Lyotard and Clark said, becomes what is seen. *Facsimile* links the chain of degradation/resemblance to a realm of discourse, not for language to elucidate the image, but to display the corrosive action of discourse upon the image and even upon the person from whom the image came. Language can facilitate the kind of forgetting that leads to social death. At bottom, each resemblance is this mix or a mutation of image and language, and each resemblance is a mutation of prior resemblances that correspond to ruination. Even as people walked the streets while the epidemic raged, the subjects of *Facsimile* were already resemblances, already caught up in the transformations inherent to metabolizing the worst.

Earlier, I claimed that when we refer to dreams we refer to the having-been-dreamt rather than the dream as such, which means that our reference to our dreams is already a reference to a

resemblance. The dream-within-the-dream is imagined to circumvent this supplementation by collapsing the dream as such and the having-been-dreamt. But like *Facsimile*'s practice of mourning, the dream effects the mutability of the body rather than a doubled echo of an intelligible original available to be recovered. Our very idea of the dream as something that existed prior to the having-been-dreamt and that can be recovered from memory contains the assumption that there is a dream as such, when the dream may be the product of the having-been-dreamt, the creative mutability of a memory without an original. This reading takes seriously the existence of "cognitive debris," for the dream proceeds from the myriad autonomizations of image, language, and memory as the deviant mutation of cognitive ruins. The mix of figure and language, after all, produces an alien concoction of the two rather than anything like a progressively reproduced entity.

We must contend with the possibility that the dream does not exist, or that what we imagine to be the dream as such is the effect of multiple relations of memory, thought, and perception that constitute the having-been-dreamt. As such, the dream is a kind of afterimage without image. Like Wojnarowicz's fantasy of an aesthetics with no past, it resembles queer practices of memory and forgetting whose purpose is not simply the creation of an archive, but an unlearning of pain. Mourning can draw us into the future only by unmaking ourselves, as the dream critically unmakes our experience of the world. As a series of dislocations and deferred references, the dream cannot be reduced to reference, and relates to the material world outside, as Richter puts it, as "a relation without relation" (134). Blanchot claims that dreams are "the likeness that refers eternally to likeness" (*Space* 268). Likeness relates only to the likeness of the dream itself as it remains open to remediations from elsewhere. Imaginative exercises in mourning and memorialization always occur in excess of the reference they claim for their

legitimacy, always unfixing the past created in the wake. We must always consider the possibility that the dream does not exist, but we can dream that it does.

Conclusion: Queer Indifference-to-Come

Let us not rebuild Notre Dame. Let us honor the burnt forest and the blackened stones. Let us make of its ruins a punk monument, the last of a world that ends and the first of another world that begins.

– Paul B. Preciado

A central claim of this study has been that the inert, insensitive, and disinterested orientations to the world that arise from queer sexualities do not end with the enclosure of the self but generate possibilities for persistence beyond the present. The weariness with the present that appears to cut us off to it plunges us into the abysses of sleep, archive fevers, and antisocial fugues that envision a world to come. I have described this temporality not as the conservation of the past or present versions of queerness for the future, nor as the redemption of the past, but as a series of transmutations proper to indifferent relations to the present that may include witnessing the past in the mode of destroying or disassembling the archive, or beholding a paradoxically ever-present stony mountain in the midst of becoming sand. The "last of a world that ends" and the "first of another world that begins" are the queer messianisms, the Omega followed by the Alpha, of a radical neutrality towards present ruination that keeps wordless watch over the emergence of unexpected queer futures. These actions of denaturing are not necessarily intentional or purposive; rather, they are relations to the present that expose our susceptibility to the conditions of existence and the inherent instability of the self as it stands before alterity. They reveal the radical potential of passive and impassive states to confront reality while queerly resisting its sometimes violent intrusions.

My wide and unfixed vocabulary for this watchfulness – opacity, neutrality, darkness, disinterest, negative attention – represents not a renunciation of the present but something closer to what Melanie Yergeau has suggestively called "neuroqueer rhetorics" (86-7), a constantly

redrafting language for different courses of growth and interaction and the social-strange *habitus* that "articulate alternate spaces and knowledges for inter/relating, indexical worlds that draw upon im/material resources, a cripped kind of betweenity" (87). Recalling *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess Goldberg's speculation that she "grew in a different way" (Feinberg 272) describes what we could name the stone butch's neuroqueer inter/relations to the conditions of thriving among ruination. Indifference's "betweenity" marks the uncontainment of the self that is open to unseen and unknown relations.

