Explicit Affects: Confession, Identity, and Desire Across Digital Platforms


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A Thesis

In

The Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema




Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Film and Moving Image Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada




September 2018
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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

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ABSTRACT

**Explicit Affects: Confession, Identity, and, Desire Across Digital Platforms**

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This study accounts for what happens when a gay male identity politics centered around Western state power comes in contact with a pornographic aesthetic queerly subverting the markers composing this type of identity formation. While pornography has long affirmed and legitimized gay sexuality within a homophobic society, this dynamic requires reconsideration within a contemporary neoliberal media environment dictating the parameters of gay identity by showcasing gay reality stars, actors, and storylines. If this homonormative inclusion of gay identity aesthetics within mainstream media assures representation of gay camaraderie, affection, and even sometimes sexuality, then what role can pornography play in influencing gay identity today?

Despite these shifts, pornography remains an essential genre within gay communal formations because it showcases what the mainstream cannot: explicit sex. While mainstream media affirms and solidifies normative gay identity, I argue that this dynamic has meant that pornography has become a primary media mode actively destabilizing and confusing identity conventions. While an approach looking for ruptures in identity formation might typically situate itself within the foundations of queer theory as developed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and perhaps Michel Foucault, I instead highlight contexts where their queer conceptions of identity become too easily coopted by nationalist right-wing forces, or in the case of Foucault, does not allow for desire to exist outside of power relations. As an alternative, I argue for an affective understanding of individuation as understood by Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Gilbert Simondon, and Brian Massumi. What their understanding of affect theory offers queer thinking is a focus on process rather than stability.

This becomes crucial within a social media environment where most users are actively consuming, creating, and exchanging pornographic imagery of themselves and others across various media platforms, and within a multitude of social contexts. This is how gay identity becomes pornographic, by engaging in an active process where identity exists in between both a

pornographic and non-pornographic assemblage. The three case studies analyzed here are instances where both identity and pornographic aesthetics are situated within a process of *becoming*. The first chapter considers how confession becomes pornographic. I do so by analyzing the amateur pornographic projects of Colby Keller and the Black Spark, who subvert both confessional and pornographic norms by utilizing masks as part of their pornographic aesthetic. These masks embody a type of queer opacity that makes one question the role of the face within a social media age of overexposure. The second chapter documents how a viral YouTube celebrity becomes a pornographic performer. Chris Crocker's identity exists across media platforms where he is a singer, a television personality, a documentary subject, and a pornographic performer. Enacting the intensities of these various media forms points to the idea of a transindividual. Simondon's notion of the transindividual situates identity as being relational rather than inherent. Such an understanding productively shifts gay identity beyond a "Born This Way" ethos. The final chapter considers how a Gay Village becomes pornographic due to the multitude of screens showing pornography as part of its architecture. This visualization of sexuality infuses the neighborhood with pornographic affects enacting the potential to turn any place into a pornographic space. These instances ultimately offer us an opportunity to shift queer identity formations from their traditional understanding within a discipline society, to ones circulating within a control society.

This dissertation was written and submitted in solidarity with all fellow working-class PhD students who must work non-academic part-time jobs and rely on the generosity of their family to house them during this period of great financial limitations. No brochure for a PhD program can accurately portray the realities for students who do not receive scholarships or fee-remissions during their tenure. And while this is a journey that I undertook willingly—with an awareness of what the hardships would be—ultimately, the experience that has led to me finishing this dissertation has enriched my life in more ways that I ever could have imagined. As only the second person in my extended family to attain a PhD, and only one of the few who has attained a bachelor's degree, I continue to believe that higher education offers one access to unique perspectives and enriching life experiences that few other "jobs" afford. While completing this degree I have had the great fortune to present at conference across North America, as well as Europe, I have met many inspiring and brilliant people, and I have learned that I am capable of accomplishing things that I previously thought were impossibilities. I hope that this dissertation might inspire other Puerto Rican Americans to dream bigger, and if I never achieve such world-wide fame to accomplish that, I hope my accomplishments can at least one day inspire my future nephew!

My experience at Concordia University, as well as in Montreal, will eternally be defined and remembered alongside the mentorship and friendship of Tom Waugh. Tom is one of the few true intellectuals I have met in my life, and his brilliance will always inspire me. But perhaps even more important than any intellectual lesson, Tom's practice of being emotionally open and generous to so many people is an example I hope to keep in my heart forever. Being a New Yorker can make you quite cynical; thankfully, Tom and his posse of radical queers have helped to melt what at times has been a cold heart. I am eternally grateful for that.

I also feel as if I had the most amazing luck regarding my classmates at Concordia University. Our weekly post-class lunches during that first year meant a lot for me as the sole American in the cohort. I would like to especially thank Andy Djaballah and Samantha Wilson for being such amazing friends. I will never forget Andy teaching me how to ice skate by guiding me along with a hockey stick (so Canadian!). And Samantha's lasting friendship has provided countless laughs along with countless hours of horrible reality television that I will not soon

forget! Additional classes also provided fertile ground for making great friends. Micky Story's friendship during this short time in Montreal was truly something special. Thanks for all the laughs, and all of the green curry! Philipp Dominik Keidl's friendship over the years has also been invaluable and enriching. Despite your hard German exterior, you are wonderfully soft and caring inside. And we love you for that! I would also like to thank Adam Szymanski for teaching me that sober vegans can actually be awesome people! Thank you for everything you have taught me about life and love from a Deleuzian perspective. Additionally, I would like to thank Catherine Bernier, Kester Dyer, Dominic Leppla, Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, Zach Melzer, and Evangelos Tziallas for their great friendship and advice. Also, a big shout out to all the queers composing our bad-ass SCMS crew!

I thank Monika Kin Gagnon and Erin Manning for their time and thoughtfulness while considering this dissertation. I particularly want to thank Marc Steinberg for being so open to sharing his knowledge with me during my time at Concordia. I will also be forever grateful to you for introducing me to the work of Brian Massumi. I doubt this dissertation would exist in its current form without the work of Susana Paasonen. This project is my best attempt at writing a queer sequel to her book *Carnal Resonance*. Thank you so much for all your work, and I am honored that you dedicated time to considering this dissertation.

My experiences outside of academia were also essential in nurturing me through this process. Thank you Eddie Eadicicco for your lifelong friendship. You truly are my second brother. I also thank Robyn Citizen, Şahika Gürler, Matthew Hipps, Ben Hozie, and Alexandre Nothis for all their kindness and lasting friendship.

Thank you to Dani, Titi, and "Crazy" uncle Bob for all of your love and inspiration. Thank You Grandpa for all the card games and love. Finally, I would like to thank my brother, mother, and father, who have sacrificed just as much, if not more, to see this dissertation to its completion. There are no words that can truly express how grateful I am for everything you give me on a daily basis, both materially and emotionally. Thank you so much for believing in me and for providing such a loving home. I am truly nothing without you.

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Figure 0.1. Chris Crocker exposing himself inside while looking intensely for something outside.

I started graduate school in the fall of 2008 in New York University's Master's program in Cinema Studies. It is fair to say that my desire to situate gay male identity in relation to pornographic aesthetics started while enrolled in the program. While sexual representation had always been an academic concern of mine, for some reason I became drawn to the idea of exploring this concept to this furthest extent by analyzing the role pornography was playing in influencing the ways gay identity is enacted throughout a range of non-pornographic experiences. Perhaps this impulse of mine became solidified after taking my first trip to San Francisco for my first academic conference. While walking around the Castro neighborhood I saw a naked man walking down the street, and no one seemed concerned or panicked about it. Growing-up in a newly gentrified New York City that was proud of the overly-zealous role that the New York Police Department had in regulating citizen's behavior, I was shocked that no police officers were rushing him to demand that he put some clothes on. He was walking around without a care in the world, and everyone around him seemed to be innocently enjoying the view. This was the first time that I realized what a big role sexuality still played in gay people's identity formation around the rest of the country. While I spent years before this going to gay bars in New York City, the insistent narrative throughout the City's nightlife was that people my age had missed the glory days where there were more bars and the range of sexually raunchy activity taking place in those bars back then were no match for the timid behavior of gay patrons today. It was as if the sexual drive in New York City had been replaced by a financially motivated and racially segregating *gentrification drive*! According to this new narrative, the online hook-up culture had also "ruined" in-person sexual courtship. As a result, what we younger guys were experiencing was apparently just a pale imitation of what was. Considering the emphatic nature of this narrative coursing through gay night life, I am sure that many other people of my generation must have also been conditioned to think that we were experiencing was a version of New York City gay life that was less alive, and was instead, walking dead.

Another important aspect to 2008 was the election of Barack Obama. I honestly never thought I would be alive to witness the election of a racial minority as the President of the United States. As a racial minority myself, I was deeply moved by the election. And as someone who

believes that my own racial and sexual identity greatly influences my own social and political perspective, I thought that Obama's election was going to genuinely change the political dynamic in the U.S. towards class equality and a reduction in military imperialism. There seemed no better time than that present moment to embark on a new approach to identity studies because we had a real-word example of someone in the White House who had a chance to change the political dynamic in the U.S. because he was in the unique position of occupying an office that had previously only been held by white men. Unfortunately, for those of us who were hoping for great change, we were very quickly disappointed in the lack of institutional change stemming from his presidency. There was little to no effort to fundamentally change the dynamics of wealth inequality and continued in the same mode as previous presidents in advancing American military empire around the globe.

The primary effect Obama's presidency had on me both personally and professionally was a fuller understanding of the degree to which people are willing to ignore the impact that their own race and sexuality has on their political ideology. In the case of Obama, there seemed to be no urgency to have his political priorities shaped by the minority status of his race. Black wealth diminished under Obama and the anti-police brutality movement Black Lives Matter started under his administration. Obama was the real-life physical manifestation of a neoliberal ethos. As a result of this political awakening I experienced under Obama, I figured that I needed to think of a new approach when considering race that relied less on a determinist sense of ideology based on skin tone or sexual practice. For a long time, I did not know how to go about incorporating this new sense of racial and sexual understanding within my PhD dissertation. I knew that I wanted to do something new regarding the way in which I thought about contemporary gay sexuality, queerness, and its dependence on pornographic aesthetics, but I just could not figure out a theory that fit the parameters of what I was trying to accomplish. I felt strongly that I needed to find some way to bring theoretical complexity to a dissertation that would work beyond just validating or invalidating the quality and degree of sexual and racial diversity in the texts I was analyzing.

My awakening in reaching for more complexity began when I read Brian Massumi's chapter "The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation" where he actively questions what he calls the "myth of origins" by drawing a dynamic parallel between the

question of "Which came first? The individual or society?" with a follow-up question asking, "which is the chicken and which is the egg?" (2002). Essentially using the comparison to explain that the question itself is far too determinist in the first place. He sees a way out of this Balkanization by subsequently asking "why can't they see that it's best to break in the middle?" (2002). His effort here is aimed at giving "logical consistently to the in-between" by arguing for an understanding of what he calls "the being *of* the middle—the being of a relation" (2002). And he sets up a metaphor of a soccer match to illustrate this point. He argues that the affective intensity in a soccer match is not centered only in the fans, nor only in the players, but is in fact centered on the ball itself. It is the ball that is in-between, and that embodies a wide-range of affective registers of everyone watching and playing. He explains:

> Put two teams on a grassy field with goals at either end, and you have an immediate, palpable tension. The attraction of which the goals and ground are inductive signs is invisible and nonsubstantial: it is a tensile force-field activated by the presence of bodies within the signed limits. The polarity of the goals defines every point in the field and every movement on the field in terms of force – specifically, as the *potential motion* of the ball, and of the teams, towards the goal. When the ball nears a goal, the play reaches a pitch of intensity. Every gesture of the players is supercharged, toward a goal or toward repelling one. *The ball* is charged to the highest degree with potential movement toward the goal, by its position on the field, by the collective tending of the team homing in for a score. The slightest slip or miscalculation will de-potentialize that movement. When that happens, a release of tension as palpable as its earlier build-up undulates across the field (2002, original emphasis).

This idea of de-emphasizing the subject to instead focus on the affective qualities of an object around which subjects situate themselves was a breakthrough for me. Instead on thinking about how the subjective sexuality of the gay community was responding to pornographic aesthetics, I could instead work in reverse by prioritizing affect theory. I could focus on the affective aspects of pornography first and then consider the multitude of ways various gay subjects interact with pornographic aesthetics. With this approach, I could take the focus off of a "paranoid reading" where I am trying to fit race and sexuality into some sort of progressive political marker, and instead I could develop a "reparative reading" where I would allow the unpredictable and

autonomous nature of affect to dictate the parameters of this project. Focusing on affective registers accounts for the ways in which affects circulate in-between various ideologies. This autonomous nature of affects allows us to understand how racial and sexual minorities can negotiate their diminished social and political status in North American society and manipulate it to neoliberal ends. This is the type of approach I was looking for when I wanted to analyze gay sexuality in a new and dynamic way in relation to moving image culture.

This project is the spiritual sibling of Susanna Paasonen's *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (2011). While that book does a remarkable job of reorienting pornography studies toward its affective nature by accounting for the ways its texts, digital circulation, and audience interact with each other viscerally—instead of through a typical analysis focusing on aesthetic or political implications. One blind-spot of the study is its overlook of queer texts and interactions. This dissertation is offered as an extension of Paasonen's pioneering work that extends into the queer affective resonance of pornographic interaction. One of the unfortunate aspects of Paasonen's study is its focus on pornographic spam-emails as its primary object of textual analysis. This points to one of the primary problems of internet studies, the ephemerality of the platform and its objects. With the sophistication of modern email filters, it is hard for me to remember the last time I received a spam email! Hence, I wanted to focus on aspects of internet interaction that are not dependent solely on aspects of the texts themselves. Of course, the texts that I do choose to focus on here will be long forgotten and obsolete by the time most people read this, however, the texts are intended to act more as a springboard for broader social contexts that have long-lasting implications within gay/queer communal formations.

The first chapter focuses on the nature of confession, but not in a typical sense. Instead of focusing on the words composing confession, I wanted to instead analyze the affective nature of confession by analyzing the body's affective role in confession—beyond the face and mouth. By constructing an "affective body" I aim to account for the ways bodies move and express themselves within queer spaces via preconscious impulses. To reconnect with the origins of Massumi's work, this first chapter is organized around affect theory as developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The second chapter works to figure out how queer subjects are constructed across media platforms in the contemporary internet age. The internet emphasizes the ways in which we are users are encouraged to situate ourselves according the various social

media platforms. Many people act differently on Facebook than they would on Instagram. And of course, the "professional" selves that we present into these platforms are incompatible with the ways in which users present themselves on pornographic platforms. Therefore, I wanted to consider an example of how one internet personality works to construct his internet persona across various internet platforms that also include himself in pornographic situations. Chris Crocker is a viral YouTube persona who went viral in 2007 with his "Leave Britney Alone" video, and what I find so fascinating about him is that he casually incorporates pornography as part of his overall media aesthetic. He does not banish it to a hidden corner of the internet. In this way, Crocker embodies the ways in which many gay men exist on the internet, both in non-pornographic and pornographic states. Highlighting a subject that queerly conflates the artificial divide between non-pornographic and pornographic as part of his digital makeup brings together strands of personality construction that "proper" society pretends does not exist. The uncomfortable conflations that Crocker highlights within his internet aesthetic allows us to understand him as a transindividual figure. This notion of the transindividual is one that I understand through the affective philosophy of Gilbert Simondon. And finally, I take these unique affective instances and apply them to a physical locale outside of the virtual space of the internet. While the internet can provide unbounded room in which to linger on theoretical musings, much of the theoretical importance of such ruminations are lost if they are unsustainable within real-world circumstances. In an effort to address this I situate my affective analysis of pornographic aesthetics into the streetscape of Montreal's Gay Village. Montreal's Gay Village is a unique locale within North America that is actively incorporating pornographic aesthetics as part of its streetscape. There are televisions pointing out to the street, within strip clubs, bars, and sex shops showing hardcore pornography. In this neighborhood there is no divide between non-pornographic and pornographic registers. This is an ideal locale for me to expand upon my notion of "becoming pornographic," where the affective intensities of pornography find their way into non-pornographic spaces. This is how we can come to understand that pornography is neither a *good* or *bad* thing, it is *everything*. Pornographic aesthetics and affective intensities infuse every interaction. In this chapter I return to Massumi and Paasonen to construct my concept of an active pornographic space in relation to Montreal's Gay Village.

This dissertation is intended as a journey through contemporary queer theory utilizing sexual affects as a primary mode of understanding internet interactions. It is my hope that refocusing on affect can help us escape the here and now of limiting identity politics and help us imagine new queer futures where political potentiality realized via sexuality will thrive.

**Coming Out, Becoming Pornographic**
INTRODUCTION

*The essentialist rhetoric of categorical identity politics threatens to erase the connectedness of our different struggles.*

Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (218)

**Gay Identity and Queer Opacity**[1]

You could imagine my excitement when—in the middle of writing a dissertation about gay pornography—I found out that there was going to be a major motion picture release about one of the most scandalous episodes in the history of the industry. Not only that, but this movie titled *King Cobra* (2016), was set to star James Franco and Christian Slater, so I figured that it was bound to get attention from the mainstream media.[2] I was interested in documenting this movie's journey to see how a gay pornographic narrative would work its way through the contemporary mainstream press and various social media platforms. Surely, there would be some aspect of this release that I could use for my own academic purposes. After all, what media outlet could ignore the tantalizing story the movie tells? For those who are unfamiliar, *King Cobra* tells the real-life story of pornography performer Brent Corrigan, who in 2004 starred in his first feature with the studio Cobra Video. Cobra Video was so small it was run out of a suburban basement! No one knew it at the time, but Corrigan was lying to studio head Bryan Kocis, telling

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[1] I have not structured this introduction according to the conventional structure of consecutive sections devoted to theoretical framework, literature review, methodology and thesis outline. Rather, due in part to the interdisciplinary nature of this project, this introduction is an integrated essay interweaving my encounter with my theoretical foundations taken from the fields of affect theory, film and moving images studies, queer theory, pornography studies, and cultural studies, together with a summary of my methodological approaches to three case studies within the queer pornography landscape, and a brief summary of the arguments of the three following chapters. These three case studies are somewhat autonomous (as are affects), having all been either published in an earlier form or accepted for publication prior to the completion of my thesis.

[2] This dissertation utilizes the idea of the "mainstream media" to account for the fact that as of 2018 80% of the top 20 most popular U.S. news websites are owned by media conglomerates. This means that those outlets are obliged to ignore any form of malfeasance enacted on the part of their owners and advertising partners. And most any form of anti-corporate activism will be treated with suspicion and derision (e.g. Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Antifa). This consolidated ownership model insures that an ideal framing of a neoliberal ethos is emphasized (Global News Village Project).

Kocis that he was 18-years-old, when in fact he was 17-years-old. However, that is not even the most scandalous part of the story! Due to Corrigan's immediate success, he became a hot commodity within the industry. So much so that two escorts named Harlow Cuadra and Joseph Kerekes believed that they could make millions of dollars by forming their own pornographic studio with Corrigan as their star attraction. The only problem was that Corrigan was signed to a long-term contract with Kocis' Cobra Video. So—in what can only be described as being in a state of psychopathic delusion—Cuadra and Kerekes killed Kocis in order to get Corrigan out of the contract so he would be free to work with them. Corrigan was not aware of the murder plot. Thankfully, their plan did not work. Cuadra and Kerekes were immediately arrested and each sentenced to life in prison. Due to the attention surrounding the murders—and the scandal surrounding his underage performances—Corrigan became one of the most (in)famous personalities within the industry. He went on to start his own studio, and, as of 2018, performs for various other studios.

   While the movie is an enjoyably trashy romp that relishes in its B-movie aesthetics, there is not much within it that is relevant for my own scholarly purposes. And while there is much to be said about the mainstreaming of a gay pornographic narrative treated to a respectful independent film budget featuring well-known Hollywood actors, this dissertation delves into more marginal pornographic texts. Bridging the aesthetic and institutional divides between a conventional movie like *King Cobra* and the amateur/art project/paratextual pornography analyzed here would be a bit too far of a divide for me to reconcile within the span of a dissertation. However, there was one aspect to my *King Cobra* experience that lingered with me long after watching the movie, and that was the way in which the main actor presents his sexuality to the public, both in relation to this project, and throughout his career. His is an example of the affective possibilities when pornography comes in contact with the "coming out" narrative. This occasion reinforced a primary question that this dissertation seeks to explore.

   The actor playing Corrigan is named Garrett Clayton (Figure 1.1). I was not familiar with him at the time, but considering that I had just seen him have a lot of simulated gay sex on screen, and that I found him to be very attractive, I decided to look up more about him when I got home. While I have never had a terrific sense for recognizing whether or not someone is gay based solely on their appearance—colloquially known as having *gaydar*—there are studies

strongly suggesting that we all have an intuition for recognizing a "gay face" when we see one.[3]
And, in my opinion, Clayton was sporting a very cute gay face in the movie! A Google search
revealed that while Clayton himself has not confirmed whether or not he is gay, he is also not shy
about fanning the fires of suspicion around his sexuality by being purposely opaque when asked
about it. In an interview with *Out* magazine he says:

> I don't really like talking about my personal life. I like a certain amount of veil. I've been
> very lucky this year. I haven't been brought down because people are focused on who I'm
> dating, what I'm eating or what handbag is the best handbag—that's so cheap to me. But
> if others want to open up about their personal lives, that is their choice. It's not for me
> to judge (Osenlund).

Reading this, I cannot help but notice how Clayton provocatively shifts the judgement of guilt
onto those focusing too much on his sexuality. Clayton's desire to situate himself seamlessly as
part of the homo/heteronormative capitalist superstructure (by conflating who he is dating with
what handbag he is carrying) speaks to a neoliberal ethos prioritizing work accomplishments and
financial gain over identity markers believed by many to be inherent, like race, gender, or sexual
preference. In this framework, it is not so much the content of one's character that is prioritized,
but rather the content of one's bank account. Of course, the idea of "identity" being inherent
belies the origins of the term, which is best understood as the social and political recognition of
marginalized groups. These new identities produce additional articulations manifesting as
reactive identity forms for the purposes of social control, this is how the concepts of "white"
(Allen 2012) and "straight" (Blank 2012) subsequently emerge. Therefore, the concept of
identity is fundamentality political—and aimed at achieving specific goals—rather than inherent.
Clayton's quote reveals his awareness of identity's politicized nature, and his willingness to
reconfigure those politics towards his own advantage. However, Clayton is not alone in this
practice, his is just another example of how the mainstream gay rights movement[4] has shifted

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[3] A 2008 Tufts University study, subsequently published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, revealed
that when "90 faces [of gay identified people] were…shown to 90 participants in random order, who were asked
simply to judge the target's 'probable sexual orientation' (gay or straight) by pressing a button. Surprisingly, all
participants (both men and women) scored above chance on this gaydar task, correctly identifying the gay faces"
(Bering). This phenomenon and its political implications will be extrapolated on further in Chapter One.
[4] The "mainstream gay rights movement" is understood within this dissertation as a network of the most prominent
gay rights organizations within the U.S. advocating for rights that fit comfortably within the socio-economic

away from a strategy forcing people to recognize difference, to a strategy convincing people that our inherent differences do not matter within the larger framework of economic nationalism that unites us all within variations of identity aesthetics.



Figure 1.1. Christian Slater, Garrett Clayton, Keegan Allen, and James Franco
in a promotional still for *King Cobra*.