At once suspensive and dynamic, queer indifferences are also indifferences-to-come. In Chapter Two, I argued that the film, *Last Address,* lends its indifferent gaze to the AIDS epidemic without claiming to come after AIDS. The *last* address is the *beginning* of a disassembly of the film. From its last and lasting stance, the film looks ahead not by sealing off the future to AIDS nor by memorializing the past but by hospitably inviting remediation and disassembly for young artists and activists to come. Its future dwells in the lasting debris of the AIDS disaster, in that undetectable gap, as Jacques Derrida says, between the trace and its erasure (*Animal* 136). AIDS now persists in the queer zone of the undetectable. As Nathan Lee explains in "The Fold of the Undetectable" (2016), the recent classification of "undetectable" serostatus subsumes the binary categories of HIV positivity and negativity and introduces a new array of meaning from the suspension of the now erstwhile distinction. Undetectable refers simultaneously, he says, to "the existence of an object and the object's escape" (Lee 167), following a narrative of seeking and the failure to be found. We might think of undetectable HIV as being alone in the body, and therefore being alone, together, with HIV. The undetectable object exists but eludes surveillance, a condition that now gives HIV a concurrent presence and absence in the body and to one's illness status. HIV's continuance in stealth categories compels

us to ask what it now means to *have* the virus, for its new identifications no longer only denote its presence or absence, but the likelihood of transmission and the safety of contact between bodies. In the destruction and inoperativity of the binary there is no after AIDS but there are new ways of dwelling with it, and it has new ways of dwelling with us. When restoration and reversion are not possible, opaque taxonomies and third terms are the signs under which queer life endures.

As AIDS-to-come claims new temporalities in elusiveness, indifferent postures may similarly embody this hospitality towards other things. In rethinking sexuality's expectations of transparency, I have argued for the imaginative potentialities released by non-subjective orientations to knowledge. By turning away from self-interest we turn towards occasions for desire and belonging not yet assimilated into identity, still far from the horizons of sight. Where sexuality interlinks with gender, race, and ability, there may be further embodiments of queerly indifferent agency. Imagining a queer indifference to gender that is not a post-gender or post-feminism, I began this project by exploring the indifference of the stone butch in *Stone Butch Blues*, a gender and sexual subjectivity associated with the 1950s American working class. Queer media's archival impulses feverishly keep watch over this desirous life for its contingent resurgence. Imagining the fitful possibilities of this gender-to-come, the breast binders worn by the novel's butches recall the dream work's binding and unbinding agency from Chapter Three. Like stone, these objects mediate the body's visibility and containment, and they bind and unbind the self to produce renewed forms of being. As a dream, gender is freighted with past knowledge that is bound and unbound to generate new configurations for living. To imagine gender as a dream is to take seriously gender's virtual life of projections, impressions, and

resemblances as a set of real possibilities that may, as Freud says, "some day lead to other things" (*Interpretation* 614).

That said, imperceptibility is not queer indifference's invariant future. An important avenue my project opens up but that I did not explore is racialization and queer indifference. From the view of black studies, for example, a critical practice of imperceptibility may be anathema to anti-racist projects for resembling a politics of colourblindness that aims to override criticisms of racial inequality and to eliminate from view the legacies of chattel slavery that continue to structure black life in the present. Jack Halberstam's work on queer darkness suggests that a queer indifference to race might similarly commit to the performative potential of dark bodies and dark space to fulfill the searching potential of Michele Foucault's "darkened spaces which prevent the full visibility of things" (*Power* 153). Following Daphne Brooks's scholarship on African American theatre, Halberstam evokes the interpretive style of darkness as "a strategy of reading as well as being in the world" to release the queer appeal of "adjust[ing] to less light rather than to seek out more" (*Failure* 97). Reading and viewing in the dark decentres subjective vantages that are normatively and racially marked as universal. It is clear that not every body can equally assume opacity and neutrality with the same stakes. While darkness for some invites less surveillance, darkness for others attracts more. Imperceptibility risks becoming the visual equivalent of the aural "Silence=Death" slogan for AIDS activism, when speaking out may mean life for some, but for others, who are not in a position to do so, may mean exclusion or death. However, an aesthetics of darkness also channels histories of racially-specific performance and subjugation that reorient us *to* darkness and the associations and representations that coalesce around it.

Dreaming often happens in the dark, and as I argued in my discussion of dreamlife, dark spaces do not only prevent visibility but generate images, narratives, and thoughts that fracture the present "as it is" so that we may discover or rediscover new relations to the context of our lives. The dark spaces of night and of the unconscious host autonomous creations in the shape of the past so that we are permitted to see beyond the normal limits of our reflection without coming after the past whose force still runs along the currents of the present. As with Derrida's archive, which I discussed in the Introduction, this recessive space of imaginative potential "produces as much as it records" (*Archive* 17) and provides an "irreducible experience of the future" (68) where new configurations of sexuality, gender, race, and ability may arise not in the face of waking or volitional horizons but in the folds of the mind's enduring betweenities.

A turn *away* from subjectivities *as they are* is a way of turning *towards* what they *could be,* were we to envision different ways of being. This action relieves the most rigid and compulsive fixations so that we may imagine things otherwise. Despite Freud's association of dreams with the past, the word dream is now synonymous with impossible futures. These can be the nightmarish hallucinations of the present or they can be an impossible faith in something different without knowing if such a thing could be made real, a kind of radical agnosticism. The existence of hope and its escape, the undetectable presence of imaginative reach, fortify our ability to persist in the forest with the blackened stones. Dwelling feverishly in suspensive intervals and stony states, queer indifferences-to-come generate alterity in ever new forms.

APPENDIX

Interview with Ira Sachs
March 20, 2015

Roshaya Rodness

Ira Sachs

RR: *Last Address* is often described as an "elegy." Do you agree with this characterization of the film? To whom is your film addressed?

IS: Well I wrote that it was an elegy, so I crafted that text and I haven't really thought about whether it officially ... or what the term elegy means in an English class. To me it is elegiac, because it remembers in a sift way. I don't think it's nostalgic and I don't think it's mournful. I think it has a kind of softer tone, which to me is elegiac. It's a process of remembrance. In some ways it's addressed to me, to myself as the artist. [It comes from] the recognition that I came to of the importance and impact of that loss on me at the time that I made the film. And in terms of my own experience being an artist in New York, how [that loss] impacted me. So I think that it's a very personal film. I think in constructing it and in finishing it, it becomes more broadly welcoming. I think of many people it's addressed to. You know I've made five features and three or four shorts and this is probably the film that's been seen the most on some level.

RR: You were saying that this has been one of your more widely-viewed films.

IS: Yes, it has been, I think. I think part of that is the form of a short film. It was put on the front page of YouTube and it suddenly got 100,000 viewers. It connects to the forms of distribution in a very easy way. It's almost like a notecard that people can share between themselves saying “remember.” It's something that can be passed between friends or people to remember. It shows AIDS in a kind of human way, I guess.

RR: That's really beautiful. Alternative paths of relationality and communication.

IS: Yeah, and I mean you talk about the different forms of theory and when it comes to queer art it's also these different forms of distribution that have made certain things more subculturally accessible.

RR: How does *Last Address* relate or compare to other elegiac activities that are features of AIDS activism, such as the Names Project Quilt, Ashes Action, or even Stewart Gaffney's short films (like *Dear al* and *Gestures*)?

IS: In a way I never thought about that question but I think in connection to the quilt there was a similarity in the sense that I hope that the film can be a kind of modern and contemporary way for people who are living to commune around the loss of the AIDS epidemic. You know, you make something for the living; you don't make it for the dead. Particularly if you're an atheist. You can make something as a form of communication with the present.

RR: And I've noticed the addresses almost seem to be stitched together kind of like the panels in the quilt.

IS: Yeah, I think there's a collage element to the film. There was a large associative development, particularly a decision in the making of the film, which at times I knew, I was certain about, I still thought, and at some points in the process I gave it a second thought: whether or not to include biographical material. And I chose not to, which means you need to understand that most people who see the film are not familiar with about 90% of the names. Some upwards of 100% of the names. I would think you find a subset is going to know Keith Haring or Robert Mapplethorpe. But that's already a particular audience. Because there are many people who don't know any of the names. And then you're going to find some people (that's been very rewarding as I've found) who are living in New York and who have been in the New York that I have who know almost every name. And many of them these people knew personally. You find individuals who knew people personally and the film speaks to them in ways that I think they find very unexpected. Suddenly, their friend is remembered. I spent a lot of time crafting the text at the end of the film, which is the only biographical information, because I wanted the film to have clarity and to be accessible for anyone who was not familiar with anything about the story that it was telling. And I needed to give enough information without giving too much to make it too explicit. As an artist it is important to be very clear with my work.