How times have changed! There was a period in the 1980s and 1990s when gay activists like Michelangelo Signorile working for *OutWeek* magazine (1989-1991) would have reported on Clayton's private life by interviewing his friends and associates, and publicly outed him in the same way he did to David Geffen, Liz Smith, and Malcom Forbes. Signorile's approach to "the closet" is the exact opposite of Clayton's, yet is still a powerful strand within the half of the bifurcated gay rights movement that is not invested in the liberationist potential of a neoliberal ethos.[5] Instead, Signorile's approach is emblematic of a gay rights strategy consisting of

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nationalist framework of Western governmentality. These include state-sanctioned gay marriage, hate crime legislation, military inclusion, and non-radical gay representation within mass media platforms. The most prominent of these organizations include Campus Pride, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Human Rights Campaign, Lesbian Political Action Committee, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, and the NOH8 Campaign.

[5] This dissertation utilizes a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberalism. Foucault pinpoints the foundation for the concept located in the idea that the "question of frugality of government is indeed the question of liberalism" (2004, 29). For him, this is due to a long history ("which is no doubt still not behind us") of "both the intensive and extensive development of governmental practice, along with the negative effects, with the resistances and revolts which we know are directly precisely against the invasive intrusions of a government which nevertheless claims to

accentuating racial, gender, and sexual difference as a way of imagining themselves relating in a different way to the corrupting influence of America's economic nationalism. In a 2007 article he wrote for *The Stranger*, Signorile conjures bold binaries in order to emphasize his practice of publicly outing people as part of this wider political strategy prioritizing sexual difference. He writes about how being in "the closet" means that one is a "hostage to homophobia;" how publicly outing is intended as a strategy to contradict how "the press has always decided what was private (homosexuality) and what was public (heterosexuality);" and describes how "amid the height of the AIDS epidemic and government indifference, we believed *invisibility*, particularly among the powerful, was hurting us" (Signorile, emphasis mine). Of course, the immediate life and death urgency of AIDS during that time stands in stark contrast to the long and procedural death of neoliberalism caused by precarious job stability, suppressed wages, lack of healthcare, and a poisoned environment, which are sacrifices left at the altar of corporate profit. And, notwithstanding much recent research on non-Western and pre-capitalist sexualities, our contemporary performance and understanding of gay identities has only existed under capitalism (D'Emilio 1983). Signorile leveraged this fact at the time to point out how the silence and visibility regarding AIDS and gay identity were class dependent and, subsequently, hypocritical. He was ultimately right, because AIDS failed in bringing about interclass solidarity. His strategy of outing helps us recognize how gay identity's reliance on the moral equity of a neoliberal ethos blinds us to the immediate and present danger of the ethos itself. And while the economic conditions shaping Clayton and Signorile's generational shift regarding what it means to "come out of the closet" are essential to our understanding of their approaches, there are additional ideologies at play linking their strategies more than one might recognize at first glance.

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say that we are living in the age of frugal government…" (2004, 28). And in an attempt to separate governmental policies from being perceived as forms of social discipline, an alternative arbiter of "truth" needed to be conjured. Foucault explains that "[instead] of continuing to saturate this site of the formation of truth with an unlimited regulatory governmentality, it is recognized—and this is where the shift takes place—that it must be left to function with the least possible interventions precisely so that it can both formulate its truth and propose it to governmental practice as rule and norm. This site of truth is not in the heads of economists, of course, but is the market" (30, 2004). This is how governments shifted their liberal regulatory obligations over to a more "just" neoliberal market "as a site invested with regulations" (2004, 30). It is the interpellation of an imagined independent "buyer" acting as a buffer between the government and the market that ensures "distributive justice" and the "absence of fraud" (2004, 30). This remains (perhaps stronger than ever) our social understanding of neoliberalism within a Western context.

The primary aspect that links both Clayton and Signorile is their emphasis on the idea of erasure, opacity, and invisibility regarding identity and representation. Signorile explicitly pinpoints "invisibility" as a primary concern that he is trying to counteract with his activism. One imagines that this concern is rooted in his worry about AIDS patients becoming invisible within the administrative hierarchy of the pharmaceutical gaze. While the correlation between increased visibility and increased political recognition seems self-evident, analyzing this dynamic within the AIDS ecosystem offers a unique opportunity to challenge this assumed logic behind an activist's construction of a collective and its shaping of our broader social understanding around representation. Douglas Crimp does exactly that when in a 1991 interview he explains the futility in attempting to address an imagined audience of people affected by AIDS:

> The biggest problem with even thinking about audiences is what one usually begins with some completely absurd fiction of generality, that is, with the notion that there could be a language that could reach everyone, or anything like a general public that could simply be addressed without exclusions. I don't think you could ever make any kind of cultural work that functioned as a general address. But the problem, of course, is that we live in a culture in which it is assumed that you can, always. And in fact almost every cultural work is made with that fiction of a general audience in mind (Caruth and Keenan, 545).

Crimp's evaluation of the rhetorical strategies of AIDS activism challenges us to think about the unexamined and contradictory politics around intra-group identification.

Based on his practice, one can categorize Signorile's approach as embodying what Alexander García Düttmann delineates in 1996 as accentuating the difference between "Being-one" (being HIV+ or having AIDS) and "Being-not-at-one" (being uninfected by the disease) (52). Düttmann's terminology here is essential; his is not a difference between Being-one and Unbeing-one, or Being-one and Being-other-than-one: instead the "not-at" of Being-not-at-one encourages us to think of *being* within a range of degrees rather than strict delineations. One can see this strategy at play in Signorile's outing of these prominent figures as one working to situate gay identity as existing along the same type of continuum that Düttmann outlines. By outing these celebrities, he is connecting them to marginalized populations who are not protected by their wealth or health. An attempt at realizing the type of intra-communal diversity that Crimp is arguing for. And for those who are infected, Signorile's practice is intended to alleviate their

feelings of isolation brought about by the diagnosis. Recognizing one's self as Being-one—which for many can be felt as a state of isolation—is actually a moment when one can realize that their "detached connectedness of life cannot be secured without being embedded in the unity of a more comprehensive connectedness" (Düttmann, 52). Düttmann's understanding essentially realizes that one cannot conceive of isolation without acknowledging a wider range of social connection.

However, while this perception of a cohesive gay identity understood through shared sexual practice might foster a sense of intra-communal unity, Crimp's analysis implies an underlying uncomfortable contradiction by recognizing the biological difference between those who are seroconverted and those who are not. The productive aspect of this delineation lies less in its ability to draw strict lines of division, than in its ability to complicate the notion of a unified gay identity, even during what is remembered as a time of necessitated political coalescence for the gay community. This leads to a reorientation around what it means to be *affected* by AIDS. Düttmann goes on to explain that:

> On what, however, could the identity and Being-one of homosexuals rely, the Being-one of homosexuals who are affected by AIDS? It is not a sufficient answer to say that one is stricken with the infection—even if in a quantitatively or qualitatively specific way. For in this case it cannot be clear enough how to draw a demarcation. The address marked out by this line contains two contradictory and therefore complementary dangers: the danger of restoring the fiction or ideology of universality—at least virtually everyone is affected by AIDS—and the danger of identifying AIDS with homosexuality. One reduces identity to a state of health, thus denying it; or one affirms a reduced identity and makes it responsible for the disease, for the epidemic in general. Either case serves the veiled purpose of ideology or fiction (52-53).

Düttmann's formulation forces us to come to terms with the contradictory nature of intra-communal identity formation that is oftentimes sanitized for the sake of historical linearity. This sanitized legacy lives in the most lasting accepted narratives about the aftermath of the AIDS crisis: the first being the canard that the crisis is over,[6] and the second being that the community

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[6] In addition to the millions who have died on the continent of Africa due to AIDS, see Linda Villarosa's "America's Hidden H.I.V. Epidemic: Why do America's Black Gay and Bisexual Men Have a Higher H.I.V. Rate than Any

has uniformly adopted the lessons about safe sex being the key to preventing another outbreak. However, scholars like Tim Dean (2009) and pornographers like Paul Morris (2014) have expanded on Düttmann's point by arguing that both the active seeking out of bareback sex and seroconversion are less about reducing "identity to a state of health," than about tapping into the queer potentialities of a positive diagnosis. Morris, who is the founder of the bareback gay pornography studio Treasure Island Media, explains that "a gay man who doesn't have a virus in his blood is no longer a complete gay man. Without the sense of separateness the virus enables, he lacks entirety and becomes all too easily a social ancillary to heterosexuality and straight society" (Morris and Paasonen, 218). In this response to the mainstream rhetoric around gay people being "Born This Way,"[7] Morris reverses the dynamic to argue that biology is something that one can queerly adopt for the purposes of cultural differentiation. Morris' provocation queerly flouts the "sensibility" of cultural, consumerist, and pharmaceutical "logic."

The force behind Düttmann's, Dean's, and Morris' interventions is their acknowledgment of the ruptures within the foundational continuity of intra-communal identity formation. These highly politicized and contentious understandings of identity formed in the immediate aftermath of the first AIDS crisis of the 1980s offer us a way to think through the contradictions surrounding gay identity today that merely register as subtle rumblings of discontent within the mainstream mediascape. Our corporatist monolith of Western media outlets actively works to shield the masses from the conflicting political attitudes held amongst gay people by forcefully championing a unified socio-economic neoliberal homonationalism centered around gay marriage, gays in the military and hate crime legislation (Puar 2007; Conrad 2014). These civil rights movements centered around economic and nationalist unity are enacted precisely because of their ability to facilitate erasure of ideological differentiation. An example of this type of erasure of differentiation is illustrated in the conflicting motivations behind the utilization of invisibility within the dynamic opposing Clayton and Signorile. Signorile's is an anti-invisibility

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Country in the World?" (2017).

[7] "Born this Way" refers throughout this dissertation to Lady Gaga's 2011 hit single. In the song she sings: "I'm beautiful in my way 'cause God makes no mistakes I'm on the right track, baby I was born this way" (Gaga). This song is situated as shorthand for the popular Western sentiment that gay identity is God given and inherent. The song represents the rejection of poststructuralist theories about identity formation, power relations, and affective desire. It is the ideal anthem for the mainstream gay rights movement.

campaign aimed at fostering political exposure, while Clayton's is a type of strategic opacity that, yes, expedites political and economic success, but also provokes us to question just how crucial visibility, or lack thereof, actually is to understanding gay identity. Nicholas de Villiers articulates a framework around the idea of "queer opacity" that helps us consider Clayton's persona within a wider historical framework. De Villiers defines queer opacity as: "allow[ing] for the possibility of non-meaning and nonknowledge as 'queer' strategies…Against the hermeneutics of sex as a field of meaning to be deciphered and interpreted, the oeuvre is not decrypted for the secret truth of sexuality to be seen as simply the result of sexuality" (15-16). Here opacity is conceived as a strategy emphasizing the unprescribed nature of queerness by minimizing the idea that sexual practice, or the subsequent discourse around said sexual practice, determines identity. He goes on to explain that our strategy for recognizing queer opacity "should be understood as indicating a style of living, what homophobic political reactionaries call 'chosen lifestyle.' This is one of those terms, so stigmatized among gay people trying to claim civil rights…" (16). Evoking "stigma" encapsulates the dichotomy between Signorile, who implies that there are shared inherent traits and political interests amongst homosexuals, and Clayton, who blithely disregards gay identity for the abstraction of queer opacity.[8] And while this is easily diagnosed as emblematic of the degraded urgency of the moment as it relates to the first AIDS crisis, the inquiries of both Düttmann and Crimp prove that these divides between gay identity and queerness within intra-communal formations are longstanding. I believe that deconstructing these types of ideological and political divides offer us the opportunity to think about intra-communal gay male identity formations in new and more complex ways.

**The Closet**

While this dissertation focuses on queer identity manifestations within more marginal forms of contemporary media, I think it is essential to recall the dominant narratives of the AIDS era of the 1980s and 1990s because two of the primary pillars of queer theory were published in its aftermath in 1990, and each is shaped by this crisis in its own way: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the*

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[8] That was until August of 2018, when Clayton finally came out as gay on his Instagram page. Which means that my analysis of his strategies towards queer opacity are contextualized in his public persona before this time (Clayton).

*Subversion of Identity* (1999). Each text's impact still resounds today because each lay the philosophical foundation for how identity is shaped within an academic understanding of queer theory. While Signorile's practice of outing celebrities precedes Sedgwick's book, one can understand his practice as embodying her primary thesis, which argues that "virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (1990, 1). One can sense that Signorile's actions were aimed at exactly this task, working to reorient the discourse from one about who is sick and who is not sick, to one centered around the continuity of social and sexual orientations between homo/heterosexuals.

This is why the context of these texts is so essential; they were each written within a highly charged political environment where the loss of all gay men to AIDS was a very real possibility. Because of this, these texts are best understood as enduring feminist efforts to maintain the integrity of gay identity. Of course, their modus operandi is not to argue that homosexuality is self-sufficient—each makes the case that being gay is inherently relational, and linked to the social conditions constructing what it means to be straight. Each author argues that there can be no understanding of heterosexuality without the specter of homosexuality, and vice-versa. By emphasizing this relational dependency, Sedgwick hopes to work through what she calls this "crisis of homo/heterosexual definition [that] has affected our culture" (1990, 11). Working from Michel Foucault's 1976 understanding that the homosexual became a "species" in the 17th century (1990a, 43)—and that such a classification was used as a way to exercise social discipline over homosexual bodies—Sedgwick identifies "the closet" as a unifying cultural signifier around which we can understand what she identifies as the social "divide" between "the heterosexual and…*these* species" (1990, 9, original emphasis).

While it is important to acknowledge the political urgency of her intervention aimed at situating homosexuality within a continuum, Sedgwick makes room for "the closet" to act as a site of less serious, alternative, and unexpected social interventions. She writes that:

> "Closetedness" itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence — not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it. The speech acts that coming out, in turn, can comprise are as strangely specific. And they may have

nothing to do with the acquisition of new information (1990, 3).

By identifying this narrower space at the edge of "the closet," Sedgwick recognizes how "closetedness" can expand our understanding of "the closet" beyond a particular political objective, and instead toward more creative uses. A consideration of Clayton's overall media aesthetic offers us the opportunity to conceive of this type of "closetedness" as a speech act in action. As a result of not definitively answering questions about his sexual orientation, Clayton has the ability to exploit aesthetics appealing to a gay audience without dealing with the burden of what it means to be gay in the Hollywood entertainment industry. For every success story of an openly gay person thriving in Hollywood (e.g. Neil Patrick Harris, Zachary Quinto), there are countless other stories of performers that inexplicably disappear from the industry once their sexual preference become public (e.g. Rupert Everett, Matt Dallas). Due to the type of freedom that "closetedness" offers, Clayton has not shied away from roles that seem meant to entice the adoration of his gay male fanbase. He chooses roles that are intentionally aimed at them, and in the process, appears in stages of undress that unsurprisingly go viral throughout various gay social media channels. Before *King Cobra*, he starred in Disney Channel's *Teen Beach Movie* (2013) and *Teen Beach 2* (2015), where he played much of his role while only wearing a bathing suit. In 2016 he played Link Larkin in the NBC live musical edition of John Waters' camp classic *Hairspray Live!* And in 2017, he was a gay hustler in Dotson Rader's stage play *God Looked Away*, opposite Al Pacino in Los Angeles. Once again, most of his time on stage was spent in his underwear. And if that were not enough, there are plenty of shirtless pictures of him on his Instagram if one is feeling impatient while waiting to see his next project.

Of course, there is not anything particularly new or revolutionary about this. There is a long history of entertainers like Liberace, Richard Simmons, and Johnny Weir who have spent their time in the public eye embodying what we might categorize as "closetedness." Not hiding their effeminate traits—and even actively provoking gay desires—while also not publicly acknowledging that their effeminate traits are linked to a gay sexuality. Clayton is just another figure within this lineage. This is an important point because while Signorile's activism attempts to make visible what is hidden, and Clayton's "closetedness" activates a field of queer opacity, each revolves around various degrees of invisibility. However, what is so provocative about Clayton's brand of "closetedness" is his willingness to do so in such proximity to the gay

pornographic narrative in the form of *King Cobra*. This highlights the one aspect to both of their identity constructions that remains invisible throughout, the actual act of sex.

**A Pornographic Identity**

While in the past considering an actor or an activist's explicit sexual practice might have been considered as either inconsequential or gratuitous, today every wired citizen is implicated within a social media environment that is energized by the creation, exchange, and viewing of nude imagery created by themselves and/or other users. Apps like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tindr, and Grindr would not have gained the prominence they have attained today were it not for the fact that they facilitate the easy exchange of nude/almost nude imagery between users. After all, how can an app like Snapchat that erases one's sent messages after a few seconds succeed in becoming a viable social media strategy unless it was specifically intended to appeal to users who do not want their nude imagery existing on the internet for eternity? I make this point to highlight how the incorporation of these social media platforms into our lives offer us the potential to become pornographic on a daily basis. A nude picture that is subsequently circulated via an internet or cellular service incorporates that image and its subject into the realm of becoming pornographic. Any analysis of our social mediascape omitting this potentiality is incomplete. Because of this, North American society is no longer bound by strict divisions between "professional" and "amateur" pornographic performers.[9] Amateurs can buy the same camera equipment that the professionals use, and professional studios are actively working to mimic an amateur aesthetic via handheld cameras and poor sound in order to capture the

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[9] I utilize the term "pornographic performer" throughout the dissertation to deemphasize the uniqueness of any particular pornographic text within a performer's overall media oeuvre. There is no such thing as just being a "porn star" when being popular within the industry requires a mastery of all platforms within the mediascape, which means achieving recognition on Instagram, Twitter, the sphere of podcasts, or attention from the blogosphere. I think it is important to not differentiate between a performer's pornographic, social media, musical, or televisual presence because it is essential to affirm that all instances of public expression are themselves a type of performance. There is no one media platform that reveals the "true" Self, there are only degrees of genuineness. Famous people who are seen in a sex tape are no less pornographic performers in that moment than any other professional or amateur performer. And for non-famous people, performing is a normalized part of everyday existence. For instance, consider the difference between how one might act in front of their grandparents versus how one would act in front of their best friend. Is one not being their "true" Self with their grandparents because they are on their best behavior in front of them? Or is one not being their "true" Self with their best friend because they feel the need to live up to the expectations set by their history together? Notions of performance are not a difference between the "true" Self and the "untrue" Self; it is only a matter of presenting different aspects of the Self.

immediacy and unrefined energy that appeals to fans of amateur pornography. The studios have essentially been forced into adopting this amateur aesthetic because of the way that genuine amateur pornography has risen to such prominence due to it being showcased alongside studio produced content on the most popular tube sites.[10]

This intermixing of amateur and professional content is emblematic of the genre's ability to appropriate disparate cultural signifiers for erotic stimulation. The proliferation of amateur content has weakened the dominance of the studios, but this amateur revolution via internet creation and distribution platforms has only widened our ability to access pornographic aesthetics beyond theaters, video-bars, closed-circuit hotel networks, dark corners of book stores populated with magazines wrapped in discreet brown paper, and backrooms of video stores. Additionally, the range of performers whom we imagine within a pornographic context has expanded as a result of the seemingly ever narrowing divide between Hollywood celebrities and pornographic performers. The sex tapes and nude photos of world-famous figures such as Madonna, Kanye West, Justin Bieber, Hulk Hogan, Paris Hilton, Colin Farrell, Jennifer Lawrence, Kim Kardashian, and even Olympic medal-winning diver Tom Daley are living testaments to a contemporary mediascape that is increasingly immune to differences between non-pornographic and pornographic performers. Everyone is finding new ways to become pornographic. Considering this trajectory, one can look back at the leaking of the Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee sex tape in 1995 as the beginning of the merger between Hollywood and pornographic stardom in the popular internet age. Not coincidentally, this dissertation sets its periodization from 1995 to our current moment.

This conflation between Hollywood and pornographic stardom encourages us to reconsider our process of identity understanding and construction in relation to explicit sexuality, even when thinking about people or institutions that we do not initially consider to be overtly sexual. Looking back, one can see an absence of a pornographic aesthetic within Signorile's identity as an AIDS activist. And while ACT UP NYC's campaigns included images of naval

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[10] Pornographic performer Siri describes tube sites as "a shorthand term for a porn website with an interface similar to the YouTube model, i.e. user-uploaded videos, a system of likes/dislikes, number of views, comments, etc. Sometimes the videos on the tube site are legitimate advertisements for partnered sites (usually if the clip is less than 8 minutes long, and has a watermark, it's legit. If it's longer than that or doesn't have a watermark, it's almost certainly stolen)" (Siri).

soldiers kissing (Figure 1.2) and activist protests like "kiss-ins" (figure 1.3), these strategies relied on showcasing non-pornographic archival photographs and performers to emphasize the fact that gay sexuality exists within a historical and social continuum, rather than as something solely intended for sexual arousal. However, there have been many recent examples where the genre has gone beyond its utilitarian purposes to arouse, and has actively incorporated hot-button political issues into its narrative as a way of situating sex at the center of progressive social advocacy. In addition to individual pornographic performers advocating for the rights of fellow sex workers on their social media platforms (Habib), there have also been movies like *Getting Levi's Johnson* (2010), which manifests the gay sexual desire lurking behind the wholesome conservative facade of 2008 Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin's family, specifically Levi Johnston, the teenager who impregnated Palin's daughter Bristol out of wedlock. There is also the example of Dirty Boy Video's (2011) scene where two young men have sex in a tent within the Occupy Oakland camp. These instances offer us the potential to imagine how a politically engaged and activist's aesthetic can become pornographic. By getting accustomed to the idea that any social dynamic or political assemblage has the potential to become pornographic, one can reorient the way in which they conceive of identity formation.
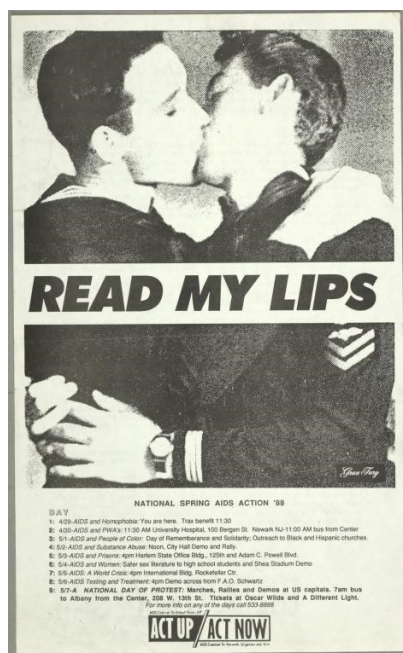


Figure 1.2. "Read My Lips" ad from ACT UP.



Figure 1.3. ACT UP "Kiss in" 1988.

Pornography's primary characteristic of emphasizing the liberating abandonment of nuance regarding sexual pleasure within a Western culture specifically oriented around suppressing these types of sexual ruptures to maintain social order, uniquely positions the genre as a mode intended to dramatically alter our perceptions of social norms (see Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* [1930] 2010). Pornography does not concern itself with such legal[11] or social etiquette, the performers know exactly what they want sexually, and they spend all their onscreen time satisfying those desires. Perhaps because of the genre's unabashed explicitness, the idea of "the closet" is maintained as a sort of restraining narrative motif that producers enjoy violating as a way of eroticizing the homo/heterosexual divide, acting as an illustrative shorthand for the subversion of social norms. There are countless narratives centered around straight characters experimenting sexually with men for the first time while remaining in the diegetic "closet" after the sex act. There is also a long history of performers who identify off-camera as straight who perform gay sex acts on camera for money. This is the subgenre of "gay-for-pay." The erotic tension derived from the idea of a straight man having gay sex for money is obvious, and, judging by its continued utilization to this day, it must also be financially lucrative. So even though this type of pornography works to productively dissolve the socially constructed divide between gay and straight sexual practices, "the closet" lingers as an imbedded popular motif that neatly bifurcates homo/heterosexual divisions instead of allowing for more diffusive and chaotic potentialities regarding identity formation, sexual expression, and affective understanding. However, Clayton's pornographic-adjacent intervention joining "closetedness" with *King Cobra* is not a division between homo/heterosexual, but instead a performative act exploiting potentialities within the in between space of homo-practicing/homo-identifying. Clayton's queer opacity while becoming a part of the gay pornographic narrative importantly liberates the idea of "the closet" from a definitive homo/heterosexual binary to a possible homo/homosexual dynamic, allowing us to imagine a multitude of new potentialities regarding identity understandings when considering "the closet" and "coming out" within wider gay intra-communal formations. This is how Clayton's unique brand of pornographic "closetedness" provokes one of the primary questions this dissertation asks: how can intra-communal figurations

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[11] Pornography showcased gay sex during a time when gay sex was illegal in the U.S., and considered a mental illness.

of "coming out" in relation to becoming pornographic impact on our understanding of gay identity formation across transmedia platforms?

**Queer Theory and Homophobia**

This specific issue of intra-communal identity formation oriented around "the closet" is not one that Sedgwick writes about in *Epistemology of the Closet* in detail. The book's priority is to maintain the social integrity of homosexuality by illustrating heterosexuality's reliance on the homo/heterosexual divide. She comes close to addressing this intra-communal issue when she writes that "my fear is that there currently exists no framework in which to ask about the origins or development of gay identity that is not already structured by an implicit trans-individual Western project or fantasy of eradicating that identity" (1990, 41). The closest she comes to defining this "Western project" is describing a "Western fantasy of a world without anymore homosexuals in it" (1990, 42). However, while this might have been true at the time, I think it is essential to reevaluate this dynamic in light of the aftermath of the first AIDS crisis, which has conversely proven that the primary "Western project" is in fact aimed more towards homonormative incorporation rather than homosexual elimination. The concept of homonormativity recognizes the ways gay identity has become a fully integrated part of neoliberal capitalism. [12] A homosexual who is willing to participate and enhance the established financial superstructure is more than welcome to become a part of those enabling systems of power. It is only those homosexuals resisting those mechanisms of discipline who are marginalized. This is how homo/normativity, rather than "the closet," became the axis around which we understand gay identity within our contemporary age.

And while Sedgwick's understanding of "trans-individual" is not expanded upon, the relational field through which she forms its definition is determinist in its scope of actors and ideology—primarily focusing on homophobia. Conversely, I adopt a perspective of the

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[12] Lisa Duggan describes the "new homonormativity" as the:

> rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: "equality" becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, "freedom" becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the "right to privacy" becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by a neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life. Welcome to the New World Order! Coming soon to a mainstream near you! (190).

"transindividual" that is affective, autonomous, and exists within a relational field of actors offering unexpected encounters. I adopt my understanding of the transindividual from Muriel Combes' contemporary reading of Gilbert Simondon's work developed in the late 1950s. Adopting an affective approach situating the trans-individual beyond a single social understanding like homophobia, Simondon's writing develops an understanding of the transindividual where the "the dynamism of growth never stops" (2005, 93). And Combes adds that, "Rather, what characterizes the individual is limitation, which comes from the capacity of the limit to be displaced. The individual is not finished but limited, that is capable of indefinite growth" (20). Simondon explains that "to think individuation it is necessary to consider being not as substance, matter or form, but as a tensile oversaturated system beyond the level of unity" (1995, 23). This intervention of emphasizing a network of actors composing a social field over notions of the Self provokes us to "posit relation as the key to experience" (Manning, 2).

This understanding of the transindividual aligns well with Sedgwick's own definition of "queer," a categorization that she uses as a counterpoint to distinguish from the idea of "sexual identity," writing that queer can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically" (1993, 7, original emphasis). Sedgwick's delineation here would seem to effectively and efficiently clarify the distinction between identity and queerness. However, Sedgwick was prescient enough to understand the possibility of slippage regarding such distinctions. She proposes an interesting "hypothesis" when writing that:

> A word so fraught as "queer" is—fraught with so many social and personal histories of exclusion, violence, defiance, excitement—never can only denote; nor even can it only connote; a part of its experimental force as a speech act is the way in which it dramatizes locutionary position itself. Anyone's use of "queer" about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else. This is true (as it might also be true of "lesbian" or "gay") because of the violently different connotative evaluations that seem to cluster around the category. But "gay" and "lesbian" still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested). "Queer" seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a

person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filtration. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which "queer" can signify only *when attached to the first person*. One possible corollary: that what it takes—all it takes—to make the description "queer" a true one is the impulsion *to* use it in the first place (1993, 8, original emphasis).

Here she explains how terminology pulls from a network of forces and actors in an attempt to stabilize meaning and solidify positions. Even for a word as unwieldy "queer"! This is in opposition to the idea of the transindividual, where relationality prioritizes continual encounters with new potentialities. Therefore, we can conceive of how the lingering specter of "the closet" works to orient the discourses of identity around itself. And that the meanings, intentions, and impression of these words are continually shaped by the dynamic of "the closet," regardless of how much one attempts to break them free from this association. "The closet" is a stagnant actor.

By utilizing Sedgwick's theory of "the closet" as a jumping-off point for my own affective analysis of gay male identity formations in relation to pornography, I am acknowledging a foundational and lingering hurdle that still limits the scope of society's understanding of homosexuality to this day—which is not so much in relation to heterosexuality (homonormativity has soothed that divide)—but rather, in relation to homophobia. Remaining in "the closet" is a strategy to avoid homophobia, so each is dependent upon each other. Because of homonormativity's ability to seamlessly incorporate homosexuals as a productive and compliant part of global capitalism, the social campaign against homophobia has become a central part of all political campaigns within Western governments. These governments are aware of the malleability of discourses around identity—and just like Sedgwick points out that these discourses attain meaning by their "*attach[ment] to the first person*"—these governments emphasize the vulnerability of their citizens to highlight the danger that homophobia poses not only to them individually, but also to society in general. This is how the idea of homophobia becomes weaponized as a strategy justifying the expansion of their military presence around the world. And within a framework where homophobia represents a civilizing divide between West and East, the specter of foreign "terrorism" plays an unsurprisingly big part (Massad 2007).

Prioritizing the elimination of homophobia as a step toward global "civility" and compliance to Western interests means that even the most craven elements of right-wing political

systems assure gay communities during their campaigns for power that protecting their safety is a top priority. Examples include nationalist figures like French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, who during her 2017 campaign touted her commitment to protect all French citizens from the threat of terrorism and immigration. It was a message that resonated with some in the gay community. One French voter explained: "where are the gays most in danger? In Islamic countries…gay people are being crucified—it's a danger and I don't want it coming to France, definitely not" (Carroll). Before her, 2016 U.S. Presidential candidate Donald Trump—for the first time in the history of the Republican National Convention—mentioned gay Americans in a sympathetic fashion. In his nomination speech, Trump declared: "as your President, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens from violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology" (Kamisar). I suppose it is a testament to the adaptability of anti-homophobic rhetoric that it is so seamlessly incorporated as part of the agenda of aspiring fascists and open racists.

The groundwork for the ease with which these opportunistic politicians pay lip service to protecting gay people has been laid over years specifically by Western militaries and their propaganda outlets (aka the mainstream media). After the fall of the Soviet Union, Western militaries began framing war as a positive force for humanitarian intervention (the Gulf War 1990-1991, the Battle of Mogadishu 1993, and the Kosovo War 1998-1999), but since the attacks of 9/11, these same Western militaries have prioritized the elimination of "radical Islamic terrorism" as the most essential part of its overall mission. This dynamic is exercised against the Middle East most specifically. Of course, this dynamic is highly malleable and allows the West to project any narrative it wants onto the East, which results in a cycle of contradictions that are an embedded part of Orientalism (Said 1979). As a result, Western militaries are oftentimes still framed as humanitarian forces compelled to bomb the Middle East into civilized modernity (recall mainstream foreign policy "expert" Fareed Zakaria on CNN unironically declaring: "I think Donald Trump became President of the United States last night…I think this was actually a big moment," in reference to Trump dropping 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles on a Syrian airbase in 2017) (Hensch). However, while it seemingly remains the West's mission to "civilize" and "fix" the Middle-East, it somehow, simultaneously, is always up to the Arabs to save themselves. As "respectable" institutions like *The Economist* explained in 2014: "only the Arabs can reverse

their civilizational decline, and right now there is little hope of that happening" (The Economist).

This is partly how eradicating homophobia has become a primary signifier for the "civilized" West. Anti-homophobia rhetoric's aim is to help unify the West's fight against terrorism, stemming from a belief that homophobia is a foundational part of a "declining" Middle Eastern culture. This dynamic plays out most explicitly when considering the state of Israel—which just happens to be a military force primarily funded by the U.S..[13] The gay tourism industry,[14] and gay pornography, also play a significant role in popularizing the idea that Israel is a sanctuary amongst a homophobic Middle East. This is part of an overall cultural rehabilitation project known as "pinkwashing." Sarah Schulman defines pinkwashing as "a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life" (Schulman 2011). This pinkwashing rhetoric around Israeli tourism and gay rights are unified within the gay pornographic aesthetic of Michael Lucas, who is the owner of Lucas Entertainment, which is a prominent New York based gay pornography studio. Lucas, who was born in Russia to Jewish parents, embraces pinkwashing as his primary political cause. In addition to the three pornographic movies he has shot in Israel—*Men of Israel* (2009), *Auditions 31: Israeli Auditions* (2009), *Inside Israel* (2009)—he has also directed a non-pornographic documentary titled *Undressing Israel: Gay Men in the Promised Land* (2013). The documentary showcases gay men's (women are curiously absent) full incorporation within Israeli society, which includes a state-funded Gay Pride parade in Tel Aviv, adoption rights, and full integration into the legally required military service. Lucas also writes op-eds for gay publications praising Israel for creating a "uniquely nurturing environment for its LGBT community" (Lucas 2011). But for every seemingly benign comment in support of Israel, there is always a strong undertone of rabid Islamophobia just underneath the surface. In 2009 this hatred for Islam rose to the surface in a piece for *The Advocate* where he declared that: "the homosexual and Jewish communities should unite against Islam; for it is the Muslims who seek the death of all gays and Jews" (Lucas 2009).

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[13] For the 2019 budget Israel requested $3.3 billion in military funding from the U.S. (Chughtai).
[14] In 2010 the Tel Aviv tourism board began a $90 million campaign to brand the city as "an international gay vacation destination" (Schulman 2011).

The examples of Le Pen, Trump, and Lucas illustrate how easily the rhetoric around homophobia can be coopted for right-wing fear-mongering, militaristic purposes, and Islamophobia. This is part of the futility of utilizing homophobia as an axis around which to construct fruitful new avenues of representational understanding, alternative interpretations of "the closet," or expanding the possibilities of queerness. Ultimately, if we ever hope to imagine outside of our contemporary quandaries, our understanding of representation and identity must be infused with the kinetic energy of a queer theory centered around relation rather than discourse. Embracing the affective potentiality of this theoretical strand helps us think outside of binary terminology because queer theory represents a standing critique against fixed meanings and literal interpretations, working to avoid discursive strategies liable to be coopted by the exact forces whom the gay population was intending to protect themselves from.[15] I believe that this affective approach can be an important aspect of intellectually adapting to the dynamics of a control society. However, it is essential to remember that while the process of becoming queer can help us expand our notions about the possibilities regarding identity, it is not properly understood if it is thought of as an identity marker. Queerness is what José Esteban Muñoz recognizes as an "ideality," and idealities are our fastest route to potentialities (1). Therefore, Muñoz's (now iconic) 2009 conception of queerness is the one adopted throughout this dissertation:

> We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.

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[15] One can see this being enacted in U.S. federal legislation being proposed in the form of The Protect and Serve Act of 2018. It is a law that that uses the framework of hate crime legislation that was advocated for, and intended to protect, the gay community now being extended to protect police officers (Grinberg).

Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world (1, original emphasis).

This quote helps to articulate how it must have been a necessity for those living during the first AIDS crisis to imagine a world that did not exist—a world without AIDS. In light of this, it is easy to understand how homophobia was situated as a primary obstacle to that world, and why emphasizing/eliminating it was a crucial part of reaching towards an AIDS-free potentiality. This decade of the 1980s defined by a disease necessitated a bold imagining that would legitimize the idea that the "here and now" of their moment was in fact only a temporary "prison." And while the first AIDS crisis presented people with an outside attack that compelled many liberal-minded people to fight as a unified front against a common enemy and imagine an unimaginable future, our contemporary moment offers us no such obvious parallels, and liberals are in disarray when it comes to agreeing on solutions to the problems that we currently face. And in the process, the ideality of queerness has been perverted.

As I write this, the Trump presidency is, according to many, the most significant threat to the future of American democracy, the remaining domestic social safety net, and global peace. However, the problem with identifying Trump as the singular problem infecting the "decency" of our political "norms" is that it ignores the multitude of systemic problems within the U.S. political system that allowed him to become president in the first place. Distilling the U.S.'s political problems down to Trump is the same as distilling the aim of the "Western project" down to homophobia. Each is a myopic view on much broader issues. This is not to dismiss the threat that Trump poses (though honestly, his polices embody the same tired, old, and dangerous

Republican agenda that the party has been implementing for over 40 years, just without the veneer of "compassionate conservatism"), or distill Sedgwick's brilliant work on queer theory down to one example (but I think even Sedgwick would be surprised at how this one example around homophobia has been taken up by the masses at the expense of the rest of her complex work, or how the uncomfortable charge that queer theory was intended to provoke has been neutered by the masses and subsequently utilized for constructing stagnant identity markers). This habit of whittling problems down to singularities makes sense once one realizes that it is an intentional neoliberal project aimed at monetizing actors marketing themselves as problem-solvers, and empowering apparatuses of state power by situating these institutions as forces for "good" against this unique problem. One can understand just how contradictory this type of *savior from evil* narrative of singularity can be when thinking about the focus on the pharmaceutical industry during the first AIDS crisis. Organizations like ACT UP fought long and hard for these companies to develop new drugs and get them onto the market fast. Their efforts worked, and today multiclass combination drugs allow people to live long and productive lives while being HIV+. However, despite the ills that these drugs have addressed, the profit imperative for these companies overwhelms any concern for a broader and sustained social wellbeing. Therefore, today companies and private investors are inflating the prices of HIV/AIDS drugs by as much as 5,000% (Mohdin 2015; Summers 2018)! And we can consider the consequences of thinking within singularities in electoral politics when liberals embrace institutions like the CIA, the Justice Department, and the FBI as foundational parts of the government filled with people of "integrity" who will surely take down Trump. The mainstream media—and their dwindling audience—make such claims for these institutions despite evidence showing that the CIA facilitates nefarious conflict within countries for the purposes of overthrowing democratically elected governments (Stuster 2013), and that the FBI hosts and distributes a significantly large portion of child sex abuse imagery within the U.S. as bait for entrapment (Clark 2016; Farivar 2016). If these are the type of institutions we are investing our hopes in to take down Trump, then may God help us all!

A natural extension of this Trump versus everyone who is anti-Trump logic is exemplified in the same binary thinking constructing the homophobia versus every homo-inclusive state and corporate institution that has essentially caused the notion of queerness to be in a state of crisis.

This is evident when the homo-inclusive institutions of state power endorse and advocate for issues like state-sanctioned marriage, the prison-industrial complex in the form of hate crime legislation, and the military-industrial complex. There is an idea that gay participation actively "queers" these institutions. But while some gay people may believe that they are fundamentally changing these institutions from the inside, there is rarely ever any popular discourse around how these institutions are dramatically changing them and their world view from the outside. An example of this is expressed by a transgender airman named Logan Ireland, who, in a *New York Times* profile, actually credits the military for allowing him to realize his full male potential, saying: "What I like about this deployment is I can be my authentic-self. I'm just another guy. Whereas back home, I'm still seen as female…Here, in Afghanistan—a war zone—it's like a vacation to me because I can be myself in such an austere environment" (Dawson).

Ireland's statement is an example of how many have become conditioned to believe that the "reality" of our "authentic self" is embedded within the process of identity formation. There are of course many problems with this logic. Firstly, the academic discipline of philosophy is built around trying to understand what the Self is, and to my knowledge, they have not yet agreed on exactly what that is. However, it is understandable that when posed with the option of stabilizing one's identity via state institutions of power, or facing the unknown potentiality of realizing that identity signifiers are floating and relational, there is only one dependable and reassuring choice. Sociologist Jeffery Weeks historicizes the nature of this choice in 2000 when he writes that:

> It is only over the past century or so…that distinctive homosexual "forms of existence,"
> with sexual identities, communities and sexual political movements, have emerged…
> Movements such as these are not simply expressing a pre-existing essence of social
> being. Identities and belongings are being constructed in the very process of
> organization itself (184-185).

Considering the relatively short history of gay identity, Weeks' conclusion about identity's dependence upon, and attraction to, already established organizations speaks to the high degree of mailability required from these same identity forms to withstand changing alongside organizations adapting to business needs. Both the organization and the identity forms that depend on them run the risk of remaining stagnant if they do not change together. Unfortunately,

due to the dominant ethos of economic nationalism in the West, any lingering queer impulses remaining in these institutional identity forms are quickly subsumed and adapted to further accelerate the state's financial and military power. Therefore, unlike identity markers related to groups like the military that have a lasting impact due to their institutional associations, queer objects of study tend to be ephemeral, marginal, or necessitate subversive readings. And while Weeks gives proper credit to "sexual political movements" for shaping the parameters of gay identity, our corporate culture has increasingly required that organizational formations deemphasize sexual pleasure whenever possible. Human Resources departments regulate and restrict consensual romantic and sexual relationships within office settings, and the sexual depictions that emanate out of these same offices for the purposes of advertising are utilized within our mediascape to express the pleasure embedded in exercising one's purchasing power rather than one's sexual prowess. Sex for the sake of pleasure is antithetical to the culturally enforced work regimen and pregnancy imperative (this latter point is why gay sex still maintains a subversive social intensity, however diminished). Additionally, the established mode of depicting sex via pornography is antithetical to traditional methods of corporate advertising, situating it as even more of a marginal mode.[16] With this being the case, how can we go about exploring the links between sex and identity when thinking institutionally works to separate the two concepts? Are we left with just modes of social and political incorporation rather than approaches leading us towards expanding our sexual potentialities?

**Identity and Desire**

Importantly, Weeks' articulation of identity's relationship to organizing principles offers us the opportunity to think about queerness in relation to organizations and notions of the Self. This is the divide between "ideality" (queerness) and "reality" (organizations/the Self). Moe Meyer explains that queerness is precisely positioned against a stable idea of the Self when he

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[16] Of course, the advertising industry has a long history of borrowing pornographic aesthetics (Rossi). However, this unidirectional exchange of aesthetics is maintained by drawing strict lines between what is advertising and what is pornography. Even the most risqué fashion spreads have yet to delve into the realm of male erections or genital penetration (Allwood). And while the biggest corporate sponsors still stay away from pornographic platforms, the proliferation of internet start-ups has fostered unique new opportunities for non-pornographic business to utilize the vast audiences that pornographic sites attract (Under the Influence).

writes in 2011 that:

> a definition of queer is one based on an alternative model of the constitution of
> subjectivity and of social identity. The emergence of the queer label as an oppositional
> critique of gay and middle-class assimilationism is, perhaps, its strongest and most valid
> aspect. In the sense that the queer label emerges as a class critique, then what is opposed
> are bourgeois models of identity. What "queer" signals is an ontological challenge that
> displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous while
> substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational,
> discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts (2-3).

This distinction brings us back to the original tension that started this chapter, the effort by Signorile to establish an embedded sense of gay identity by outing "closeted" celebrities, and Clayton's performativity of "closetedness." While both sexual identity and "closetedness" are performative, only the self-reflexive nature of "closetedness" threatens the integrity of a gay sexual identity that was developed as part of a long project by activists and intellectuals for the purposes of political and social recognition. But while the initial thrust of queer theory as exemplified by Sedgwick and Butler seemed poised to take this notion of gender and identity performativity to exciting and unexpected realms of potentiality, a militant AIDS activism movement dependent on identity stability for the sake of political and pharmaceutical recognition in the face of a life-threatening crisis altered this course. And in the process, strict and literal binary thinking about "the closet" became a primary way to process the notion of gay identity. Marlon B. Ross maps this connection when he writes that "'Out of the closet and into the streets' is more than just a slogan of protest politics. The phrase indicates to what extent the political strategy and agenda of gay/lesbian rights have been deeply structured ideologically through the closet paradigm" (Ross).

Of course, thinking within such binary modes as exemplified by "the closet" hampers our ability to account for intersectionality, which considers the ways in which a multitude of identity forms are enacted within a single subject (Crenshaw 1989). Considering intersectionality means thinking beyond the "in" or "out" dynamic of "the closet" to also account for the racial, national, ability-related, and economic traits composing an identity form. Meyer presents the opportunity for an intersectional analysis when he writes about the idea of queerness emerging as a "class

critique." Recognizing this explicitly acknowledges how the forces of global capitalism that were supposed to flatten identity differences in favor of economic unity (Friedman 2005) are actually the same forces that compel scholars to reevaluate Western identity formations in relation to newly interdependent financial networks represented by organizations like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. These organizations and treaties facilitate neocolonialist financial and cultural dominance over counties not a part of the Group of Seven. Thinking about identity formation as a class critique within the context of these financial networks brings Western identity forms in contact with the exact populations these institutions are intended to exploit. As a result, we must acknowledge that the impact of these structural arrangements affect identity understanding for both the West and their subaltern counterparts. Marxist cultural theorist Stuart Hall speaks to this point in 1996 when he writes:

> identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. We need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively "settled" character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity…and the processes of forced and "free" migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called "post-colonial" world. Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the *process of becoming* rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from," so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation (4, emphasis mine).

What strikes me about Hall's understanding of identity here is how he situates the population he is advocating for within a regime of unstable and relational identity signifiers. The subaltern is a subjectivity that is solely understood within the West as being in a reactionary

position against dominant global powers, so him doing so is not intended to belittle, but to speak to an unequal reality. And while the historical comparison between the subaltern and the white population of the West is not comparable in terms of the unilateral ways in which trauma has been/continues to be inflicted, the first AIDS crisis provides a unique historical rupture where rich, white men were ravaged by illness alongside poor, transsexual, racial minorities—temporarily aligning them within the social hierarchy of the subaltern. In this regard, there is a way to consider the effort to eliminate AIDS and homophobia as a project to return to a pre-AIDS world order of white, patriarchal, cultural and class dominance. Doing so allows us to understand clearly why the mainstream gay rights movement have prioritized gay inclusion in institutions of state power as a primary objective. Additionally, we can understand this drive for gay inclusion as resulting directly from the trauma experienced by AIDS and homophobia. The aspiration for military inclusion could be thought of as an attempt to regain social strength to counteract the weakened state AIDS left the gay community in, hate crime legislation punishes homophobia, and gay marriage is a reaction to the systemic loss that AIDS caused. Even the state of Israel itself—and the subsequent abuse it inflicts upon the Palestinians in their Occupation of their lands—can be understood as a result of the trauma inflicted upon them during the Holocaust (Schulman 2016). Without understanding this cycle of trauma, it will be impossible to recognize the equally traumatic implications of gay identity's investment in state power.[17]

Ultimately, because gay identity formation, queer theory, and pornography studies emerge as a response to historical periods of trauma and panic, each theoretical strand risks developing their own regimes of representation as an evidentiary strategy to combat the stereotypes, half-truths, and outright lies that are used to justify homophobic, gender absolutist, and anti-pornography rhetoric. This approach has its own liabilities because taking a historical approach prescribes a false consistency of identity traits over time, and theoretical models oftentimes limit the potentiality of identity, reducing it to an embodied reaction to already

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[17] To be sure, an entire dissertation could be written about how the trauma of AIDS affected the gay community's understanding of identity formation and the resulting eagerness of the movement to participate in mechanisms of state power. Thankfully, one has been written! Concordia University graduate Ryan Conrad's dissertation titled: *Revising the Queer Political Imagination: Affect, Archives and Anti-Normativity* (2017) argues that AIDS—and the attendant trauma from the Christian right's effort to stop anti-discrimination laws at the ballot box in the 1980s and 1990s—severely limited the queer political imagination to the point where all that is left is a narrow vision of inclusion-based policies.

established identity models. And while the concept of intersectionality is a productive effort towards infusing identity formations with multitudes, these imagined multitudes merely reproduce already established and politically fraught identity forms. Therefore, the moment of this writing strikes me as unique opportunity to reevaluate these theoretical approaches due to their distance from the first AIDS crisis and the subsequent full incorporation of gays within Western socio-economic regimes of power (I will leave it up to trained historians to analyze the historical resonance of this moment). Make no mistake, neoliberal governmentality assures that the entirety of the economy's bottom 99% is in a continual state of trauma: transgender, immigrants, women, and racial minorities being in positions of particular precarity. Neoliberalism's assault on all identities existing outside of the very top of the economic ladder offers us a chance to consider a queer theory enlivened in relation to a spectrum of political and affective concerns and assaults, rather than being targeted directly.