RR: The text at the end seems much more than backmatter for you.

IS: Correct. It is form and content in its most defining way. You know I think it is the thing that gives the earlier material weight and historical clarity.

RR: Would you characterize this film as a form of activism? Or did you conceive of it as mostly memorial in nature? Perhaps the distinction between memorialization and activism doesn't apply in this instance. How would you characterize your project?

IS: Well I have to say that what I have realized since I made the film is it was a very significant turning point for me as an artist. You know when I came to New York in the late eighties there was a very strong new queer film and queer art movement. It was a very palpable city and it was connected to activism and I made some shorts that were explicitly gay and that engaged questions about gender and sexuality, and they were radical in some way in terms of the content in American culture. I kind of stepped away from explicitly gay work for about ten or twelve years. I think that that was to some extent a reaction against capitalism and the difficulty creating that work economically. It was also a testament I later sensed to a certain amount of shame and external and internal homophobia, which was encouraging me to closet myself again, even though I came out as a teenager. But it was really a reaction against what seemed possible. With *Last Address,* which came for me at a point when I was also making real transformations personally in terms of how I was living my life and who I wanted to be, I really wanted to be very open in a way that I hadn't been since I moved to New York. This was the film that kind of announced my interest and who I was and where I came from. I also got a huge amount of inspiration in learning about various artists that are in the film and creating the website that you might have seen.

RR: Yes.

IS: The website includes a lot of biographical information. I just kind of went down the rabbit hole of those artists at that time and I was reminded of their risk-taking, their lack of bourgeois comfort, being a part of a real avant garde New York, and I got inspired. I got courage. My next film, after *Last Address,* was called *Keep the Lights On*.

RR: Yes, I've seen it.

IS: It was an extremely open film in which I tried to hide nothing. I'm sure I didn't succeed; that was my attempt, and that was a kind of new coming out for me that I did on the back of the work of the people who were in *Last Address*. I was like, "if they can do that work that's that honest ..." Clearly, we're talking about a number of different artists, and they're not all the same, but as a group there was a lack of creature comfort to their lives as artists that I embraced. So for me the film turned out to be activist both for myself as an artist as well as (I think) for the people who interacted with the piece. We ended up doing a window display based on *Last Address* just south of Washington Square Park, a series of window galleries that was run by New York University. And those were on public display for six or eight months in 2011. I'm sure I can find somewhere the record; we have images from that display. But that was a way the film became even more of a public conversation. Because it was really street art.

RR: I've seen some of those images and I think they relate to the next question I wanted to ask you, which is about the extra-cinematic events that the release of *Last Address* inspired. Not only were there the window displays, but there were walking tours of the residential units and readings at the doors. I wonder what you make of these events and how they have changed the nature of the film.

IS: We also did a screening at White Columns, which was a kind of short films event connected to *Last Address* and the artists in *Last Address*. White Columns is an alternative art space here in New York. That was a great event; it really was. Because this film isn't about content; it's about absence. For me the content is also very significant. I wish somehow that that website was more, and that I could organize real outreach, and that it could become utilized in an engaged way in universities. It's really great. Like if people spent a few hours in a classroom setting. I don't know, I was just so influenced by the work I discovered while making it that I wish more people knew about it. In some ways it's like any film: it becomes; it's not a passive object. It creates engagement. It creates a possibility for dialogue, discourse. In this film there's a lot of room for personal reflection. That's maybe where it seems poetic in some ways. It encourages interior thought. Coming back to, as I described, the things that have happened on the street in connection to the film, I feel like the film got me in touch again with activism in a physical form. I had been very involved in ACT UP when I came to New York in the eighties and it reminded me of the social and political rewards of that work. Sociality being a big part of cinema in general. How does it create society? I run a couple of queer art programs and I've now started a non-profit. I run a monthly series called Queer/Art/Film. Specifically, I run another program called Queer Mentorship, which I think is directly linked to the lightbulb that happened when I

came up with the idea for *Last Address*. And I remember exactly where I was. I was crossing Houston, the street in lower Manhattan. And I just sort of thought about it all at once as a conceptual idea including the title, because I thought about absence. I've been crossing Houston since 1984, which was the first summer I lived in New York, and I lived a block from that street. I first moved to New York in 1984. In the summer while I was in college working, I lived right off of Houston. So I've been crossing Houston for thirty years. Somehow being in a space time and time again you suddenly can have a really strong sense of time past and time future and time present. In one moment, I had the idea for *Last Address*, fully formed, including the title.