The only way I can conceive of breaking out of this cycle of reparative identity formation as a reaction to trauma is to begin systemically deconstructing the established modes of identity formation. Doing so will minimize our investment in identity forms, which could narrow the window for trauma when those same identity forms come under attack. If we release ourselves from the shackles of identity we will no longer be their prisoner. I invoke the image of a prisoner to highlight the fact that the notions of identity that we are conditioned to believe benefit minority populations are composed from the same reservoir of identity markers that dominant populations draw from as well. Minority populations run of risk of getting caught in the prison of this cycle. Therefore, we must remain aware of Hall's declaration that "language and culture [is] in the *process of becoming* rather than being" (4, emphasis mine). Acknowledging this point offers us a way to imagine possibilities and connections that are atypical to our prescribed identity form, and instead invest in a process of becoming that is continual, messy, and incongruous—but most certainly not dependent on the aping institutional power. But while Hall's understanding of "becoming" relies on *discursive* "practices of subjective self-constitution," I want to explore an alternative strand of becoming that focuses on the *affective* intensities of the transindividual. "Transindividual" moves us way from identity towards relationality. Doing so allows us to dig deeper in the process of becoming, rather than attempting to diagnose particular definitions of identity formation.

While Hall is emblematic of a structuralist strain of cultural theory relying on a Marxist and Althusserian "account of how subjects are constituted," his work also productively connects those thinkers to the poststructuralist work of Foucault, specifically regarding how identity is imagined in both schools of thought. Foucault does not conceive of identity as a strict subjective hailing enacted by the dominating superstructure of capitalism, but instead stresses the idea of a discipline society, where social order is negotiated via mechanisms of power presented to the public as helpful and normalizing institutions: like psychoanalysis ([1961] 1988a), the medical field ([1963] 2003), and the prison system ([1975] 1995). By invoking Foucault, Hall recognizes that "it is not enough" to concede that the Law alone is able to "summon, discipline, produce and regulate but there must also be a corresponding production of a response (and thus the capacity and apparatus of subjectivity) from the side of the subject" (13). Here Hall is referring to Foucault's understanding in 1984's *The Use of Pleasure* of how individuals "recognize themselves as subjects of 'sexuality'" (Foucault 1990b, 4). Foucault goes on to explain that his project is "neither a history of sexual behaviors nor a history of representations, but a history of 'sexuality'" (1990b, 3). Foucault's conception of sexuality accommodates Hall's need to formulate an understanding of a subjective response to mechanisms of power because a Foucauldian formation of sexuality is itself a product of power relations. Therefore, sex is a response to power because it is a product of power. This distinction is important because it is conceived of as part of a wider "genealogy" of sexuality, formulating Foucault's understanding of desire within wider networks of power relations. He explains:

> This does not mean that I propose to write a history of the successive conceptions of desire, of concupiscence, or of libido, but rather to analyze the practices by which individuals were lead to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as *subjects of desire*, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen (1990b, 5, emphasis mine).

This idea of being a "subject of desire" is key to why Hall invokes Foucault when searching for an account of how subjects can respond to power. Desire is how one comes to understand the subjective "truth of their being" as a response to power. However, the hollowness of Foucault's use of "truth" in this context (in comparison to his more nuanced formation of an *archeology of*

*knowledge*) provokes more questions than answers. Additionally, how is one to understand "themselves" within a theoretical formation prioritizing power relations over "the truth of their being?" This leads me to ask what exactly is Foucault's understanding of desire?

While Hall's utilization of Foucault's notion of desire is an effective strategy towards inserting post-structural notions of identity into Marxist frameworks, post-structuralist understandings of desire vary widely, and the differences have deep implications for our conceptions of desire as it relates to both the mechanisms of power, and affect. This divide is most pronounced when considering Foucault's understanding of desire versus that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. While these philosophers are commonly utilized together in formations of sex and desire because of their close affiliation to each other—especially since Foucault wrote about desire in the introduction to *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* ([1972] 1983)—there are significant differences in how each conceives of desire, and those differences will be important in situating how the notion of desire is used throughout this dissertation. Wendy Grace makes clear that:

> Foucault's account of sexuality is *incompatible* with desire as formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. For Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis entails a new, non-Marxist ontology of contemporary society, one that links power to truth production, and of which the *dispositif* of sexuality is a decisive component. Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, never questioned the appropriateness of invoking a Marxist version of modern Western society as a general cultural force structuring *agencements*[18] of desire (53).

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[18] When asked about the "apparatus of sexuality" and "what is the meaning or the methodological function…of this term, *apparatus* (*dispositif*)?" Foucault explains:

> What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality (1980, 194-195).

This is an important point to keep in mind when considering the differences between Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari. Foucault contextualizes relationality within mechanisms of institutional power and discourse. While Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge these same structures of power—especially as they relate to the theoretical formations of Marx and Freud—yet they utilize the concept of "becoming" as a way to affectively tap into potentialities beyond the apparatus of state power. Something that Foucault is not willing to do. This idea of

This speaks to what Grace identifies as a profound difference in points of emphasis between Foucault's, and Deleuze and Guattari's formation of sexuality and desire, writing that: "Foucault concentrates more on challenging the psychanalytic account of sexuality, leaving the unconscious more or less untreated…while the authors of *Anti-Oedipus* reserve their hardest criticisms for the gaps in Freud's account of the unconscious, sidelining sexuality somewhat" (60).

For Foucault, the "truth" of sexuality is constructed within "regimes of truth," where discourses of confession and scientific enquiry dictate a social understanding of "truth." This understanding must have played a significant part in Jean Baudrillard's 1977 declaration that "it's simply that in Foucault power takes the place of desire" (21). The gaps within Foucault's considerations of desire and libido are filled in with an emphasis on power relations. Conversely, Deleuze and Guattari account for a Freudian understanding of a "libidinal economy" to argue that desire is defined as: "constantly coupl[ing] continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows" (1983, 5). Here one can start to sense how Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire allows for affective resonance to "flow" beyond the subjective, rather than confining subjectivity solely in relation to power relations the way Foucault does. Deleuze and Guattari's subsequent linking of desire to the notion of "becoming" will illustrate how these flows traverse various social assemblages and offer opportunities to "break the flows" of power relations as a way of tapping into potentialities. This is how we can understand sexuality's dependence on mechanisms of power, while desire is part of a wider process that actively brings one into contact with a multitude of social actors and pre-conscious affects to produce unexpected connections and becomings—related to mechanisms of power, but not bound to them. In this regard, this is how we might go about understanding why desire for/towards "unproductive" things like pornography offers us the opportunity to imagine new becomings that have the potential to reorient the ways in which we conceive of identity forms.

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becoming is the primary framework that this dissertation adopts and will be defined in more detail later in this chapter.

**The Affective Turn?**

Before expanding upon Deleuze and Guattari's affective understanding of becoming, it is instructive to recall Hall's use of "process of becoming" as an example of how amplifying the language utilized within affect theory signals less of a new "affective turn," and is instead more of a *re*turn to an affective discourse that has long been used to articulate subjectivity's non-prescriptive and unexpected encounters with desire. This is especially true within film theory, which is built upon a foundation of theorists arguing that society's earliest desire to see cinema was precisely due to the range of affective registers it evoked, ranging from shock, to astonishment, to "an excitement bordering on terror" (Jacques and Marie André, 66).[19] Additionally, this cinematic experience facilitated unexpected encounters with modernism, revealing spectacles to audiences in a theater that they were unable to see outside of it.[20] While much film theory before World War II credited the technological capabilities of the camera for enabling new types of modernist encounters with the world, postwar theory generally focuses on the subject via a psychanalytic understanding of desire utilizing the teachings of Sigmund Freud.

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[19] This is best articulated in the work of Tom Gunning, whose theory "cinema of attractions" embodies the desire of the technology's earliest audiences to experience a spectrum of unwieldy affective reactions. In describing the conditions of this experience, Gunning explains that:

> If the first spectators screamed, it was to acknowledge the power of the apparatus to sweep away a prior and firmly entrenched sense of reality. This vertiginous experience of the frailty of our knowledge of the world before the power of visual illustration produced that mixture of pleasure and anxiety which the purveyors of popular art had labelled sensations and thrills and on which they founded a new aesthetic of attractions (743).

I argue that Gunning's work in this regard remains essential precisely because it embraces an affective understanding of a cinematic experience over a rigid understanding of audience pleasure as understood via character identification along gender, racial, or sexual delineations, a strand of film theory ushered into the discipline by Laura Mulvey (1975).

[20] An account of this specific strand of film theory is detailed in Malcolm Turvey's *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (2008). In it, he argues that theorists like Jean Epstein, Dziga Vertov, Béla Balázsa, and Siegfried Kracauer "view the cinema's revelatory power as its most important attribute" (4). Epstein exemplifies this idea when he writes in 1935 that "cinematography renders perceptible through sight and sound individual beings we thought invisible and inaudible and divulges the reality of certain abstractions" (Epstein, 190). And Vertov extols the *kino eye's* capacity to allow for the human eye to see beyond the physical capabilities of the human body. Vertov writes in 1924 that the "Kino-eye is understood as 'that which the eye doesn't see'…as a possibility of seeing without limits and distance" (41). And while each of these theorists credit cinematic technology for enabling these expanded encounters through sight, Turvey contextualizes each within a modernist understanding where imagined potentialities were made possible explicitly because of technology's ability to capture images that people in the industrialized world had not seen before. Such encounters, and this new technology, are dependent upon each other.

This Freudian approach to film theory was embraced by Christian Metz in his 1977 book *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (1986). For Metz, film satisfies three primary desires within a Freudian framework: the desire for ego, the desire to desire, and the desire of the object through fetishism. To accomplish this, Metz differentiates between the individual and the screen by situating the subjectivity of the viewer within the apparatus of the camera. He writes that:

> At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am *all-perceiving*. All-perceiving as one says all-powerful…the instance, in other words, which *constitutes* the cinema signifier (it is I who make the film) (48, original emphasis).

After situating the viewer, he outlines how desire works within this dynamic, writing that "The practice of the cinema is only possible through the perceptual passions: the desire to see (= scopic drive, scopophilia, voyeurism)" (4).

Metz's connects this desirous scopic urge to Freud's drive system, which include the biologically essential requirements of breathing, drinking, eating, and sex. However, when it comes to the sex drive, both Freud and Metz allow for mailability regarding the ways in which the sex drive can be satisfied. They admit that satisfying the sexual drive is not as deterministic as the other drives. And as a result, this is how variations of desire become intertwined with the sex drive. Metz explains that:

> The sexual drive does not have so stable and strong a relationship with its "object" as do for example hunger and thirst. Hunger can be satisfied by food, but food is quite certain to satisfy it; thus instincts are simultaneously more and less difficult to satisfy than drives; they depend on a perfectly real object for which there is no substitute, but they depend on nothing else. Drives, on the contrary, can be satisfied up to a point outside their objects (this is sublimation, or else, in another way, masturbation) and are initially capable of doing without them without putting the orgasm into immediate danger (hence repression). The needs of self-preservation can neither be repressed nor sublimated; the sexual drives are more labile and more accommodating, as Freud insisted…Inversely, they always remain more or less unsatisfied, even when their object has been attained; desire is very quickly reborn after the brief vertigo of its apparent extinction, it is largely sustained by

itself as desire, it has its own rhythms, often quite independent of those of the pleasure

obtained…the lack is what it wishes to fill, and at the same time what it is always careful

to leave gaping, in order to survive as desire. In the end it has no object (58-59).

This lack of a specific "object" for the sex drive helps explain non-reproductive sexual fetishes, like the foot fetish, the shoe fetish, or BDSM. Situating desire outside of prescribed "objects" helps to productively expand our understanding of sexual practice. However, linking sex to a Freudian conception of drives reinforces the notion of the Self as centered within the body. Additionally, Metz's concept of cinematic desire relies on the foundational Freudian trope that our drives are motivated by a search to "complete" an inherent "lack" within our psyche, which only reinforces the false impression that the Self can ever be "complete," or that the Self is somehow self-sufficient outside of a continual state of relationality. If we want to understand sex and desire outside of these limiting confines, and more towards an affective understanding, then we must heed Erin Manning when she writes that "direct experience takes place not in the subject or in the object, but in the relation itself" (3).

A wider understanding of how Freud's concept of the sex drive could be understood within the realm of affect was popularized within cultural studies due to the archival work of Sedgwick and Adam Frank, with their edited collection *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995). In this collection, psychologist Silvan Tomkins argues that the inclusion of sex within the regime of drives is a result of "confusion" on part of Freud between drives and affects. Tomkins claims that this was intentional, because if "Freud had not smuggled some of the properties of the affective system into his conception of the drives, his system would have been of much less interest than it was" (49). This speaks to a historically based conception of Freud that depicts his efforts to situate sex at the center of his analysis and diagnoses as part of a wider strategy to market psychoanalysis to the public. The thinking being that since most everyone has/wants sex, and has many questions about it, it makes for a good focal point to pique people's interests (Kerr 1993). Sexuality is dynamic, while the drives are determinist. Tomkins, much like Metz, emphasizes desire's impulse toward nonprescriptive "object[s];" however, Tomkins liberates this manifestation of desire from Freud's regime of drives when he writes in 1962 that:

Freud's concept of sublimation is quite inappropriate for drive satisfaction per se. One

can eat only food, breathe only air, and drink only liquids. The concept was illuminating

only with sexuality—the one drive which is the least imperious of all the drives, the drive in which the affective component plays the largest role, the drive in which activation of the drive even without consummation has a rewarding rather than punishing quality. It is much more exciting and rewarding to feel sexually aroused than to feel hungry or thirsty…An erection in males or a tumescent state in females is more pleasant than painful. Therefore symbolic and indirect arousers of sexual excitement with or without sexual tumescence, or genital stimulation, could in fact be a substitute for more literal and more complete sexual experience (60).

Tomkins' point about the "indirect arousers of sexual excitement" is an important concept to keep in mind throughout this dissertation because it allows us to consider both the indirect and direct ways in which the various actors within the social assemblages I outline in each chapter carries the potential to *become* incorporated as part of the realm of the pornographic. Just like sexual desire, pornography is not so direct or prescriptive. Many of the pornographic texts analyzed throughout this dissertation are not necessarily intended to be used to reach an orgasm. Some are art projects with long diversions into sexless plots, and others are shown in public spaces, where it would be illegal to start masturbating. In these instances, my intention is to present these texts within the social assemblage in which they are presented to situate becoming pornographic not as concept immediately intended for satisfaction of the sexual drive, but as a process that situates the affective body simultaneously within social assemblages consisting of non-pornographic and pornographic elements. My aim is to situate pornographic desire, not diagnose it. To diagnose desire robs it of its affective potentiality and social charge. Because of this, some might come away frustrated at this study's lack of conclusions; however, to allow desire to enliven all the instances of becoming pornographic analyzed in this study, it must be able to chart its own path.

A study that most explicitly attempts to account for an affective sense of desire within cinema studies is Nick Davis' *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema* (2013). Davis' aim is to account for Deleuzian philosophy within queer film theory. Proceeding from Deleuze's project of periodization started with 1983's *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (2009), which accounts for pre-WWII films; and 1985's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (2010), which accounts for post-WWII films, Davis details the period of the early 1990s,

after the first AIDS crisis, composed mostly of independently produced movies with strong queer themes known as "New Queer Cinema" (Rich 1992). Davis frames this period within a Deleuzian understanding of desire, hence conceiving of the "desiring-image." However, while Davis uses the *Cinema* books as his theoretical basis, each book fails to explicitly define Deleuze's own understanding of desire. While Davis acknowledges that "Desire and cinema follow the same processes of production," and that desire reveals "itself to be as active and as generative a force as movement and time," he admits "that desire, despite its centrality to earlier Deleuzian texts, oddly absents itself from the *Cinema* volumes…Deleuzian desire *does* subsist in the *Cinema* books—unacknowledged as such—at the level of conceptual structures" (17; 13; 17, original emphasis). To access a clear understanding of Deleuzian desire, Davis borrows the definition from *Anti-Oedipus*, as have I. And to read for desire within the movies, Davis' strategy throughout the book is close textual analysis of his corpus, so close in fact, that at times it feels claustrophobic.

Davis reveals the focus of his strategy when he explains that "what follows, then, is…what *Anti-Oedipus* calls 'schizoanalysis,' a method blending detailed description of a complex assemblage with structural accounts of what that assemblage discloses about desire. I apply this same process of schizoanalysis…to both *Cinema* books and, later, to my curated films, in all their formal and narrative eccentricities" (13).[21] And while this is a reasonable framework within a cinema studies context, I cannot help but feel that this type of dedication to textual analysis misses opportunities to connect these texts to wider cultural assemblages, which enhance the potential to explore unexpected moments of social relationality. While a cultural studies approach to cinema studies requires a base of textual analysis, studies focused on textual

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[21] While Davis's understanding of schizoanalysis is accurate, I feel that it minimizes the theory's effort to push the scope of analysis beyond the parameters of one's comfort. While all studies must establish a set of parameters to maintain coherence, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that productive theory can emerge only by extending beyond constructed parameters and achieving states of messy incoherence. This is why Brian Massumi argues that Deleuze's work is "antimethodological" and "pragmatic, not dogmatic" (1996, 402). Therefore, this dissertation adopts a more expansive understanding of schizoanalysis as outlined by Guattari, when he describes it as a strategy that "will work towards [the strategy's] complexification, its processual enrichment, towards the consistency of the virtual lines of bifurcation and differentiation, in short towards its ontological heterogeneity…rather than moving in the direction of reductionist modelisations which simplify the complex" (61). This is what I will keep in mind as I try to mirror the Deleuzian project of producing work that is "in a constant state of recursive revision by virtue of its systematic openness" (Massumi 1996, 104).

analysis do not always require the same degree of non-diegetic cultural analysis. Davis limiting his objects to the *Cinema* books and a selection of films assures such limitations. And while his work attempts to fill-in the "[lack of] any coherent theorization" regarding our understanding of New Queer Cinema, I am left desiring more theorization about how we might go about situating these films within their own social context, or even our contemporary social context (2013, 13). Of course, my own attempts to sketch out the social contexts of my moving image objects of study are fraught with their own pitfalls. I am aware that composing a social assemblage is exactly that, a matter of subjective composition. And while there is no inherent "truth" embedded within a social construct, that should not prevent us from utilizing such considerations as material for theoretical formations. This is why I adopt an understanding of the social from Bruno Latour, who reminds us that "'society,' far from being the context 'in which' everything is framed, should rather be construed as one of the many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits…'There is no such thing as a society'" (4-5). Therefore, I consider the social less of a framework, and more of an additional actor within an assemblage. My compositions of a social context throughout should be thought of as merely one part of a wider picture, and as being written in pencil rather than permanent ink.

This is not to take away from the task that Davis does accomplish with his study. While I agree with him that Deleuzian philosophy has a lot to offer queer conceptions of moving image culture, I also agree that the *Cinema* books are not, on their own, adequate for manifesting a complete understanding of cinematic desire, or prescriptive for how to read for the affective qualities of films outside of the scope of each book. Deleuze's theoretical readings of the films are quite specific to the texts being analyzed, which makes them difficult to extract and utilize within one's own cinematic readings. Even Davis borrows his understanding of desire from another source! The *Cinema* books are best understood as examples of Deleuze using his affective framework established in his other work and applying that to cinema. This is exemplified in just one example in *Cinema 2* when he writes that "identity is now dialectical, and passed though the transformation of the nature of being of man" (226). Such a conception of identity is not too dissimilar from one he formulated with Guattari years before in *Anti-Oedipus* when they wrote: "The group fantasy *includes* the disjunctions, in the sense that each subject, discharged of his personal identity but not of his singularities, enters into relations with others

following the communication proper to partial objects: everyone passes into the body of the other on the body without organs" (63, original emphasis). This is an example of how the most transferable elements from the *Cinema* books to one's own study are typically concepts that are found—and expanded upon in greater detail—in his other work. Therefore, I consider the *Cinema* books more as theoretical showcases rather than as texts that influence my own work on the affective qualities of identity, sexuality, desire, and the moving image.

Deleuze's articulation of the "affectation-image" via the close-up of an actor's face remains perhaps the most enduring legacy of the *Cinema* books within cinema studies. His description contains an efficient description of cinematic affect regarding how it is understood within the face via the close-up:

> Affects are not individuated like people and things, but nevertheless they do not blend into the indifference of the world. They have singularities which enter into virtual conjunction and each time constitute a complex entry. It is like points of melting, of boiling, of condensation, of coagulation, ect. This is why faces which express various affects, or the various points of the same affect, do not merge into a single fear which would obliterate them…The close-up does indeed suspend individuation…(2009, 103).

This description of the affective registers of the face speaks to the enduring complexity of reading for (and writing about) affect within the moving image. Earlier in this chapter I advocated for a Simondonian understanding of "individuation" as a strategy for thinking beyond stagnant identity signifiers; yet here, Deleuze's understanding of individuation is more literal, simply meaning it "distinguishes or characterizes each person" (2009, 99). While the word usage is different, the sentiment is similar. Individuation for Simondon is dependent on understanding one's potentiality via relationality, while Deleuze's understanding of potentiality stems from this understanding of the "virtual," which for him describes a concept where "the virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual*…the reality of the virtual is structure" (1995, 208-209, original emphasis). Here we can understand the virtual as a potentiality tapped into as a result of the atypical relationality between the face and the camera. The cinematic structure bringing together these two social actors evokes a range of affective registers both from the image and the audience. They help us realize the virtual in a way that cannot be captured via any other means. The unpredictability of these resulting affects is evident

in the degree to which the close-up deterritorializes the indexicality of the actor and the perception of the viewer. Deleuze argues that this is due to the close-up's ability to blur identity by making "all faces look alike" (2009, 103). And while this remains a productive example of reading for affect within moving image forms, I argue that additional affective resonances can be formulated by accounting for Deleuzian texts beyond the *Cinema* books. I believe that this approach can help us break away from strategies of close textual analysis and situate the role that affects play in the relationality between moving images and wider social assemblages.

Steven Shaviro's *Post-Cinematic Affect* (2010) comes closest to accounting for the affects evoked in a contemporary era where cinema has lost its cultural dominance within the mediascape. And instead of focusing on one media form, Shaviro thinks about media within a wider social ecosystem by evoking Raymond Williams' formation of interconnected "structures of feeling" as a way to account for "*what it feels like* to live in the early twenty-first century" (Williams 1977; Shaviro 2010a, 2, original emphasis). This is how he composes a defused moving image media environment consisting of movies, videogames, and music videos where they have collectively become "*machines for generating affect*" (2010a, 3, original emphasis). In addition to close textual analysis, Shaviro considers each text as an actor within a wider affective field, explaining that:

> These works are symptomatic, in that they provide indices of complex social processes, which they transduce, condense, and rearticulate in the form of what can be called, after Deleuze and Guattari "blocks of affect." But they are also productive, in the sense that they do not *represent* social processes, so much as they participate actively in these processes, and help to constitute them" (2010a, 2, original emphasis).

This example of utilizing the textual particularities of moving image texts, rather than emphasizing them, is a model that I follow throughout this dissertation, and an approach that allows us to situate these texts within a wider relational assemblage.

However, Davis' and Shaviro's lack of accounting for pornography within their studies fails to tap into the potentialities that the genre could offer affective readings. Shaviro—despite the prevalence of pornographic themes within his corpus—enacts pornography as more of an adjective than as a point of deeper exploration, or as a genre worth reading as a way to enhance his own analysis of non-pornographic sex scenes. In describing *Demonlover* (2002), he writes

that "money flows through pornographic video images, which themselves work as incitations to rape and murder," and he later writes about how "in putting [Asia] Argento's body so continually on display, the film radiates a certain sense of pornographic sleaze." (2010b, 40; 55). These strike me as moments where relating *Demonlover* to particular pornographic texts, or pornographic reception, might have broadened our understanding of the movie beyond the normative descriptors he uses when writing about these highly sexualized moments. Here, pornography is used as an abstract object against which to determine the parameters of non-pornographic *Demonlover*. There is no becoming here, only separating. And Davis seemingly goes out of his way to avoid a deeper reading of pornography, especially when writing about the sexually explicit movie *Shortbus* (2006). Instead, of situating the movie within the broader genre of pornography (a genre the movie is clearly aping), Davis instead investigates the degree of indexicality evident within the movie's sex acts as a way of connecting them to the "radicalism" of "New Queer tropes" (2008, 625). While this is a productive endeavor connecting contemporary cinema to a previous era, it strikes me that making connections between *Shortbus*, the sexuality on display in New Queer Cinema, and the pornography being made during the first AIDS crisis, might have brought a deeper level of radical understanding to both genres. However, in the case of both Davis and Shaviro, an analysis of the affective resonance of pornographic texts remains lacking.

**Positionality and Pornography Studies**

While Deleuze's conception of affect productively complicates cinematic identity and audience identification, it lacks a sexual dynamic. And while Davis' and Shaviro's analysis considers the sexual dynamic, they utilize it for the purposes of identifying cinematic forms as separate and distinct entities apart from pornography. In this regard, Linda Williams' book *Screening Sex* (2008) might be considered as a bridge between these two approaches due to its aim of accounting for pornography as a fully incorporated part of the moving image environment of the early 1970s, while also accounting for audience reception within this era of New American Cinema. Williams makes clear that "prurience has always been an important reason for interest in movies," and that our desire for "screen[ing] moving images [is] to encounter our own immediate sensuality in the more vivid world" (2008, 7;1). But while Williams' approach is most

comprehensive in terms of her corpus, she does not embrace affect theory. Therefore, I conceive of Williams' book as a bridge leading towards a more pornographic, and less platform-specific account of the contemporary mediascape—which is embodied in Susanna Paasonen's *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (2011).

What makes Paasonen's work so essential is not only her embrace of pornographic texts, but a theoretical understanding that studying the genre entails positioning one's self in relation to the text as a way of deconstructing the artificial distance between subject and object that has long helped to "legitimize" formal textual analysis. She connects these fraught issues of academic and social proximity to pornography when she writes that "Pornography aims to create proximities between viewers and images, whereas content analysis is efficient in obscuring these proximities. Both content analysis and studies of representation can be critiqued for being based on and giving rise to a distance between the images studied and the one doing the study" (133). Participating, watching, thinking, and writing about pornography requires one to situate their identity in relation to sexual desire—desires that are both known and unknown. This need for subjective positionality in relation to the text is due to the origin of pornography studies itself, which emerged because of the feminist anti-pornography movement in the late 1970s/early 1980s—exemplified in Bonnie Sherr Klein's *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1981).[22] The need to stake a claim is what helps maintain the taboo around pornography as a cultural object. This is what enlivens the genre within society and is precisely what bothers many

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[22] The dynamics around how the formal parameters for the academic study of pornography were developed as a reaction to anti-pornography feminists and their increasingly bold legislative actions aiming to restrict pornography, is outlined by Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage in their 1985 special issue of *Jump Cut* focusing on pornography. In it, they write that they are:

> acutely aware of problems at this point in trying to discuss sexual representation. Recently, the feminist movement has divided sharply on questions of sexuality. In particular, a strongly dissenting mixture of women defend their "politically incorrect" sexuality (such as swinging, casual sex, and lesbian sadomasochism) against what they see as puritanical "good girl" mentality in the feminist anti-pornography movement. The anti-porn movement itself has decisively altered direction in the past two years. From an emphasis on education and traditional pressure group tactics, it has turned to pushing for local censorship ordinances, most notably in Minneapolis where such a law was co-authored by feminist lawyer and scholar Catherine MacKinnon…and Andrea Dworkin…The debate around these issues has been explosive and antagonistic. Yet we think it is important to present and discuss the range of issues in *Jump Cut*" (Kleinhans and Lesage).

This is an important point because it illustrates how pornography studies demands social positionality in either the pro- or anti- camp. This, of course, is a problematic dichotomy, and one which I hope to reach beyond in this dissertation.

people about the academic study of pornography itself. While academic study has never been unbiased, the academy engages in obligatory policing regarding the appropriate level of objective distance a scholar needs to have from their object of study to maintain "impartiality."[23] This is mirrored within society, where one also needs to maintain distance from pornography because to admit to what one enjoys reveals the watcher's own sexual desires. Proximity to the object admits guilt. I believe that Paasonen's push against close textual analysis is a common strategy within pornography studies aimed towards developing a reciprocal relationship where the scholar situates their relationship to pornography as a way of prompting the reader into considering their own identity formation in relation to their pornographic and sexual desires. Additionally, since discourses around pornography are so often weaponized for striking fear into the populace due to opportunistic politicians looking to pad their credentials by writing anti-pornography legislation (Nance), pornography is maintained as a continual affective abstraction that does not need to be seen to be felt culturally. John Champagne speaks to these issues when he writes that an "insistent recourse to close textual analysis necessarily obscures some of the social *functions* of gay pornography in particular," and because of that:

> gay porno films signify culturally and socially *regardless* of whether they are "actually" watched or not, and that the way they signify culturally and socially has less to do with their individual "content" than with a wide weave of forces beyond the grasp of a discipline dedicated primarily to reading films" (77, original emphasis).

By deprioritizing individual close readings, Paasonen situates pornography as part of a "multifaceted assemblage" (8). In borrowing the discourse of assemblage from Latour, Paasonen accounts for the multitude of ways in which pornography is created, consumed, and circulated. Paasonen's work is a type of blueprint for how pornography scholars can go about deconstructing the hierarchies created by the monoliths of individual texts. While close readings of texts should never be abandoned, the clandestine history of the genre (not to mention the extent of lost texts) requires scholars to sketch broader historical and erotic assemblages to understand how these texts existed, and continue to exist, within everyday life, and what they

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[23] Upon the announcement of the *Porn Studies Journal* in 2013, infamous anti-pornography Professor Gail Dines used the occasion to join the chorus of *panic* being documented within the reactionary pages of *The Guardian* newspaper, where she was quoted as saying that the publishers of the journal—Routledge—had been "derelict in its duty to uphold academic impartiality" (Cadwalladr).

might mean as objects satisfying unwieldy desires. Thinking within assemblages is inherently affective, not prescriptive. In prioritizing the kinetic dynamism of pornographic assemblages, Paasonen actively connects the genre to its history as an affective signifier across various time periods. This history is detailed by Walter Kendrick who situates "pornography" as an idea rather than a text, where "what is being talked about is not a thing but a concept, a thought structure…" (xiii). Kendrick's understanding is accurate to the degree that the concept of "pornography" has been used as a tool to manipulate the thought structure of the populace within the West, especially towards fearing sex and female sexual agency. However, his approach accounting for the political and social outcomes of pornography is a step in front of my own study. Like Paasonen, my intention is to step back and consider the affective resonance of pornographic becomings before they are utilized as explicit political signifiers. This is how Paasonen's notion of a pornographic assemblage offers us the opportunity to "[conceptualize] online porn as a nexus of generic conventions, technologies, body styles, and values that, if tuned to the right frequency, has the power to affect its users in unpredictable and often contradictory ways" (18).

One can frame the history of gay pornography studies as a series of five ongoing examples of scholars attempting to situate pornography within a social assemblage via historical, sociological, or theoretical perspectives. Accounting for these examples productively allows us to consider the role that desire plays within these discourses of positionality and subjectivity, and offers us a path from these phenomenological accounts utilizing the discourse of affect towards assemblages constructed within the mode of affect theory:

- In an essential 1985 issue of *Jump Cut* consisting of articles addressing pornography directly, Richard Dyer's piece "Coming to Terms" argues that pornography is its own artform "rooted in bodily effect [that] can give us a knowledge of the body that other art cannot" (1985). He positions the genre within an assemblage of homophobia, arguing that pornography is an essential actor for locating and legitimating gay desire within a hostile society:

  > Gay porn asserts homosexual desire, it turns the definition of homosexual desire on its head, says bad is good, sick is healthy and so on. It thus defends the universal human practice of same-sex physical contact (which our society

constructs as homosexual). It has made life bearable for countless gay men (1985).

In this way, Dyer taps into pornography's affective potential by situating it as standing in for a type of virtual bravery for those who are too afraid to come out of "the closet." And while it was written before the scope of the first AIDS crisis became apparent, this essay seems prescient in its understanding of the genre's ability to say "sick is healthy." As a result, Dyer's declaration has subsequently been championed for understanding the role that pornography played in legitimizing gay desire during a sexual panic. This is how one can come to understand the genre as visually providing the metaphorical "muscle" needed to counter countless news images of bodies wasting away from AIDS at the time.

- In *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* (1996), Thomas Waugh enacts a historical approach to the scattered history of both nude and non-nude male images appealing to gay audiences before the riots at Stonewall in 1969. The affective investment that many of the producers and collectors profiled in the book make in these images is revealed by the fact that most of the images were not intended for mass circulation or profit. A significant part of Waugh's analysis is centered on the affective labor that fueled these covert pornographic circulations. Ultimately, Waugh's intention is to incorporate this type of affective desire as an essential actor within a gay historical assemblage:

  This book attempts to reclaim our cultural heritage of homosexual eroticism, a transgressive legacy that embodied, in the absence of a socially sanctioned nonerotic culture in the generations before Stonewall, the basic sexual order of our difference. If our political history is one of courage, self-realization, and mobilization, our cultural history is one of desire—of the slow emergence of a concealed and repressed love, of its acknowledgement and declaration, of its individual and collective fulfillment, and of its sharing…It was hard to imagine love in those years; imagining hard was an act of both revolt and community. Recycling those hard imaginings from our past may stir today's soft, wounded imaginings (1996, 4-5).

Waugh's use of "hard to imagine" here brings to mind Muñoz's affective understanding of queerness that is a "rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1).

- Moving into the theatrical era, Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999) documents his own phenomenological experience cruising the pornography theaters of New York City's Times Square for gay sex. Delany's approach is unique when compared to scholars, considering that his account is more novelistic than academic. Regardless, his account remains an essential primary source of this time, documenting the ephemeral sexual experiences occurring in those theaters. Considering the fact that he is mostly known as a science fiction author, Delany situates himself as a type of *flâneur* whose experiences are varied, remains open to a range of potentialities, and considers this history through a highly subjective perspective:

  > The dual pieces here present a sociological and diachronic periplum. They are two attempts by a single navigator to describe what the temporal coastline and the lay of the land looked like and felt like and the thoughts he had while observing them. From the most peremptory landings, these pieces register impressions and ideas as they occurred to this navigator, somewhat storm-tossed over thirty-odd years, who finally sought something no less necessary to his appetitive life then good food and fresh water (xviii).

  In situating himself within this pornographic assemblage it is interesting that he categorizes his desires within the regimes of Freudian drives by evoking his "appetitive life." As I have outlined, the sexual drive is inherently affective.

- In the era when pornography dominated the VHS platform, John Burger's *One-Handed Histories: The Eroto-Politics of Gay Male Video Pornography* (1995), fills in the history of video pornography in the 1980s. Developed originally as a Masters thesis, Burger's account is a processual journey of how he comes to terms with his sexual desires in relation to an emergent academic framework within which to situate his desires. The coming together of these two actors is representative of the wider assemblage that he

builds by highlighting texts addressing a range of issues from ageism, to activism, to AIDS. In situating his positionality within the study, he writes:

> Several years ago, while pursuing my Masters of Arts degree in Performance Studies at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, I became addictively swept up in the academic and political debates surrounding pornography and sexual representation. At the same time, new to New York, I was spending a lot of long, dateless nights at home with my VCR and the fast-forward button, consuming gay porn videos like popcorn. Consequently, my viewing habits began to inform my skills in the porn debates at school, and the results of these debates began to slant my perception of what I was jacking off over at night (ix).

This admission about his graduate school debates slanting his perception speaks both to the affective nature of historical accounts, and the ability of desire to be shaped by social assemblages.

A primary strength of pornography studies has always been the ability of scholars to emphasize their own bodies' positionality in relation to the text as a way of encouraging readers to confront their own body's relation to the text. This is exemplified here by Dyer, Waugh, Delany, Burger, and of course Paasonen. Often, these accounts lead readers to consider uncomfortable realms of the senses, which is a compelling space to explore if one is looking for the effect of unexpected potentialities when the body meets pornography. This is what Williams taps into when writing about "body genres." She explains that what connects the body genres of melodrama, horror, and pornography, is their shared indulgence in displaying "bodily excess," which helps to make them "'gross' genres" (1991, 4). This not only accounts for pornography's low cultural status, but speaks to the central role that the formation of a subjective body had in the history of pornography studies.

- Unsurprisingly, the arrival of the popular internet age in the mid-1990s has coincided with more explicit utilization of affect theory within academic considerations of the moving image. Considering the flood of information, data, and texts that the internet

provides, the illusion of linear histories or unified cultural experiences has been exposed. The internet age requires us to think more within assemblages shaped by affect theory because one can only capture moments, reactions, and resonances within a floodtide of texts. Along with Paasonen, Shaka McGlotten's *Virtual Intimacy* (2013) embraces affect theory to analyze sexual texts, particularly by situating sex within an assemblage of desire composing public hook ups, sex apps, video games, and pornography. For McGlotten, sexuality is an always already activated affective register that is capable of unexpected potentiality due to its wide spectrum of relationality:

> I learned that sex was a kind of background hum, that every space might become a queer space, if only I paid attention to sometimes faint but almost always present erotic frequencies: gazes held a second too long, subtle and not so subtle movements and gestures (a casual grope or a hand resting near a crotch), alert lingering in gym showers and saunas, or the peculiarity intense studying that goes on near some university toilets, especially out of the way ones (4).

These examples of affective discourse used within pornography studies over the years not only speaks to pornography's affective charge, but can also help us differentiate between affective rhetoric and affect theory.

Texts and assemblages, and identity formation and individuation, are couplings that embody many of the same qualities that characterize the divide between the emotional life of the subjective body and affect. An assemblage connotes interaction, and individuation requires relationality—these are the kinetic qualities that embody affect. Importantly, these affective qualities are maintained because they are not bound to specific emotional requirements or political obligations. The feminist rallying cry, "the personal is political," reveals the political stakes that need to be planted to legitimize identity and achieve political goals. Brian Massumi's definition of emotion speaks to this point when he writes: "An emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onwards defined as personal" (1995a, 88). In outlining this divide between emotion and affect, Eric Shouse explains that:

affect is not a personal feeling. Feelings are *personal and biographical,* emotions are *social*…and affects are *pre-personal*…An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential…Affect cannot be fully realized in language…because affect is always prior to and/or outside consciousness…Affect is the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience. The body has a grammar of its own that cannot be fully captured in language (Shouse, original emphasis).

This understanding of affect explains why affect theory is so amenable to the project of analyzing queerness. Just like affect, queerness is an "ideality," is experienced in small moments of pre-consciousness before recognition, and is not personal but sensorial. Gay is an identity, queerness is a potentiality. Therefore, while affect is a linchpin of broad political movements, a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of affect theory is far more difficult to incorporate into those same movements. Affect theory's task is to quantify the unprescribed and pre-conscious grammar of the body, while political movements impose an emotional framework onto bodies composing a unified movement for political expediency, which is their right, and has a long record of success.

Massumi writes that "affect is intensity" (2002, 27). He goes onto explain that "Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things" (2002, 25). Many scholars have embodied an understanding of affect within their work as a way of articulating their visceral encounters with pornography. However, it is typically more common to engage with affect via phenomenology than with affect theory. Phenomenology centers experience within the body and prioritizes subjective experience. It is important to differentiate that from affect theory, which situates experience at the surface of the skin, rather than deep within subjectivity. Affect theory also considers the notion of "'the body' as a misnomer. Nothing so stable, so certain of itself ever survives the complexity of worlding" (Manning, 16). Within affect theory the body is just another social actor, it loses its primacy.

**Becoming**

If this dissertation's aim is to nuance the dynamics of gay male identity formation in relation to pornography, then the difference between a pornography studies centered around the *affective discourse* (the physical experiential of the emotional body in relation to pornography) and *affect theory* (which emphasizes individuation and intensity in relation to desire) needs to be resolved. While the ideality of queerness as understood by Muñoz might be sufficient for squaring the difference between the two approaches, I have outlined how a primary pillar of queer theory preceding him hypothesized queerness as "signify[ing] only *when attached to the first person*," a version of subjectivity composed to withstand a political crisis (Sedgwick 1993, 8, original emphasis). And as a result, our popular understanding of Sedgwick's theories around "the closet" rely on the subjective political project of eradicating homophobia, a project that has already been fully coopted by right-wing governments. In this instance queerness is not enough. Therefore, a theoretical framework is needed to coalesce this spectrum of bodies, affects, and theories as a way of conceiving of queerness beyond identity formation. I argue that an affective understanding of desire is an effective way of unifying this multitude of forces, and move away from the centrality of subjectivity. Desire reaches beyond the body to encompass both sexuality and an affective sense of potentiality. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari offer us a theoretical framework when they write that "becoming is the process of desire" (1987, 272).

While I adopt an understanding of "becoming" from Deleuze and Guattari, it is important to recognize that there are alternative and queer understandings of becoming. And the differentiations are crucial for discerning between an affective reading and an affect theory perspective. A primary example is developed from Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 conception that "One is not born, but, rather becomes a woman" (301). Butler utilizes this concept to develop her theory of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble*, where she writes that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (23). While the performative nature of gender is the focus of her book, one must go back to earlier work to gain a coherent understanding of Butler's definition of becoming. In the essay "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" (1986), Butler admits that Beauvoir's use of the verb "becomes" contains a "consequential ambiguity," one that Butler attempts to clarify by contextualizing this text within its proper

existentialist framework (36). To do so, she connects Beauvoir's conception to an understanding of the body developed by Jean-Paul Sartre, who in 1943 writes that "I am my body…my body is at once *a point of view and point of departure*…which I *am* and which at the same time I surpass toward what I have to be" (326, original emphasis). So, for Sartre, even though "The body is…the obstacle to be surpassed in order to be in the world," the body remains the focal point of his experience, and he declares it as his own when he admits that while "the body is inapprehensible, it does not belong to the objects in the world" (326; 328). Butler builds on his idea of being "what I have to be" by explaining that "the body is not a lifeless fact of existence, but a mode of becoming" (1986, 38). However, just like Sartre, Butler returns to the idea of "the body" as inherently a "corporeal experience" (as opposed to an affective condition) (1986, 38). Butler goes onto explain that "Beauvoir's becoming a gender seems both an extension and a concretization of the Sartrian formation" and that:

> The tension in her theory does not reside between being "in" and "beyond" the body, but in the move from the natural to the acculturated body. That one is not born, but becomes, a woman does not imply that this "becoming" traverses a path from disembodied freedom to cultural embodiment. Indeed, one is one's body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one's gender. The movement from sex to gender is internal to embodied life, i.e. a move from one kind of embodiment to another (1986, 39).

In adopting de Beauvoir's understanding of becoming centered within the body, Butler reveals her motivation to situate her own gender theories within the dynamics of the physical world to "avoid the fate of an impossible and vain utopian project" (1999, 143).

Butler goes onto reify the body when outlining what she understands as desire's ability to legitimize the "actual," recognize the Self, and expand "identity" in 1987's *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (2012). In adopting a Hegelian understanding of desire, she writes that:

> Insofar as all external relations are transformed into internal—or double—relations through the mediated self-reflection of Hegel's emerging subject, all indeterminate negations or ruptures in the ontology of experience are rediscovered as determinate negations, differences that are contained within the ontological integrity of experience. In that desire always emerges as a confrontation with a difference that appears ontologically

disparate, and is, further, an effort to overcome this disparity through disclosing a mode

of interrelatedness which has hitherto remained opaque, it seems fair to conclude that

desire is always thematizing—and rendering actual—the ontological preconditions of its

own emergence. Whereas the initial confrontation with otherness enforces a sense of

limitation on consciousness, the satisfaction of desire reveals a more capable self, one

that is able to admit its interdependence, and thereby gain a more expanded and

expansive identity (2012, 35).

This description of desire speaks to Mikko Tuhkanen's point that because of Butler's "Hegelian genealogy, performativity has trouble conceptualizing becoming as a radically open and unpredictable process, notwithstanding Butler's protestations otherwise" (9). Butler admits to omitting Deleuze as part of her theoretical formation because his theory of becoming proposes "an elusive and tantalizing 'beyond' to culturally instituted desire [as] the *promise* of liberation" (2012, 216, emphasis mine). However, as Deleuze and Guattari make clear, "becoming is the *process* of desire" (1987, 272, emphasis mine). *Process* is not a *promise*!

So, if we are to construct a response to Butler's formation of becoming it starts with an understanding that becoming is a continual process linked to desire. Therefore, there can be no "consciousness," "satisfaction," or "identity" associated with desire because the becoming nature of desire cannot be linked to these static entities. Butler's discourse here reveals her dedication to the notion of a subjective body. However, since the body is not prioritized by Deleuze and Guattari, there can be no "thematizing" within their formation of desire, because "everything ties together in an asymmetrical block of becoming, an instantaneous zigzag" (1987, 278). The potentiality of desire is lost once it stops becoming. While Butler's body is seeking to be satisfied by desire, Deleuze and Guattari's body is:

not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor

by the organs it possesses or the function it fulfills. On the plane of consistency, *a body is*

*defined only by a longitude and a latitude:* in other words the sum total of the material

elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness

(longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or

degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential

speeds (1987, 260, original emphasis).

In this way, it is not a matter of understanding desire through difference as Butler would have us believe, but it is a matter of recognizing desire's affective agency beyond the body within social assemblages. And it is this agency that empowers affective intensities to formulate the Deleuzian and Guattarian body beyond subjectivity.

Butler's dismissal of Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of desire as existing "beyond" cultural institutions is also unfounded. Yes, while their understanding of affect exceeds the physical body, their formation of desire is related to the notion of "desiring-machines," which connote the idea that desire resonates within social assemblages epitomized by the "political economy" of Marxism and the "libidinal economy" of Freud. Here, Deleuze and Guattari reveal that desire is not only recognized by our liminal "drives," but is also infused within every aspect of an assemblage. Desire is no utopian project. Deleuze and Guattari make clear that the state is desire incarnate; it is desire that "passes from the head of the despot to the hearts of his subjects, and the intellectual law to the entire political system" (1983, 221). But while desire helps to shape these economies, desire is not dependent upon, or tied to them. In formulating an understanding of how affect works beyond the body, one must explore the notion of the autonomy of affect. In this regard Massumi writes that "the *autonomy* of affect is its participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness.* Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is" (1995a, 96, original emphasis). So, the "beyond" that Butler is worried about is desire's ability to affectively resonate "beyond" the parameters, boundaries, and subjectivity of a particular body. While this understanding of desire might present us with a realm of potentialities that are perhaps hard to imagine—and even harder to quantify within an academic analysis—affect theorists must strive to present instances of relationality where unexpected moments of desire are possible and expectations go *beyond* our lived realities—this is the only way to reach towards potentiality.