RR: So it was a very embodied gesture for you, and an embodiment that doesn't quite appear in the film itself.

IS: Yeah. I think it reflects some exterior version of an interior sense. The film for me was a way of noticing. Paying attention. Witnessing, certainly, but witnessing not just the disappearance and those artists but also nature and the temporality of experience in the city, and in life in general, but in the city specifically. Recognizing for the first time that there are birds that chirp and you can actually hear them in daybreak, which I noticed when we were shooting Keith Haring's apartment when the sun came up. I'm like, “Wow, there are birds in these trees! I never noticed birds.”

RR: You mentioned in a different interview that you spoke with your colleague David France about making a film called *Oh Fuck I'm Going To Live,* about reconstituting one's life after surviving the epidemic. This unmade film and *Last Address* both seem to have something in

common, which is that among other things there are about survival after loss. May I ask how your work speaks to the condition of survival in the face of losses?

IS: I think it has a lot to do with AIDS, certainly, but more specifically for me being almost fifty years old and being very much aware of the temporary nature of my life and my parents' life. I've lost friends in the last few years. I lost a very close friend after I made *Last Address*, who died of cancer. I think I'm in a reflective mode. *Love Is Strange* is an interesting film, which is my most recent film to look at in connection to *Last Address*. I would actually say it's the narrative film that speaks to the themes, including spaces and trees and light and the city of New York in a very direct way. For example, the last scene of *Love Is Strange* is shot on the same block as Charles Ludlum's apartment. It was an image that I experienced and a space that I experienced in making one film that I used in another film that was also about loss and rebirth. I feel like I'm a survivor also, just because I'm still making films. In a way it's a narcissistic way of thinking about it, but I'm not talking about mourning, I'm talking about hustling.

RR: <chuckles>

IS: Like I'm a hustler. And I think that there's something about recognizing loss and temporality, which gives you courage ... to hustle, to make new things. You could say the stakes are greater, but the stakes are also fewer because you know it all has an end. You're more deeply aware of that. I've always thought that New York City will never blink when I die. Will hardly notice. And I think accepting that is really empowering.

RR: How so?

IS: Because you don't take yourself too seriously. You have a sense of humour around things like death. Death is not tragic, actually. Technically, death in itself is not tragic. If you talk about the term tragedy, death is factual. Clearly, the AIDS epidemic was a tragic and disastrous event that was handled so brutally by our culture and it's not so different from ... what is the line about history, you know that the people who live are the ones who own it?

RR: Oh, the victors are the ones who will create history?

IS: Yes. That's the concept, and you certainly feel that in the Holocaust, and you feel it in the AIDS epidemic. But in the same way it's very hard to understand how you're part of history when you're living in it. It's like when I was at Yale and studying queer theory there, and I don't know if I would have even called it queer theory. I think we were studying feminist theory and deconstruction. It was pre-queer theory. There were gay historians and gay writers, but I feel like queer theory came just a little bit after; I could be wrong historically. But I think that that didn't occur out of a vacuum; that occurred in the passage of history. These are all possibly clichéd terms, but I think that they're ones that are meaningful to me.

RR: Can you discuss some filmmakers or particular films that informed the unique formal features of *Last Address*?

IS: Well, Chantal Akerman. In a significant way, a film like *News from Home,* which is a film she made that only uses images of New York City up and down, from exterior shots, up and down the island of Manhattan. But the text is that she's reading letters from her mother back in Belgium. I also recommend a film called *Je tu il elle,* which is an extraordinary queer film. I think it's a history of minimalist art, conceptual art. That in a way was one of the more significant films for me. I think I've always been interested in forms of portraiture and observation. There are also films like *Portrait of Jason*, which is a very different film by a woman named Shirley Clarke. It asks you to attend and watch the man talking for seventy-three minutes, and just to pay attention, and see what you can see. It doesn't tell you what to think. It allows you to find your own way in. So I think for me as an artist the challenge is to give people enough that you're not obfuscating meaning but not too much to point too directly at how you want people to feel.