Desire's potentiality is limited if solely understood as a drive intended to expand our identities. The strength of Butler's notions of performativity lies in its ability to allow us to imagine the range of material possibilities at our disposal within our subjective realities. This is essential for the aim of expanding our identities. However, the absence of a Deleuzian/Guattarian understanding of affect from her work omits the affective assemblage of desires, impulses, and feelings that *compel us* to imagine a range of new potentialities in the first-place. Affect is the

impetus missing from a Butlerian formation of desire and identity. If desire is understood as "constantly coupl[ing] continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented," then one needs to consider what happens when those flows and partial objects come into contact with one another (1983, 5). For Deleuze and Guattari, this is becoming.

They describe becoming thus: "starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire" (1987, 272). Hence, becoming is about *changing* through *sharing*. John Brady explains that becoming accounts for how "two regions, sharing particles between them in any given map (field), can enter into subterranean singularities and alliances…just particles forming into various assemblages in semi-stable states of *becoming*" (Brady, original emphasis). David Heckman expands on this definition when he writes that:

> "Becoming-" is a process of change, flight, or movement within an assemblage. Rather than conceive of the pieces of an assemblage as an organic whole, within which the specific elements are held in place by the organization of a unity, the process of "becoming-" serves to account for relationships between the "discrete" elements of the assemblage. In "becoming-" one piece of the assemblage is drawn into the territory of another piece, changing its value as an element and bringing about a new unity (Heckman).

This process of becoming realizes the leap into the virtual that is too "beyond" the realm of potentiality for Butler's endorsement. However, as a gay racial minority who has experienced right-wing politicians coopt the material realities of exploited and marginalized minority populations to further their agenda of funneling economic benefits to the top 1% of the economic bracket, I believe it is time to move *beyond* the reality of our real-life conditions to imagine a more financially and politically equal future for sexual, gender, and racial minorities. Queerness is in a state of crisis because we have been encouraged by a neoliberal ethos to abandon the fantasy of ideality in favor of "reality" and "practicality." Affect theory is perhaps a way to recapture queerness's radicality. To retain radical potentiality queer theory must remain in a process of becoming, because what was radical in 1990 has already become a part of

contemporary right-wing ideology. Hence, our formations of becoming must be constantly reviewed and reviewed. As Elizabeth Grosz makes clear:

> The aim of all radical politics is the production of a future that actively transforms the dynamics of the present, and this may involve precisely an unpredictable leap into virtuality…This leap into the virtual is always a leap into the unexpected, which cannot be directly planned for or anticipated, though it is clear that it can be prepared for (186).

## Becoming Pornographic

"Becoming pornographic" indicates the impulse to widen identity assemblages to both a pornographic and non-pornographic relational field. The flows between the two fields exemplifies an affective sense of becoming, and the becoming expresses the autonomous desire emanating from this relation. The affective resonance between the two fields accounts for the ability of a pornographic aesthetic to travers into seemingly non-pornographic realms. The alliances built between these two fields result in the seemingly ever-expanding reach of a pornographic assemblage that has only been launched into hyperdrive because of networked internet technologies. The mechanics of the networked internet give a physical structure to the affective idea of an assemblage. The marginal status of pornographic texts, along with examples where becoming pornographic is emphasized, provide opportunities to consider instances where identity is queerly subverted. *Being* gay and *having* sex are politically stagnant modes of being. Conversely, the *ideality* of queerness and the process of *becoming pornographic* speak to the affective potentiality to engage in wider kinetic social assemblages, reaching beyond the prison of the here and now and towards an expansion into queer realms of new political possibilities. Conventional notions of identity formation are upset by becoming. Considering identity, desire, and becoming within a pornographic assemblage is my attempt to articulate the sexual potentiality imbedded within an affect theory framework.

Becoming pornographic also moves us from a false dichotomy where pornography is either a "good thing" or a "bad thing," when in reality, it is *everything*. What I mean is that within the scope of this dissertation, pornography is a primary moving image signifier of affective desire. And since desire is a totalizing force, pornography is also allowed to be framed as a central aspect of one's experience. Anyone who has ever taken a nude picture of themselves,

or has looked at a nude image, has become pornographic. This is due to the fact that once a pornographic image is composed or viewed by a subject, an immediate negotiation begins to take place between needing to maintain subjective coherence in that moment, and an autonomous affective desire that risks rupturing the coherence of one's non-pornographic social assemblage. One is changed by pornography because its becoming situates us simultaneously between two social registers: coherence and desire; becoming means existing within a perpetual state of each. "Polite society" operates on the agreed-upon lie that pornography has no place—or at best, a severely limited place—within the operations of everyday life. However, just like the effect it has on our desires, subjectivity works to hide and repress the role pornography plays within our everyday experience. Pornographic production and viewing—just like affects—are a kinetic experience happening in starts and stops, in covert locations, in public spaces, and anywhere there is internet accessibility.[24] This is how any locale can become pornographic. Due to its kinetic nature, pornography mimics the fluidity of affects; hence, an affective analysis is in order. Conceptualizing becoming pornographic is an effort to explore the omnipresent nature of affective desire and understand what its queer implications are.

The case studies outlined within this dissertation follow instances where someone's pornographic desire has come to play a dominant part in their seemingly non-pornographic social existence. While the rest of us work to hide the role that pornographic desire plays within our public identities, these figures utilize pornography to accentuate queer aspects of their identity formation. While the idea of being a pornographic performer typically consumes one's identity formation within the popular imagination, I instead want to stress becoming, instances where one's pornographic identity intersects with the realms of the non-pornographic. This is how I have come to explore pornography's influence on the concepts of confession, transmedia identity formation, and cityscapes in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 respectively. These are the assemblages where I utilize affect theory to "tackle the simultaneous 'shapelessness' and sharpness of sensation" (Paasonen, 26). And in doing so, I have reached the same conclusion as Sharif Mowlabocus, who writes that "pornography is written into the code of gay men's everyday lives and it continues to

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[24] People are literally moving while watching pornography today! PornHub reported that "visits to the site from smartphones are continuously on the rise. In 2016, 61% of the traffic was from cellphones, registering an increase of 9% from 2015, major of which [*sic*] was stolen from desktops which witnessed a decline of 8 per cent from a year ago" (Sheikh).

shape understandings of the Self and Other in increasingly powerful ways" (61).

While the advantage of affective analysis lies in its ability to capture the resonance of any object, pornography is one of the few visual discourses that still retains the capacity to "shock" and "disgust"—despite how performative the shock and disgust may be. It is within these reactive moments where the affective registers of pornography are most evident. And there is something compelling about the ways in which the figures that I analyze here insist on incorporating pornography as an essential part of their identity formation despite society's pressure to disavow it. This active tension highlights the process of becoming. And it is within these intersections of active identity formation and pornographic desire that affective intensities are most evident. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth highlight this point when they explain that "affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*" (1, original emphasis). Importantly, becoming is a process, one can only understand it while it is happening. Therefore, an extended definition outlining the "rules" of becoming pornographic is somewhat fruitless. Just like Justice Potter Stewart's infamous definition about pornography: "I know it when I see it," becoming must be experienced to be truly understood (Jacobellis v. Ohio). In outlining the chapters below, I hope to hint at how I approach the concept of becoming pornographic, and express how each chapter will expand on its social, political, media, and identitarian potentialities.

Each chapter of this dissertation analyzes an instance of becoming pornographic. Each case study has been chosen because it highlights instances where conventional understandings of gay identity is disrupted by pornography, and as a result, new queer possibilities are enacted. Pornography is the primary genre analyzed because its culturally marginal status within the mainstream media allows for more frequent instances of queer rupture. Chapter One considers what happens when confession becomes pornographic. While confession is a fundamental part of internet culture and aesthetics—the internet might be considered *a machine for generating confessions*—the dynamics of networked confessions are rarely analyzed, especially in relation to sexuality. I profile the pornographic art projects of performers Colby Keller and the Black Spark because their moments of pornographic confession incorporate masks as a primary aesthetic trope. What happens to confession when masks are introduced within a social media age of over-exposure? The answer to that question within the chapter offers a range of alternative queer political potentialities regarding race and our understanding of the surveillance state. This

chapter's theoretical thread expands on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming animal," and considers what happens when this concept comes in contact with Foucault's formulation of the "confessing animal."

Chapter Two asks what happens when a YouTube celebrity becomes a "porn star." Taking Chris Crocker's 2007 viral "Leave Britney Alone" as a starting point, I utilize the theoretical framework of Simondon's "transindividual" to consider Crocker's five-year journey across transmedia platforms that eventually led him to making three pornographic videos. The ideas of transindividual and individuation emphasize identity as a strictly relational concept. Such an affective notion of identity offers unique pathways for understanding identity within a popular internet age where each of us exists within various states across the internet. And each platform inhabited on the internet forces people to mold their understanding of themselves in relation to the audiences they garner on each platform. One can see this in action in our own lives when developing an identity on Facebook intended to appeal to our grandmothers, as opposed to the identity we cultivate on Grindr when looking for sex. Traversing transmedia platforms proves that there is nothing stable about subjectivity. The relevance of Crocker's journey from PG-YouTuber to XXX-rated pornographic performer is in the degree it reflects many other users' experience with the internet—from "innocent" fun, to an exploration of one's identity via the internet, to a livelihood, to pornographic desire. Crocker's attempts to capitalize on his viral fame—from singer, to television personality, to documentary subject, to pornographic performer—result in a type of queer failure that further plunges his social identity into the depths of the unknown and unpredictable. Thankfully for us, this is also the realm of affective potentiality.

The final chapter considers what happens when a Gay Village becomes pornographic. While Gay Villages across the West have always been highly sexualized spaces, my own experience of moving from the posh gay neighborhoods of New York City, to the working-class non-gentrified locale of Montreal opened a range of new pornographic potentialities that I had never experienced before. The difference between the two cities became particularly pronounced regarding the multitude of public television screens within Montreal's Gay Village featuring pornography. These screens point out to the street from businesses, and litter the inside of bars, bathhouses, strip clubs, and sex shops. Couple this with the ways in which hook up apps are used

throughout the village by the people cruising for sex—and the ways in which the Village is portrayed within pornographic texts that travel throughout the globe—and you have what I define as an active pornographic space. Additionally, Montreal is now one of the primary cities in the West where gay pornography is produced and distributed. As a result, gay pornographic performers regularly populate the streets of the Village and are also featured dancers in the strip clubs populating this stretch of rue St. Catherine. Because of this, I highlight my own interactions, and social media engagement with Pierre Fitch, arguably the most popular French-Canadian gay male pornography performer in the genre's history. He makes his home in the Village, and the incorporation of his pornographic aesthetic with his non-pornographic life on social media make for compelling moments of becoming.

I conclude with some thoughts on the discursive potentiality of sexual affects and how this conflation of pornography studies and affect theory might influence my research in the future.

CHAPTER ONE

**Confessions of a Masked Pornographer:**
**Reorienting Gay Male Identity via Bodily Confession**

*Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.*

Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist" (389)

**Pornographic Confessions**

**Voice off camera**: Antonio, how you doin'?

**Antonio Cervone**: I'm doin' pretty well.

**Voice**: Are you nervous at all?

**Cervone**: Umm…this is the first time I've done this before, I mean…

**Voice**: You've done cam work though, right?

**Cervone**: Yeah.

**Voice**: Are you horny?

**Cervone**: Yeah.

**Voice**: Okay, alright, cool.

**Cervone**: Usually am.

**Voice**: Well, let's get your stats. How old are you?

**Cervone**: I'm 24-years-old.

**Voice**: And what do you weigh?

**Cervone**: I'm 145lbs.

**Voice**: Okay, how tall?

**Cervone**: Six feet.

**Voice**: Do you know how big your dick is?

**Cervone**: Eight feet. Oh!

**Voice**: Eight feet!?!?

**Cervone**: (laughing) Eight inches.

**Voice**: You like the boys right?

**Cervone**: Yeah, I like guys.

**Voice**: Okay, what kind of guys do you go for?

**Cervone**: I usually like guys with little…thicker set, or something…or like a little bigger, stockier than I am.

**Voice**: Okay, so like a daddy type, or…(fading out) otter?

**Cervone**: Yeah, I like daddies. I like guys with chest hair. Like, umm…I don't know…what was the one you said?

**Voice**: Like an otter?

**Cervone**: Yeah, I like otters, yeah! Umm…yeah.

**Voice**: And are you a top or bottom?

**Cervone**: I'm a bottom.

**Voice**: Okay, alright. Do you have to have a big cock or just…

**Cervone**: Umm…I don't know, I mean not necessarily. I mean I like a big cock, but, I mean, it depends on what you can do with it I guess.

**Voice**: Right, exactly! Alright, cool! And umm…how often do you jerk off?

**Cervone**: Umm…usually like three, or four, or five times a day, you know.

**Voice**: Okay, alright, so a pretty horny guy!  Where you at when you're doing that?

**Cervone**: Umm…I am…I don't know, I'm usually, like…I don't know, it's when I wake up I'll jerk off like in my bed. Umm…I do my own work, umm…like by a computer, and when I need a break I'll jerk off. And in the shower, yeah.

**Voice**: Alright, nice! Well, let's check out your body and check out your jerk off skills...

(Cervone)

———————

This exchange between pornographic performer Antonio Cervone and the owner/camera man of the website ChaosMen is a prototypical example of how confession has become a foundational aspect of gay male internet pornography. This should not come as a surprise considering that confession solves many production problems. Its currency lies in its ability to act as a substitute for a narrative script, and the subsequent budgeting required for an expansive feature shoot. Utilizing confession as the primary narrative mode of contemporary pornography allows internet studios to produce as many videos as they can in a shorter amount of time, while

showing that they are still interested in offering a compelling story to anchor each scene. Confession is also understood as the primary marker of genuineness, and since pornography's primary motif is to convey the idea that its viewers are witnessing *genuine* sex, confession serves as an ideal complement to the intentions of the genre.

Opening this chapter with Cervone's confession also serves a couple of different purposes; firstly, he performs genuineness quite well—the impulsive laugh upon making the mistake of saying "eight feet" instead of "eight inches" is a dead giveaway—and secondly, because it is an example of the habitual and benign nature of pornographic confessions. Perhaps what is most striking about describing pornographic confession this way is that these adjectives are antithetical to the ways in which we typically think about pornography: *Exciting! Erotic! Stimulating!* Instead, this confessional exchange between the Voice and Cervone is routine, boring, and reveals little about the inner life of the confessant. The tone of the Voice seems as if he is tiredly reading these questions from a prepared script, and additionally, he does not infuse his voice with the sexual excitement that the questions are seemingly trying to tap into. Cervone deserves credit for trying to enliven the exchange by rubbing his genitals through his pants while answering the questions—and retaining a sense of humor while making his professional pornographic debut—however, the physical attention he draws to his penis only makes the words he utters that much more perfunctory. Ultimately, asking about the performer's physical proportions seems redundant considering that we already see what he looks like, and that most viewers are familiar with the fact that the camera distorts their perception of scale. And even with the promise of an eight foot—sorry, I mean eight inch!—penis, when he eventually reveals it, it does not match up to the length and girth of most other prominent performers. Of course, there are other examples where performers testify about their first time having sex, or the "wildest" place where they have had sex, and sometimes those testimonials are more erotic than whatever sex takes place afterwards. However, more often than not, pornographic confession plays out like Cervone's. So, if one considers pornographic confession as being a provocation toward sexual excitement, these types of confessional exchanges feel like a failure.

Pondering this contradiction between the unstimulating nature of these confessions and the erotic excitement pornography provokes, one is left to conclude that their utilization within pornographic texts must serve another purpose. To think of pornographic confessions, or the

genre itself, as only an orgasmic stimulant would be to miss its role as one of the primary moving image modes showcasing and validating gay sociality, material conditions, and sex. That is no small burden for any text to bear! Towards that aim, one can understand the genre's intent to include as wide a range of elements, practices and actors composing what we understand as the assemblage of gay identity formation. Gay male pornography's inclusion of characteristics from other media platforms like music,[25] social media,[26] and stories culled from newspaper headlines,[27] testifies to the genre's eagerness to situate itself as part of the continuity of a mediasphere aimed at the varied interests of gay men. The primary trait linking both pornographic and non-pornographic texts within this mediasphere is the freedom that these platforms allow for people to express themselves via the act of confession. Here sexual freedom is linked to the freedom to confess the "truth" about one's self. Of course, confession's prominence within gay communities stems from its position as the most recognizable act confirming one's homosexuality. We can understand its importance via the practice of "coming out of the closet." The essentialism of coming out is not only marked by a National Coming Out Day (celebrated each year in North America on October 11th to commemorate the 1978 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights), but also affirmed year-round by rhetoric endorsing the idea that the confession of coming out merely confirms the notion that gay people are born with an inherent sexual inclination. So, while confession is situated as a liberatory act, the narrowness with which it is interpreted within gay communities merely constrains confession's potentiality before it has a chance to resound in ways that might contradict these assumptions of sexual determinism. What is lost when we fail to think beyond the limitations of "the closet" (a severely bifurcated understanding reducing us to either *in* or *out*) is articulated by Cesare Casarino when he writes about the "sublime of the closet," and that to attain it, the key is "*not* a coming out. It is rather, an overcoming of the closet" (187, original emphasis). He goes on to explain that:

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[25] Who could forget Jeff Stryker singing over the title sequence of his pornographic debut in *Bigger Than Life* (1986)?

[26] Like YouTube viral sensation Chris Crocker performing in a video with the pornographic duo known as The Maverick Men (detailed in Chapter Two) (*Chris Crocker Fuck It!!!*).

[27] See Chris Steele's parody about Levi Johnston—the man who impregnated former Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin's daughter—titled *Getting Levi's Johnson* (2010).

To come out of the closet also reaffirms the effectiveness and *raison d'être* of the closet…
This is to say that if to come out of the closet may turn out to be also the proverbial
solution that feeds back into the very problem it was meant to solve, as it locks one into
the vicious circle of a perpetually self-reproducing dialectical relay, other types of
solutions need to be pursued at the same time (188).

So, while confession is commonly associated with the idea of freedom, the confession itself is
not free to contradict the scripted nature of the coming out narrative. Reinforcing the discourse
around the idea of "the closet" only limits our potential to think of confession outside of this
mindset.

The importance of confession fitting into a mold is explained by Ken Plummer when he
writes about the formation of "social memories," which he describes as growing out of "gay and
women's movements" that "come to develop their own folklore of stories which get transmitted
from generation to generation, complete with ritualistic days and marches—Stonewall, Gay
Pride, AIDS Awareness, etc.—which help to provide a sense of shared history" (41). In this way
Plummer helps us to understand how confessing one's persecution, pride, and suffering make up
the building blocks of gay identity. And because of confession's outsized role in legitimizing gay
identity, the aesthetics of confession maintain a position of prominence in all types of media
looking to be incorporated within a gay identified assemblage. This is the reason for the
obligatory way confession is used in these pornographic texts. Pornography's use of confession
signals its aspiration to be a fully incorporated piece of the assemblage composing gay identity.
And it is precisely because confession, and the coming out narrative, have become a matter-of-
fact aspect of gay identity within both our networked pornographic landscape and our
contemporary social media environment that their implications regarding our understanding of
gay identity need to be investigated.

In addition to articulating the desires composing a gay identity, confessions also add to
the erotic sense that we as viewers can not only see every physical aspect of someone, but can
also access a piece of their interior emotional life. Pornographic performance is a totalizing
experience. This is how we can understand pornography as a mode eroticizing the concept of
exhaustion. Being centered around the "money shot," pornography fetishizes the idea of
exhaustive finality embodied within the exploration of the physical body, the conclusion of the

orgasm—and, via confession—the entirety of the interior life of the performers. What is so satisfying about the idea of *la petite mort* is an understanding that one has figuratively reached out and touched the bodily limits of their desires. The physical orgasm for a man is desire's finality at that moment. Pornographic confessions rarely distract from its aim of urging the viewer to get off/finish. To that end, pornographic confessions must align with conventional notions of gay male sexuality in terms of relationality and identity, and never undercut the journey to the orgasm. And while participants occasionally expand the boundaries of "normal" sexual practice when they regale viewers with a story about having sex with someone while they were underage, or confess to having sex with their brother (just before they literally have sex with their brother on camera), these moments are examples of highly controlled experiences, consensual couplings, and merely reinforce the erotic scenario taking place. Pornographic confessions are a means to an end.

However, if confession is to be considered a point of analysis, then one must posit these confessions as a starting point rather than an endpoint. Instead of thinking about eroticism within the scope of finalities, Claire Colebrook reminds us that in fact, "the world is *not* an object to be known, observed or represented, so much as a plane of powers to unfold or express different potentials of life" (97, emphasis mine). By enacting Deleuze's concept of "the fold," (*le pli*) Colebrook pinpoints how we might come to understand confession within the mold of the fold, where the act does not reveal a hidden interiority, but instead exposes the degree to which we understand ourselves more so through exterior affective intensities. Within this context, pornographic confession does not so much reveal the degree of one's "true" sexual desire (those confessions are performed corporeally for the sake of the camera) as hint at one's urge to be perceived as sexual, which reveals a performer's desire to tap into the wellspring of sexual affects composing the history and practice of a wider pornographic assemblage. One can read more into an intent than a practice. And it is the intent to tap into these affects that offers us an opportunity to think about confession beyond the limits of performative verbal discourse. By invoking the idea of "the fold" we can also begin to conceive of the role that the body plays in connecting with a wider range of affective registers. Deleuze connects the idea of "the fold" to the body, and hints at its "animal" characteristics when he describes it as:

Life is not only everywhere, but souls are everywhere in matter. Thus, when an organism

is called to unfold its own parts, its animal or sensitive soul is opened onto an entire

theater in which it perceives or feels according to its unity, independently of its organism,

yet inseparable from it (2006, 12).

Thinking of confession in terms of the fold allows us to conceive of the practice's potentiality in a more expansive way. The fold is inherently linked to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming due to the fold's ability to account for a multitude of experientials within affective expressions. The fold is a process of becoming. Deleuze writes that:

The new status of the object, the objectile, is inseparable from the different layers that are

dilating, like so many occasions for meanders and detours. In relation to the many folds

that it is capable of becoming, matter becomes a matter of expression (2006, 41).

Importantly, Deleuze describes an idea of eradicating conventional notions of emotional interiority via the fold through the resonance of affective forces. Situating the body as existing within a relational mode allows us to think of his notion of "becoming animal" as a recognition of how the body facilitates affect through embodying confession. This is how we can understand confession as an attempt to tap into something beyond the limits of verbal discourse.

The aim of this chapter is to expand upon the idea of "becoming animal" to conceive of pornographic confession as more than just a routine, and instead consider it within an affective body. Outlining the dynamics of bodily confession within gay pornographic texts also forces us to productively reconsider the role of confession within our constructions of gay identity and a queer sensibility. To draw a contrast to the type of limited verbal confessions exhibited by the likes of Cervone for professional studios, I will analyze the work of independent producers and performers like Colby Keller and the Black Spark who pointedly deemphasize the role of verbal discourse, and instead embed confession within their bodily pornographic aesthetic. Both performers pointedly de-emphasize the voice and the face by utilizing masks as a visual trope within their work. Doing so reorients our ideas around pornographic confession from something that is verbalized, to something resonating within the body. Formulating a notion of bodily confession within this context is most appropriate, considering that pornography is the preeminent "body genre." What is most compelling about these artists is the way in which their use of masks triggers a crisis regarding the cohesiveness of gay identity by accentuating the

abstraction of queerness. Thinking about queerness as a sensibility rather than an identity brings us back to the notion of "queer opacity" developed by de Villiers. This strikes me as an effective way to think about how masks in pornography act as affective triggering mechanisms. For de Villiers, the idea of queer opacity "allow[s] for the possibility of non-meaning and nonknowledge as 'queer' strategies" (15). Within this framework, pornographic masks ironically force us to read for confessional traits embodied in opacity within a genre dependent on explicit exposure.

## Becoming a Confessing Animal

To be gay is to always already be in the act of confessing. Growing up gay means being confronted with questions that do not yet have fully formed (or even partially formed) answers. Because of this, the verbal exchange of confession frustratingly works to solidify the social position of a body that is actively in tune with the kinetic flows of affective intensities that are continually shaping (and reshaping) bodies and social assemblages. One can see this in action when considering the types of questions a gay person encounters throughout their life, and sometimes even throughout the course of a single dinner party: *Are you gay? Are you bi? Are you trans? When did you know what you were gay? How old were you the first time you had sex? Have you ever had sex with the opposite sex? Do your parents know that your gay? How did your parents react then you told them? Are you "the man" or "the woman" in the relationship? Do you go to gay bars? What are they like?* The degree of fascination on the part of the questioner aimed at finding out about sexual practice cannot help but legitimize Foucault's presupposition that confessional exchange is about finding out if "there is something hidden within ourselves" (1988b, 46). The limited scope of these types of questions is not intended to tap into the desires of the subject, but instead work to establish a foil against which to establish their own parameters for what it means to be heterosexual. This is the sense one gets from the questioner, not so much that they are interested in learning more about you, but that your confessions are being used as a way for them to situate their own heterosexual desires and practices. This leads to an unequal exchange where the questioner is seeking confirmation about their own sexual practices, while the person answering the questions is left to continue their own sexual exploration. This is why being gay means that one's words typically fail them, because

language lacks the ability to express the expansive rage of desires that would defy classification.

While society impresses upon us that the act of confession is the primary way in which we reveal the "truth" about ourselves, confessing conversely activates a social pressure to conform by forcing us to be more conscious about what we are about to say, account for the sensibilities of our audience, and confess in a manner that will emphasize our best qualities. It is astounding if one can recognize themselves at all after confessing! It strikes me that this is what Foucault meant when he wrote that "nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men." (1977, 153). Foucault's assertion that one cannot even rely on their own bodies for a sense of "self-recognition" acknowledges the degree to which one's physicality is incorporated as part of the affective intensities of social assemblages, an actively modulating force that speeds past the boundaries erected by the narrowing practice of verbal confession. Massumi makes this point clear when he writes that "the skin is faster than the word," and this is why a verbal confession fails to capture a coherent notion of the Self, identity, or the body (1995a, 86).

This disconnect between the stagnant verbal confession, and the kinetic and affective body, emphasizes the dissociative nature of "truth" and identity in the negotiation of the difference between verbal and bodily communication. In short, words are always playing catch-up to the body. Perhaps this is why Foucault felt compelled to associate confession with the animal kingdom, a population that does not rely on linguistic cues, and can only use their bodies and howls to express themselves. He does this when he declares that "Western man has *become* a confessing animal [*devenir une bête d'aveu*]" (1990a, 59, emphasis mine). Foucault's figure of a confessing animal here situates becoming as a passive experience, prioritizing the role that confession plays within power relations over any affective desire passing through the subject. Foucault's use of *bête* in the original French emphasizes this passivity with dismissive connotations of "stupidity." Once again, Foucault's dismissal of the affective potentiality of desire is lost due to not thinking of the subject beyond power relations. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow pick up on this point when they consider Foucault's idea of becoming a confessional animal as a way of demarcating a specific period of industrialization where the "systems of classification were elaborated, vast descriptions scrupulously collated, and confessional science, one dealing with hidden and unmentionable things, came into being" (176). For Dreyfus and

Rabinow, we *become* confessing animals in the sense that we become classified, demarcated, and situated within an evolutionary chart via verbal confession. Importantly, this classification prompted by confession emphasizes a sense of disassociation from the lived reality of the confessing body. The confession is not connected to desire, it is always already incorporated within mechanisms of power. Within this formation, our verbal discourse is being classified alongside our "stupid" primitive bodies. Here, desire is lost to power.

I utilize the word "primitive" here to highlight Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion that our "language-game is an extension of primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is behaviour) (Instinct)" (545). Wittgenstein's argument that "words are connected with the primitive" evolves from his allegory of the hurt child; whereupon instead of simply crying when he is hurt, as he gets older "adults teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour" (244). This leads to our normative condition where "the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and *does not* describe it" (244, emphasis mine). While language remains the primary practice through which we conceive of confession, Wittgenstein (perhaps unwittingly) taps into the affective characteristics of language, where its inadequacy in describing pain reveals the wide scope of affective intensities that poetically transcend the mechanics of language. Therefore, one can only understand the full affective scope of confession by understanding language's inability to fully describe it. In the same way that language can only hint at describing the affective life of pain, it is equally incapable of encompassing the totality of the Self. Therefore, when it comes to confession, verbal discourse is merely a primitive "language-game," a game that must be judged against the actions of the body.

## From Confessing Animal to Becoming Animal

The "game" is over once the person confessing has released their words and are subsequently left to contemplate their own body without discourse. It is at this moment when the confessing individual is confronted with what Gerald L. Bruns identifies as one of the primary "regulating questions of recent European thinking: 'who comes after the subject?'" (703). In search for an answer, one would find some possibilities in returning to the animal motif, which is picked up by Deleuze and Guattari after Foucault. One can see a through line between Foucault's analogy of *becoming a confessing animal* and Deleuze and Guattari's idea of *becoming animal*.

The notion of *becoming*—which can be understood as a point of distinct classification in Foucault's usage—is more of an abstract process for Deleuze when he writes that "becoming" is a pure event "whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once" (1990a, 1). So, for Deleuze and Guattari, what comes after the subject is desire, affect, and intensity. Subjectivity happens in starts and stops, just like affect. Therefore, the "animal" within Deleuze and Guattari's formation is just another field of intensity that an affective body can resonate with. Foucault's formation stresses the animal (a loss of subjectivity to power relations), while Deleuze and Guattari stress becoming (individuation and affective resonance). For Deleuze and Guattari the lines of demarcation for subjectivity, desire, and power are not as impenetrable as they are for Foucault. In their understanding of becoming, the "animal" has affective autonomy, and can "…move and pull in both directions at once." This is how one can come to understand how the figure of the animal for Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, operates.

For Bruns, this type of awareness of existing in between affective registers is what provokes a sense of "deterritorialization" wherein "a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity, but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement or into an amorphous *legion* whose mode of existence is nomadic or, alternatively, whose 'structure' is rhizomatic" (703-704, original emphasis). This is the essence of what it means to become animal: a recognition of the futility of subjectivity via language, which translates into a desire to be a part of virtual planes of intensities. The root of this desire for desubjectification is articulated by Deleuze and Guattari when they write that "language is not life; it gives orders. Life does not speak, it listens and waits" (1987, 76). Hence, language has the tendency to turn questions like *Are you gay? Are you bi? Are you transsexual?* into emphatic statements—*You are gay. You are bi. You are transsexual*—that are exemplary of the ways that language hails us into subjectivities and quashes queer sensibilities. This inevitability of subjection is due to the gay community's inherent relationship with confession. An example of this is evident in the rhetoric and practice of coming out of "the closet"—the liberatory "truth" that the act offers—and how this confessional act has become a foundational aspect of what it means to identify as gay. Considering the strength of this bond between confession and gay identity—which is reinforced

by hetero and homosexual neoliberal and nationalist factions—it is no surprise that there are subsequent queer ruptures within media texts challenging this linkage, exemplified by the use of masks in the work of Keller and the Black Spark.

These ruptures represent a recognition within the gay community of the radical potentiality of becoming animal. Shifting the concept of identity from the realm of stability to that of instability through the use of masks is an active aesthetic process of becoming. This can be understood as part of a political strategy intended to counteract a mainstream media environment fetishizing the cohesiveness of gay identity via confession. This approach is also connected to a longer history of masks signifying political subversion (e.g. Guy Fawkes masks worn today by anti-capitalist activists). And in this instance, becoming animal subverts the stability of the homonationalist and homonormative identity utilized by the state to show just how *progressive* contemporary North American society has become regarding homosexuals. This is where one can see the connection between the purposefully contrarian political intentions behind queer opacity (e.g. *not* coming out of "the closet," *not* verbalizing confession, *not* revealing one's face) coinciding with the tropes of becoming animal when Deleuze and Guattari write that "there is no longer man or animal, since each deterritorializes the other, in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum of reversible intensities" (1986, 22). And while the use of *becoming* for Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari exemplifies their differing theoretical intensions (Foucault using *becoming* as a way to illustrate the mechanisms of disciplining categorization, and Deleuze and Guattari utilizing *becoming* as a way to emphasize the flux of a control society), each use the idea of *animal* as a way of emphasizing the body. For Deleuze and Guattari, their affective body represents an enduring impulse to circulate within non-verbal planes of intensities signaling a rupture in the established social structures of identity. For Foucault, the primitive body takes primacy over linguistic games, and for Deleuze and Guattari, speaking of Kafka, "the animal essence is the way out, the line of escape, even if it takes place in place, or in a cage. *A line of escape, and not freedom. A vital escape and not an attack*" (1986, 35, original emphasis). Hence, the idea of becoming animal for the purposes of this chapter will focus on how the idea of bodily confession actively works to utilize the idea of queer opacity to upset the structures of gay identity formation held in place by the practice of verbal confession. This chapter delves into the most marginalized form of media—pornography—in order to find

these moments of animal rupture.

**Pornography Becomes Animal**

Just like queerness, becoming animal is about movement and stripping away the markers of a fixed identity. Deleuze and Guattari expand on this point when they write that:

> To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs (1986, 13).

Perhaps spurred by the era of the selfie—and over-exposure exacerbated by social media generally—a counter movement has emerged within gay pornographic media embracing the aesthetics of transience, opacity, and erasure. And while the over-exposed nature of pornography itself could not exist without fetishizing what is hidden (a fetish that is only satisfied once what is hidden is revealed), some texts within gay pornography are experimenting with enacting the erotic traits in what insistently remains hidden. A performer who embodies this ideal is Colby Keller.

Keller began appearing in studio-produced scenes in 2004, and in 2014 he started fundraising for a pornographic art project titled *Colby Does America* (CDA). Keller describes the project as: "buy[ing] a van, a mattress and a camera and travel[ing] across the country. I'll meet all my amazing fans, blog my adventures, collaborate with other artists and make videos in every state…I plan to make a porn in every state (and whatever they call states in Canada—jk! jk!)" (Keller 2014). He later explained that the process of creating each of these three to six-minute videos requires him shooting the footage himself on site, and then offering that footage to any artist who is willing to edit it for him before he posts it on the project's site, ColbyDoesAmerica. The highly collaborative nature of the project assures that no two videos share the same feel, though of course the inclusion of Keller, gay sexuality, and cheap handheld cameras insure that there is aesthetic continuity. Keller's random journey throughout the countries (scenes are released erratically, and he does not provide a map where viewers can follow him) exploring the exoticism of the forests and lake locales hidden in states and provinces that one presumes to

*longitude and a latitude* know, literalizes Deleuze and Guattari's non-prescriptive invitation to "participate in movement." Keller's engagement with amateur performers—many of whom are discovering their sexual desires on camera for the first time—and his practice of shooting scenes with an amateur aesthetic that is more concerned with positioning the camera in a place that is conducive to the parameters of the locale—rather than utilizing ideal angles to complement the best sex positions—help him to "stake out a path" of his own artistic and sexual desires. However, the practice that best embodies the tropes of becoming are the videos where his co-performers wear a mask throughout the scene. The "path" staked out with this choice is where traditional identity forms "come undone." The use of masks in pornographic texts is not as common in the post-stag era—which makes its contemporary use in a pro-am production particularly disruptive.[28] Seizing on this opportunity to explore the dynamics of the pornographic mask as a "matter of deterritorialized flux," we can work towards deemphasizing the prominence of the face, and instead situate the body as a primary site of confession.

CDA itself emerges from a context of confession, and some might say desperation! Understanding its origins gives insight into the aesthetics of movement, stripping away of identifying traits, and the sense of deterritorialization that encompass the project. In an interview where Keller speaks about what prompted him to start the project he explains:

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[28] Throughout the history of existing stag films (1915-1968) there is no consistency regarding the ways in which masks were utilized. Considering the straight male audience most of the films tried to cultivate, it is unsurprising that most of the masked performers in these stags are men. Joseph W. Slade argues that this analog strategy for hiding the face could be a byproduct of an overall effect to emphasize the erotic nature of the medium's genuineness by accentuating "ineptitude" over technological mastery (37). For Waugh, masks signal markers of delineation. In photos meant for gay male audiences the split in mask wearing is "less common" among the "amazingly brazen" amateurs who pose for nude pictures intended for private circulation as opposed to photos meant for the commercial market (1996, 342). And in stag films for straight audiences, masks emphasize the divide between amateur men looking to hide their identity contrasted against the professional female sex workers they were oftentimes performing with (2004, 136). And while Williams does not address the use of masks within stags directly, she cites an important point by Beverley Brown who writes that pornography is the "erotic organization of visibility" (1999, 49). Williams goes on to explain that "hard core is the one film genre that always tries to strip this mask ["masquerade of femininity"] away and see the visible 'truth' of sexual pleasure itself" (1999, 49-50). This is the structuring logic of *Hard Core*, that pornography's strategy for erotic enticement revolves around an "involuntary confession of bodily pleasure" on behalf of the female (1999, 50). This need for visible evidence of female pleasure is fetishized within pornographic texts specifically because of its hidden nature; in contrast to the externalized ejaculating male penis. So, if what is hidden embodies an erotic charge within pornography, then the use of masks by male performers beyond their functional use should be understood as an attempt to tap into this well of eroticism. After all, a mask draws attention to the mystery of the face rather than to the obviousness of what is exposed. Of course, the political implications behind a masked straight face versus a masked gay face are radically different. However, despite the differences, the erotic allure of what is hidden behind the mask remains the same.

I really needed a radical solution. So I'm just going to get rid of every little thing that I own in an art piece, anyone, anyone off the street, anybody. I can't make exceptions, I need to follow this rule. To the point to where everything that I own someone has taken. Or I've gifted it to them…I got rid of the stuff. [Everything] no shoes, no socks, no underwear. I was completely naked at the end of this project. I was really struggling with how to address my career, and the way most people recognize me, which is though porn. [And] how to incorporate that though my art practice. And you know, part of that is about, you know, exposure, and vulnerability, and nudity. [And] in kind of a jokey, metaphorical way, getting to that place. Really!...It was a really transformative, really moving experience…I ended in this cave in Tennessee, completely naked.

Emerging like a five-year-old child from the cave (Keller 2017).

Invoking the figurative idea of being reborn is a consistent theme in Keller's work. There has always been a sense that he is uncomfortable with being known only for his pornographic performances. Hence, he consistently seems to be reborn into different public personas. In his Twitter blurb he describes himself as an "artist, sex activist, actor." On his blog that brought him notoriety beyond pornographic circles, BigShoeDiaries, he documents his appreciation for the fine arts, and his own art practice that he cultivated at the University of Maryland, where he earned a Masters of Fine Arts degree. He captured social media notoriety within gay circles by originating the hashtag #ISeePenis, where Twitter and Tumblr users have accumulated a series of pictures of seemingly non-sexual objects (like mushrooms, bottles, newspapers and children's slides) that just happen to take the shape of a circumcised penis in some way. The hashtag shows that he does not want to abandon explicit sexuality from being a part of his extracurricular non-pornographic work. While all of these media incarnations can be read as expanding his personal "brand," emphasizing his face and his dick, his performance in a music video for the song "After Dark" (2012) by the band Undercover hints at some of the motifs of erasure he will later explore in CDA when he dons a glittering silver eye mask while looking into the mirror—visually contemplating the fragility of his own identity and the ease with which it can be obscured. Interestingly, Keller does not wear a mask in CDA, but the two performers that do don masks are black. This decision is regressive in terms of racial representation, but is dynamic in terms of how confession works in these texts to expand the parameters of how one thinks about the nature

of gay black pornographic performers.

In the video *Colby Does Kentucky* (2015), Keller has sex with a burley black man wearing a knitted ski mask (Figure 2.1). Throughout the two-minute video a non-diegetic soundtrack of a horse race plays in the background. While this is an obvious reference to Kentucky's most famous annual event, The Kentucky Derby, associating a black man's penis with that of a horse cannot be considered as much more than a lazy visual trope recalling a long racist history of comparing the nature of black men's sexuality to that of a wild animal. The scene of them having sex is intercut with an image of an animated donkey ("donkey dick" being an even more crude variation on "horse dick"), and in attempting to interject "artistry" into the scene, there are continual cuts of horses and nude men culled from the photographic experiments of both Étienne Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge (Figure 2.2). This intercutting not only emphasizes the connection of a black man and a "horse dick" through editing, but also reduces the sexual experience taking place on screen to that of a science experiment. These types of early photographic experiments are ones that Williams contextualizes as part of pornography's prehistory when she equates the fascination with Marey and Muybridge's work as part of the "unprecedented cinematic pleasure of the illusion of bodily motion emerg[ing] partly as a by-product of the quest for the initially unseeable 'truths' of this motion" (1999, 39). So, while this tongue-in-cheek editing gesture might have been intended to amuse, it subtly recalls a time when film was understood as a medium for speaking the "truth" of both science and sex. A history that does not aid in contemporary racial understanding. The clinical way in which the both the horses and men jump in these scenes mimics the emphatic bouncing of Keller on this performer's penis. And the absence of any type of verbal exchange between the two—due to a lack of on-location recoding in this scene—robs the encounter of any eroticism outside of a fetish to see a black man have sex with a white man. Within this context the mask strips the performer of any humanity or agency and adds to the continuing erasure of complex black sexuality by not allowing it to exist outside of a white perspective.

Figure 2.1. *Colby Does Kentucky*          Figure 2.2. Intercutting Muybridge's donkey into
                                                                a gay sex scene.
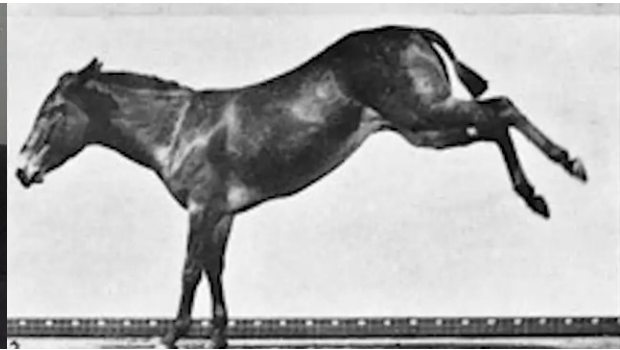
Thankfully, there is a noted change in the understanding of contemporary racial dynamics in *Colby Does Virginia* (2015), even though the black performer in this scene also wears a mask (Figure 2.3). This seems most likely due to the editor of the video, Ulysse St-Pierre, who writes that he "wanted a counter-intuitive edit that would create a story and a mood" (St-Pierre). I assume what he means by "counter-intuitive" is that the video is far more contemplative than erotic. The ominous notes of Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie No. 1* play loudly and emphatically throughout, sometimes drowning out the verbal exchange between the performers. Certainly not a track that seeks to excite its listeners erotically. However, despite the uneven volume of the track, the music connotes a sense of class and refinement that much of the rest of contemporary gay pornography rarely bothers with.[29] This is striking considering that a black performer is featured in the scene. Within gay pornography the characteristics that black performers play up most are their street-wise accents, hip-hop attire (backwards baseball caps, bandanas and do-rags), and ferocious dominance over their white co-performers. Sites like BlackDickFever, ThugVids, and FlavaGold are the most preeminent examples showcasing these traits. Not the type of aesthetic that works in harmony with one of the most iconic pieces within the canon of classical music. And while the music seems to conjure a sense of refinement, it eventually works as a point of contradiction when set against the performer's apartment where the video is shot, which appears to be a basement apartment with a dorm-room-style mismatched arrangement of

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[29] The exception to this rule is the gay pornography studio Cocky Boys. Whose owner and primary director Jake Jaxson frequently evokes an aesthetic closely resembling the tropes of contemporary art cinema, especially that of Terrence Malick. Jaxson went so far as to include Bedrich Smetana's "Vltava (The Moldau)" as part of his production *A Thing of Beauty* (2013). A composition that was also featured in Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011).

clutter, giving the impression of a working-class occupant. As a viewer, one is immediately confronted with this aesthetic opposition that mirrors the contrast of the racial depiction seen here in comparison to both *Colby Does Kentucky* and the websites I mentioned previously. What sets this unnamed performer apart from other black performers are the ways in which he incorporates his personal history, educational accomplishments, and his living space as part of his erotic makeup.

He starts off his confession to Keller by explaining that he was a competitive gymnast and cheerleader. He then talks about attending Harvard University, and explains that despite the clichés about Harvard cultivated in movies and television, that "90%" of his time there was a "good experience." Later, in what would typically be a throw-away line, Keller asks if it is okay if he "moves some of [his] stuff." This allows the audience to know that Keller is moving into this performer's personal space. This line is important because a sense of ownership is lacking for black people on both sides of the camera in the gay pornography industry. None of the top studios is run by black people, and just like in *Colby Does Kentucky*, black performers are oftentimes still silenced, cordoned off into their own segregated sections of websites, and problematically objectified when they have abnormally large penises. In asking about moving his "stuff," Keller shows a degree of respect rarely granted black performers, and in the process, empowers the *mise-en-scène* in a way that threatens the preeminence of the sex taking place. The camera angles used in the scene reinforce this idea by using medium and long shots to capture as much of the whole bodies and their surroundings as possible, instead of utilizing any close-ups of genital insertion. A prominent picture of Jesus Christ hanging on a tall cabinet that the performer leans against while he is being anally penetrated by Keller encourages us to think of the mask as a wearable type of confessional (Figure 2.4). The voice-over of the performer's confessions to Keller while he is facing away from Keller literalize the Catholic practice of not facing one's confessor, and empowers the mask itself as a reflection point where a range of affective registers can emanate as a result of the obscurity that it provides.

Figure 2.3. *Colby Does Virginia*        Figure 2.4. Makeshift porn confessional with Christ looking on.

While the bodily confession here relies on verbal discourse, this example is a productive starting point for thinking about this concept because of what this performer's body represents. As the first documented black graduate of Harvard to appear in gay pornography, the strength embodied in the muscles, the pleasure expressed via moaning, and ownership of his apartment represent a counter-narrative to the imagery of tortured gay black men that are given such prominence in North America. The cohesiveness of this body in *Colby Does Virginia* stands in stark contrast to mainstream media narratives promoting *haunting* stories of the black experience in Ivy League schools (Pitterson 2011), the image of blacks living amongst the *shattered* ruins of formerly prominent cities (Drew 2017), the idea of black people as habitually producing *broken* families (Barras 2015), and the notion that the black community engages in *disjointed* political responses as a result (Moran et al. 2016). So, while Keller attempts to regain ownership of his queer narrative by stripping away his identity signifiers, and accumulating new ones throughout CDA, racial minorities conversely work to attain bodily integrity by enacting their own historical heritage, which this performer does here by recounting his time at Harvard and taking ownership of the pornographic space. The integrity of this black body is ironically fortified here by an aesthetics of opacity that denies projected readings of pain and trauma into his face.