RR: Can you tell me more about how the conventions of these films influenced you?

IS: Minimalism is something I have responded to. Akerman is a very big influence in my life. I feel that she knows just what to put and not too much. One of the things with *Last Address* is that I'm playing with issues of duration. But I never want duration to exceed boredom's due date. I tried to keep it moving and maintain some suspense even though as the viewer you are asked to sit and reflect. In editing it with Brian Kates, who is a very good editor that I worked with, we were trying to keep narrative tension while still playing with ideas of duration and the demands that duration can make upon the audience.

RR: You seem to exercise tremendous restraint in the making of *Last Address*. By that I mean part of the film's force feels like it is derived from what it doesn't do or doesn't want to do. Why did you choose this aesthetic and what purpose does it serve?

IS: I would say that would be an element that I have in all my work. I'm looking for subtlety and an open experience for the audience where it is allowed to find complexity. I'm looking for the work to be good in my book. That kind of restraint is something I experience in most of the artists that I respond to. That includes novelists. I don't want to see the work. I want to feel it somehow.

RR: In some sense you've created a film in which nothing happens. Yet it is also a film that remembers something shattering that has happened, whose effects reverberate in the present in the form of all those lost futures. Would that be a fair assessment of *Last Address*? <Sounds of construction in background> I'm sorry for this noise. They're doing some work in my building.

IS: A nod to *Last Address*, there's the loud construction shot.

RR: Yes!

IS: <Construction sounds continue> There is movement, and what happens is just that things that we might not notice in everyday life are happening. People cross the streets and birds are chirping and someone's calling out to someone else and people are opening shops. It's not that nothing is happening it's just that there's no ... the city is happening.

RR: I suppose I'm thinking about my own impression of the film, a film in which nothing, and I put nothing in scare quotes, seems to happen in the present, but that which comes from this shattering experience reverberating from the past and also coming from the lost futures.

IS: I think why I'm resisting that on some level is to me the reason the film works for audiences is that something is happening, so there's not a complete absence of life. It's very important that the life of the city be very present and dramatic for the audience. There is a lot happening, and that's the idea that the city doesn't blink when you're gone. The city doesn't notice the absence. The presence and absence are both at play in a way that for the audience is significant.

RR: Now, decades after the introduction of HIV to the global North, and now that knowledge about and treatment of AIDS has undergone several shifts, how does *Last Address* speak to experience of and activism surrounding AIDS in New York City? By that I mean, how does it speak to and from the current situation of the AIDS epidemic?

IS: I think it speaks to the meaningfulness of the lives of the people that have been lost. I made a film, I should somehow send it to you, you might find it interesting. It's a film I made about 9/11 a week after 9/11. And there was a group of artists that were asked to make a film that responds to that attack and the violence in whatever way they wanted to respond to it. Before the [Missing Persons] posters came down I went and I shot the faces of about maybe sixty or seventy people on the posters. There were signs all over downtown New York saying, “have you seen this person?” “Have you seen that person?” Missing, missing, missing. And I just shot the faces in

these. The film is images of tattered photographs and it's a silent piece. There's actually no sound in it. If I think about it, if any film was probably influential to me besides the one I mentioned – the Chantal Akerman film – it would be my own film, this 9/11 film, which was untitled. Because it was trying to remember before people were gone, and to remember the contemporaneous experience of what it was like to have those images all around the town, and to see them and know what they meant. I think what's depressing on some level is that people are forgetting, you know, people have forgotten. Some people post *Last Address* every year. I've been doing that and *Visual AIDS* has a couple of times used it as a marker on A Day Without Art. There's no memorial in New York of AIDS. And memorials … I don't know how important they are. They're certainly not activist. I think that the film is a gentle way to recall loss. I'm not sure it's an activist work except that it encourages conversation and reflection and possibly encourages a connection to the artists. I think it's a celebration on some level. It's certainly a remembrance but it's also a celebration of this incredible group. By the way, it's an extremely self-selective group. It's people that I have some connection with or I heard about and were connected with in the process of making the film. But, you know, Hugh Steers is an artist that you probably don't know. I went to college with Hugh, and he was one of the first people I knew who died of AIDS. Hugh died when he was probably twenty-four or twenty-five, maybe twenty-six when he died. Other people, such as Harold Brodkey was someone I knew. Harold Brodkey was a novelist that I personally really really love and felt like I was one of the few people who knew his work so well after he disappeared. He was one of the great authors of the nineties and then he died and it's like he never existed, which is crazy for me. It's kind of like a personal remembrance.

RR: In addition to filming the last addresses for the film you film several small animals who appear in a few intervals between addresses. What role do they play in the film?

IS: Well the cat was Jim Lyons's cat. Jim Lyons was my ex-boyfriend.

RR: Really!

IS: So that was Jim's cat. Jim Lyons was an editor; he edited *Poison* and *Safe* and other films with Todd Haynes, and was my partner for a while. So the cat had a certain significance. I think it's the attentiveness to the other narratives that were going on that we're unobservant of, including nature and the natural. Life.

RR: I'd like to talk a little more about the origins of the film.

IS: I can actually add a little to that.

RR: Okay.

IS: I was teaching at the graduate program at NYU and I was having trouble making my own narrative features. I was having trouble getting financed and I was really dependant on economic forces beyond my control, which were not interested in the work I was trying to do, which was work with gay content. And so I started teaching and I always encouraged my students to make work at the top of their potential, whatever the economic possibility or reality was. To aim high;

aim outside of the school. I was having that conversation with students and I was asked to make a film for a one-night event at a place called Light Industry, which was an experimental space that does experimental film in New York. They were asking New Yorkers to make films about New York for a one-night event, and I thought, “I'm going to do that, I like that challenge. But I'm going to do it as if I'm making one of my feature films. I'm going to do it at the highest level that I could intellectually, creatively.” And in terms of the people – the collaborators – I got very good people to work with me, and I said, “I'm going to make something that I really believe in for myself but that I also believe can have value outside of this one night.” And it was really for one night, that's really where *Last Address* came from. I was thinking, “What do I want to say about New York as someone who lives here?” I came up with this idea as I was crossing Houston and the film cost $3000 totally. I worked with the cinematographer Michael Simmons, whose work I had admired, and the producer was Lucas Joaquin. He'd been my intern and assistant for many years. Suddenly I thought, “well why don't we see if he can produce for me.” And we worked together and we still do. *Last Address* was the turning point of our professional relationship. I just tried to make something at the highest level I could. I think ambition was really important to the film. Ambition: not public ambition, but artistic ambition.

RR: The film appears very seamless and easy but I'm sure that there were a number of difficulties you faced in creating it. I'm wondering if you can talk about some of the difficulties that arose in creating the film.

IS: As I remember it now the biggest difficulty was shooting Ethyl Eichelberger and John Brockmeyer's house in Staten Island, which is the yellow house. We were at a three-day shoot

and getting our small little crew across the bridge over to Staten Island took an extra amount of time than we had expected. It was a long trip for a three-day shoot to get over there and back and to shoot that one shot, but I'm so glad I did because it is very different than everything else. Traffic was a big problem there. The editing phase: we constructed basically a twenty-four hour clock, which is constructed; we shot over three days. It was two daytimes and one night. That was an editing process with Brian Kates that we came up with, the one conceptual narrative element of the film. Day passes, and it wasn't real time but constructed in the process of cutting the film. Other problems: Well, I didn't realize how dramatic weather would be in a positive way. One of the surprises was the dramatic weather over the course of three days. And that was unexpected and dramatic for the film. You know I never would have thought that the shadows, the clouds across London Terrace – the buildings where three of the artists lived – would be so powerful. Letting nature in was a really big part of the process.

RR: And there's one shot I know when the camera seems to be almost battered by the wind, too.

IS: I think it's of Norman Resnais's apartment building. Norman was someone, by the way, he directed a movie called *Long Time Companion* and my first job in film was as his assistant on that film. It was a film about a group of friends who were confronting collectively the AIDS epidemic. It was one of very few narrative fiction features about AIDS. Norman died. It was written by a man named Craig Lucas, his partner, who was a doctor, and he was kind of our advisor on the film; he died. A lot of the hair and make-up people on that film died, a lot of people who worked on that film died. Of AIDS.

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