In both videos we can begin to understand the multitude of factors and events that resonate throughout Keller's journey: the black experience, film history, a particular state's identity, classical music, video making, sex, and even the politics of attending Harvard. These varying intensities coalesce into a "map of intensity" that Keller actively creates with this project. By invoking the idea of a map of intensity I am guided by Deleuze's outline of the

concept when he writes that "it is the libido's business to haunt history and geography, to organize formations of worlds and constellations of universes, to make continents drift and to populate them with races, tribes, and nations" (1997, 62). Here we can understand Deleuze making a divide between libido and desire. While desire is affective and becoming, Deleuze's use of psychoanalytic terminology like libido speaks to the ego's need for subjectivity, identity, and nationhood to satisfy a lack. Libido here represents the insistence of the body within our imagination. To tap into the map of intensity one must situate the libido to an appropriate proportion. However, such a process of proportioning is not prescribed. By invoking the idea of "haunting" Deleuze recognizes how libidinal resonance does not transcend the realities of our understanding of the world, but in fact does "[follow] world historical trajectories" (1997, 62). This is how one can gain productive insight into the racial dynamics of *Colby Does Virginia*. To situate this performer as being in an active state of becoming one must acknowledge both his active libido via discourse, and his mask, which disrupts the coherence of identity formation. This active borrowing from both fields—libido and desire—connotes becoming. Recognizing libido enacts the entrenched history of blackness in the U.S. and imbues his contradictory mask with disruptive force. Here we can understand how the visceral nature of affects and becoming are always dependent on their context.

Of course, the most provocative aspect of affects is the ways in which they help us see a world of potentiality beyond the scope of our immediate reality. However, it is impossible to acknowledge the exciting potentiality they conjure without recognizing the destructive ways in which they have been manifested in the past. As Clair Hemmings points out, "the delights of consumerism, feelings of belonging attending fundamentalism or fascism, to suggest just several contexts, are affective responses that strengthen rather than challenge a dominant social order" (551). So, while Massumi argues that today the power of a dominant ideology is diminished because we live in an era where a multitude of ideologies are practiced and recognized; writing that: "it no longer defines the global mode of functioning power. It is now one mode of power in a larger field that is not defined, overall, by ideology," it is essential to remember that the charge of becoming stems from its ability to simultaneously enact both identity (libido) and potentiality (desire) within the same field (1995a, 104). In this respect, one can never completely escape the legacies of one's history.

Therefore, while it is important to recognize Hemmings' declaration that "power belongs to the past," a Deleuzian perspective cannot go so far as her in this respect (power can always be overthrown because power is never so unidirectional) (561). Deleuze recognizes the role that history plays in maps of intensities when he explains that:

> We see clearly why the real and the imaginary were led to exceed themselves, or even to interchange with each other: a becoming is not imaginary, any more than a voyage is real. It is becoming that turns the most negligible of trajectories [e.g. the past, race], or even a fixed immobility, into a voyage [e.g. the mask]…each of these two types of maps, those of trajectories and those of affects, refers to the other" (1997, 65).

Here we can understand how Hemmings' critique about race and power is not as clear-cut as she would like us to imagine. Deleuze never abandons gender, race, or nation. Becoming is the in between space where the past resonates with the future, each enlivens each other, each map refers to the other. In this understanding, both history and potentiality are activated and enlivened by new generations and ideologies. But even given our instinct to continually construct new social maps, we can feel the intensities of the past haunt us in new ways, especially gender, racial, and sexual minorities. However, it is these intensities of the past that subsequently enliven our contemporary affective maps. Therefore, when we consider the small number of black people today involved in competitive cheerleading, or who compose a graduating class at Harvard, the black performer's mask in *Colby Does Virginia* embodies a type of becoming that encompasses both the uniqueness of his social position and his active displacement from the widely accepted historical narratives about black lives that I mentioned previously. One's understanding of the pornographic black experience is modified because of the affective mapping occurring in *Colby Does Virginia*. And the rupture in our racial understanding here can only be understood via the history embedded in maps of intensity.

The affective resonance of Keller's maps of intensity across America lies in the accumulation of affective residue throughout the journey. The events from state to state cannot help but guide, change and influence Keller's experience. As was explained in Keller's confession about the project's origin, its purpose was to set out to engage in a rage of genuine sexual experiences to make up for the stripping away of superficial consumerist goods and his personal emotional baggage. Hence, accumulation is a key aspect of CDA. This point is

somewhat in conflict with one of the foundational aspects of affect theory as understood by Massumi: that affects are autonomous. However, as Deleuze makes clear in his articulation of libido, escaping the framework of history is nowhere near as simple as one might imagine. And for racial minorities who are essentially defined by an educational and structural apparatus defined by a white hegemony, history is both inescapable and an actor in the social construction of racial understanding. So, while affect theory enlivens queerness by counteracting neoliberal ideology, it would be naive to suggest that the ways in which the ideas of affect play out in theory are so easily applied in the real world. No theory is strong enough to erase racial difference in reality. Looking back to Deleuze we can understand that such erasure was never a part of his theoretical goals, and critiques such as Hemmings' are essential for addressing criticisms (like her own) that affect theory attempts to erase racial difference. For affect to be relevant to our understanding of race and sex there needs to be an acknowledgement that the reception of affective forces (and not the affects themselves) are particular, cumulative, and of course individuated. This is what accounts for racial difference. Hemmings speaks to this point when she writes that this type of reading "indicates a return to Tomkins' *affect theory* too, where it is the reinvigoration of previous affective states and their effects, rather than affective freedom, that allow us to make our bodies mean something that we recognize and value" (564, original emphasis). This is part of what remains fascinating about CDA: the journey taken would carry no meaning and lose all worth if there were not some stickiness to the intensities experienced along the way. So yes, while affect is initially autonomous, libido accounts for our conception of affect's ability to linger within the body and allows us to map its trajectory. These masked porn performers in CDA help us to understand that racialized gay identity is perhaps a little sticky, but certainly never stagnant.

**The Politics of the Faceless Pornographic Image**

Examining Keller's social and political intentions with his work are necessitated by the fact that he positions himself as a politically engaged artist. He is a self-described Communist, claims to have worked for a lobbyist in Washington D.C., and articulates his political viewpoints for the express purpose of provoking a reaction. This came to a head in 2016 during an interview with OfficeMagazine when he declared his commitment to vote for Donald Trump in that year's

U.S. Presidential election. Keller explained his reasoning by saying that while he "[doesn't] support or endorse any of his policies," he thought that Trump would be a productive "destabilizing force" that would "escalate the problem" of our corrupt two-party system, and help lead it to its downfall (Silver). Of course, there is no need for me to rehash the obvious negative reaction that Keller's declaration evoked throughout the gay blogosphere. I will just say that the response was swift, angry, and hostile. While there is nothing particularly interesting about Keller's voting preferences, what was compelling about this hiccup within the seemingly linear narrative of universal support for Trump's opponent amongst "rational" gay men was that it hinted at a wider rupture within our understanding of "appropriate" behavioral practices for sexual minorities. Keller's confession disrupts a social class valorizing the tenets of identity politics as a measuring stick for acting "respectably" within "civilized" social circles. And he was not the only gay pornographic performer to publicly declare their support for Trump (Sire 2016; Sunderland 2016). Even women were warned not to step out of line during the election when former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told a crowd at a New Hampshire rally for Hillary Clinton that "there's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other" (McCarthy). It is at times like these where wearing a mask turns into a necessity if one chooses to vote for the "wrong" candidate or follow an ideology outside of the parameters supported by identity politics.

What makes Keller's confession so jarring is that it contradicts the seemingly "progressive" public face of the pornographic industry that typically coalesces around ideals like freedom of speech, gay rights, and racial equality. But of course, there are limits to tolerance when it comes to political party association. The swiftness with which Keller was universally denounced on social media illustrates that the idea of freedom of speech within the industry is only legitimized by those expressing a more liberal viewpoint. And while professional pornography maintains its consistent political viewpoint via its cadre of performers who typically skew towards a Democratic ideology (Harlan)—and express as much on social media (TMZ)—it is mostly only through the diffuse and haphazard realm of amateur pornography that one finds alternative platforms for expressing viewpoints frustrating this "liberal" groupthink narrative.

A platform that does this provocatively well is the social smartphone app Grindr. Grindr is a geolocation-based app where gay men post pictures of themselves and fill in a descriptive

profile to socially or sexually meet other men in their immediate location. While the idea behind Grindr is to facilitate physical meetings between men, in my own experience it is most often used to trade nude pictures with other users, regardless of whether we intend on meeting in-person or not. In this way Grindr has become a primary platform for gay men to circulate their self-pornographic imagery. It is against the terms and conditions of the app to post a nude image of yourself as your profile picture, so all nude pictures are traded via private messaging with other users. Instead, it is through the textual content of the profile where the subversive political nature of the app is on display—and subsequently archived on the website DouchebagsOfGrindr. The site is a collection of Grindr profiles expressing the most politically incorrect, racist, fem-shaming, and fat-shaming descriptions of the kind of people these users are looking to meet. As you can tell from the site's name, the comment sections are filled with people shaming these users for their shortsighted, and racist perspective on their own sexual desires. It is a space where one goes to shame shamefulness. Typical entries on the site will feature profiles that read:

> "I'm a gay GUY! If I wanted to date someone feminine I would be straight and with a girl" (24 Aug. 17)
>
> "I block more Asians than the Great Wall of China" (24 Aug. 17)
>
> "18-25 if your [*sic*] old enough to be my dad don't bother" (22 Aug. 17)
>
> "Avg guy, masculine, happens I like guys. If you open your mouth and a purse falls out please save yourself the rejection. Not looking for a headless torso or a friend with no pic" (21 Aug. 17)

While the concept of the site offers a comforting venue to shame others as a way towards social progress, it simultaneously exposes the ugly underbelly of the false foundation that our contemporary understanding of identity politics is built upon.[30] A common sexuality does not

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[30] Our popular and contemporary understanding of "identity politics" perverts the term's original purpose. It is either interpreted as meaning that racial or sexual minorities are selfishly fighting only for their own interests and abandoning the wider project of intersectional liberation (Lilla). Or, like the mainstream gay rights movement would have us believe, the term is about having all identities be a fully incorporated part of the political mechanisms of state power. However, while this dissertation focuses on the political limitations of identity, it is essential to remember that the original definition of identity politics is a productively radical way of thinking that does in fact deal with the "implications of race and class as well as sex." This notion of identity politics as defined by the Combahee River Collective also makes it clear that governmental politics is anti-liberatory, writing that the "liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy" (Combahee River Collective).

connote a common political cause. Keller's confession only brought this level of honesty beyond the pages of DouchebagsOfGrindr and exposed it to a wider audience.

The last entry where I cited a user who is "not looking for a headless torso or a friend with no pic," highlights a crucial aspect of the site, and connects us to the masked performers of CDA. While my overall description of Grindr might give the impression that the app is as photocentric as Instagram, much of the app is populated with headless profile pictures of torsos, blank profiles, memes, and even pictures of non-sexual objects. Perhaps the prominence of faceless profiles throughout Grindr should not be too surprising considering that the app's logo is a mask (Figure 2.5). In describing the original yellow minimalist hockey goalie style mask with four square teeth jutting out at the bottom, founder Joel Simkhai explains that:

> We looked at this notion of meeting people and the idea is very much a basic human need to relax and to socialize. I went back to primitive tribal arts in Africa and Polynesia. One of the things I saw was these primal masks. It brings us back to basics, primal needs. Socialization is the basis of humanity (Salerno).

Romanticizing the "primitive" and "primal" brings us back to Wittgenstein, which helps us recognize the rhetorical game being played here by Simkhai. Here Simkhai attempts to valorize the genuine "simplicity" of these masks by erecting a foil made up of the signifying discourse of our corrupt contemporary capitalist mode. By doing so he is hoping to capitalize on an inbred nostalgia for a "simpler" past. While his intentions are mostly admirable—even Foucault romanticized the East with his formulation of *ars erotica*—Simkhai's ultimate failure lies in his attempt to essentially trade one mode of signifying traits for another; and in doing so he legitimates both. Ultimately, the question here cannot be the futile search for the "proper" set of signifiers that will bring us back to a healthy "primitive" state; one must instead recognize the futility of signifiers themselves, and their inability to access the affective potentiality beyond the mask or the face. For Deleuze and Guattari both the mask and the face are not standalone or oppositional signifiers, they are part of the same signifying regime. They remind us that, "the mask does not hide the face, it *is* the face" (1987, 115, original emphasis).

What Deleuze and Guattari are referring to is their belief in the futility of signifiers. They write that "there is not much to say about the center of significance, or the Signifier in person, because it is a pure abstraction no less than a pure principle; in other words, it is nothing" (1987,

114-115). In fact, it is the signifier's propensity for a type of pornographic repetition that accounts for this hollowness of meaning: "the sign refers to other signs ad infinitum" (1987, 115). Understood within this context, it is fruitless to try and organize a kind of aesthetic hierarchy of profiles with faces and faceless profiles. There is no facelessness without the presence of the face anyway. Additionally, Grindr's value lies less in its ability to feature "real" pictures of their users, and is more invested in a regime of potentiality as a way of keeping longtime users hooked and attracting future users. Regular users of the app are already aware of the futility of the profile picture. Pornographic performers will oftentimes tweet pictures of Grindr profiles using their images, doing so to either warn people about the fake profile, or point out the humor of the cooptation. This emphasizes the common knowledge that the strength of the profile picture's indexicality has never been strong. This is why exchanging additional pictures via private messages remains such a crucial part of the experience. *How many years ago was this picture taken? Do they look this good in all types of lighting? Are they just sucking in their stomach for an ideal profile picture?* are typical questions racing through one's mind as they begin to analyze the profiles that provide a face picture.

The precarious indexicality of the Grindr profile picture coincides with the app's happenstantial role in exposing the fragility of a gay identity politics movement based on the social status of coming out of "the closet." While coming out has long been recognized as a strategy for formulating a type of *public face* of a sympathetic gay body, this strategy has seemingly lost much of its social energy now that inclusion in the institutions of the military, marriage, and hate crime legislation has become norms in the U.S.. More nebulous struggles like racial understanding, class consciousness, and even gender fluidity are not only harder to stay plugged into, but have met active resistance from many gay people who benefit greatly from the racial, class, and gender inequality fostered by the country's neoliberal ethos. Therefore, if we are to conceive of a contemporary gay body after its been fully incorporated as part of the U.S. neoliberal legal structure, we must also reconceive the role of its *public face* in this new makeup. This is how Grindr's platform for queer opacity via faceless profiles becomes instructive. By actively resisting facial exposure in a gay culture centered around public declarations of coming out of "the closet," these profiles enact a version of queer opacity that productively ruptures the illusion of political unity.

These faceless Grindr profiles also highlight Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about the futility of signifiers themselves. For Deleuze and Guattari the face itself represents an area on the body that is overly imbued with signifiers—to the point of rendering it meaningless.[31] For philosophers prioritizing a body moving through planes of intensities, the idea of a part of the body acting as a facilitator for entrenched political and emotional signification is anathema to their project. They go as far as saying that the face is so "overcoded" and entrenched with projected signification that it is no longer a part of the head, and that the face represents "the inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is from the start" (1987, 171). They explain this phenomenon as "faciality," and describe it as a practice through which we go about conceiving of the entirety of the body within identity and ideological frameworks.[32] Therefore, the faceless Grindr profiles can be understood as an active retrenchment from our established modes conceiving of identity via the face, and help us realize just how prevalent our use of faciality is in this process. Because only through recognizing our reliance of faciality will we be able to transition into realizing the affective potentialities of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari note, "to the point that if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations to become imperceptible, to become clandestine, not by returning to animality, or even by returning to the head, but by quiet spiritual and special becomings-animal" (1987, 171).

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[31] "The head is included in the body, but the face is not. The face is a surface: facial traits, lines, wrinkles, long face, square face, triangular face; the face is a map, even when it is applied to and wraps a volume, even when it surrounds and borders cavities that are not no more than holes. The head, even the human head, is not necessarily a face. The face is produced only when the head ceases to be a part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body, when it ceases to have a multidimensional polyvocal corporeal code—when the body, head included, has been decoded and has to be *overcoded* by something we shall call the Face" (1987, 170, original emphasis).

[32] "But the operation does not end there: if the head and its elements are facialized, the entire body also can be facialized, comes to be facialized as part of an inevitable process" (1987, 170).

**The Faceless Aesthetic of the Black Spark**

The inciting incident for this chapter occurred in late 2010, when a performer calling himself Black Spark began premiering his self-produced pornographic music videos on Xtube. Most of the songs chosen for the videos are contemporary with a healthy dose of digital sounds pulsating listeners into trance-like states (e.g. "Woods" by Boni Iver in *Black Spark Art #12* [2013]) and with occasional pops of bouncy dance tracks (e.g. "Cards to Your Heart" by Groove Armada in *Dance in My Heart Now* [2015]). The prominence and relevance of the music alone would have been enough to mark a monumental change in pornography aesthetics that have relied on the monotonous droning of uninteresting background music for decades, and in the internet era where individual scenes have abandoned music all together, preferring the diegetic sounds of the body to provide the soundscape. However, the most intriguing aspect of the videos is that Black Spark wears a bandanna or mask over his mouth and nose, hiding at least half of his face in all his videos—and never reveals his identity (on or off camera) throughout any of his productions (Figure 2.6). When he or his fellow performers wear an ornate mask it is in the style of the ones featured in the mysterious costume ball scenes in the movie *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). With this series of pornographic music videos, suddenly the genre that exists explicitly to exploit every crevice of the body, was provocatively hiding the body's primary transmitter of affect and pleasure.



Figure 2.5. Original Grindr logo



Figure 2.6. The Black Spark

There were strategic reasons why Black Spark made the decision to cover his face. Perhaps because of the mystery caused by his obscured face—and the resulting sensation it caused throughout the gay blogosphere—he gave a series of interviews explaining some aspects of his videos to clarify what his intentions were. His reasons for wearing a mask ranged from the

functional (he did not "want the Black Spark to hinder [his] large-scale future plans in film"), to the emotional (his "work is driven by what [he] feel[s]") (Crook). The latter is an important point, because while the mask immediately connotes a sense of performativity and artifice, the *mise-en-scène* consistently builds up an inventory of sexual desires being fantasized and acted out in front of the camera. His aesthetic assemblage is both consistent and revealing. Besides the familiarity of the music's tone from scene to scene, the videos are populated by a recurrent cavalcade of men with physiques seemingly ripped out of an Abercrombie & Fitch catalog, all white, young, hairless, and possessing rolling mounds of abs going on for as far as the eye can see! This is actually quite a feat because of the way it bucks trends in an age of amateur pornography increasingly populated by the most diverse range of body types and racial match-ups in the history of the genre, brought about by the accessibility of internet connected cameras. His insistence on a body type typically reserved for those who make professional use of their local gym and health food store, could surely point to his preference in men (who would not want to have sex with someone in such great physical condition, at least once? [e.g. *Sunday Faith* (2014)]).

In the same way, Black Spark's approach to lighting emphasizes what is hidden as a way of opening up a multitude of avenues for interpretation and confession. He does this primarily by using various colors of LED lights in otherwise darkened rooms to create strikingly half-lit figures that reorient familiar body types into new shapes and illuminated patterns (e.g. *Black Spark Art #4* [2013]). This lighting scheme is antithetical to the typical intense key lighting that shines on all pornographic performers in professional productions, leaving very little to the imagination. The lighting in the Black Spark's videos provocatively gives us permission to question the typical lighting scheme of pornography, something that is typically taken for granted in videos that strive for a professional look. Because of how the Black Spark breaks the taken-for-granted approach to lighting, we are subsequently invited to question the indexicality of both his own partially lit performers and the fully lit figures we are accustomed to seeing throughout the rest of the genre. In Black Spark's videos we instead think about his sparse lighting as a motif intended to connote the idea that the genre can actually be one in which bodies are gradually discovered as performers slowly and erratically emerge out of the darkened shadows, instead of being figures that are always already exposed. He challenges us to see that even

pornography can be a site of potentiality, that there is still something about the body yet to be explored. This creates an exciting sense of discovery in the Black Spark's videos where we can feel what he might be feeling regarding sexual excitement and experience; that we are discovering new aspects of the director's sexual desires as he is realizing them on camera with his wandering LED light. This feeling aligns with his admission that the videos served as "an outlet to share my innermost desires. I had secrets that were eating me alive, and at one point I wanted to go to therapy. But I found my own therapy through making these movies" (Sire 2011).

While Black Spark's sexual satisfaction is evident through his direction, erections, and "money shots," he testifies that his therapeutic salvation was found through his impulse to "share" part of himself with a wider community. This impulse is less about conforming to the conventionality of confession, but more about sharing the experience of sexual and self-discovery. This is where the role of the mask becomes evident. In positioning the videos as a type of therapy, they can be understood as a type of self-exploration. Black Spark's subjectivity is ruptured due to the secrets "eating him alive." This sense of alienation implies a need to rediscover the Self. The mask represents this drive to explore the Self as if it were anew—there is no *old* (face) to return to. And the bodily confession as manifested within the pornography shares this process of becoming. The dark lighting in many of the scenes also emphasizes the process of discovering the mysteries of someone else's body during sex. In addition to sharing the feeling of discovery with a lighting strategy that links his own erotic curiosity to his viewer's, he also engages in a more literal type of sharing when he shifts his sexual performance from the intimacy of his apartment to the public places of Chicago, like when shooting in an adult video store or in a snowy alleyway. Situating pornography within a cityscape taps into a longer history of gay pornography that channels a neorealist practice of utilizing the city as a way of emphasizing the wider range of affects intersecting within a sexual assemblage (Escoffier 2017; Strub 2016).

One might wonder if Black Spark is betraying his anonymous persona by giving away the specificities of his hometown, the financial means behind the equipment he uses, the places he shoots in, and by granting interviews describing his own work. However, because of the ephemeral nature of pornography I think there is a case to be made for the need to explain the motivation behind one's work if there is a desire to have the public pay attention to it within a

floodtide of texts, and pique the audience's interest in the aesthetic motivation behind the videos. Elucidation does not nullify anonymity. And if it were not for the interviews we would have missed out on one of the most important insights for his videos: his declaration that in fact his work is "not porn" (Crook). Now of course, we could reject this claim with the judicial definition of pornography—"I know it when I see it"—but I think that there is a more essential aim embedded within this statement. Sure, while the oral and bareback sex featured in the videos testify to the normalized aesthetics of pornography, the insistence that these videos do not belong to the wider genre of pornography—along with the masked performers—contributes to an aesthetic of opacity that is in a dynamic interplay with a confessional assemblage. Black Spark strips away the markers of identity to tap into a more personalized and affective notion of confession that is not reliant on the politicized articulation of words within the text. For him, music, places, lighting and bodies provide just enough indexicality to hint at a relatable assemblage of gay male iconography, while also aspiring to create something beyond those parameters.

**Queer Opacity as Confessional Aesthetic**

While Black Spark's verbal confessions reliably situate the videos as a therapeutic strategy, his directorial strategy conversely utilizes the aesthetics of opacity as a confessional strategy compellingly challenging conventional notions of gay identity formation. By robbing the audience of the opportunity to conceive of his identity via his face, he upends the foundational Balázsian notion that the "psychological interiority" of a person is to be found primarily within the physicality of facial movements (Balázs). By doing so, the Black Spark encourages us to heed Eugenie Brinkema's idea that the totality of *mise-en-scène* includes "reading for what is put into the scene," but additionally reading "for all of its permutations: what is *not* put into the scene; what is put into the *non-scene*; and what is *not enough* to put into the scene" (46). This type of reading allows us to tap into both the queer and affective identity traits that are evident in the video, but *do* necessitate our venturing into paratexts to contextualize Black Spark's aesthetic of opacity.

Emerging from a media environment fostering a reactive and juvenile understanding of gay identity exemplified by YouTube's "It Gets Better Campaign," and Lady Gaga's rhetoric that

gay people are "Born this Way," the Black Spark's debut onto the gay scene reintroduced a sense of mystery about what it means to be gay by emphasizing a queer aesthetic of opacity. Black Spark's aesthetic defiance of these mainstream concepts of gay identity might be understood as a visual representation of the anger felt by Foucault when he spoke of the struggle against subjection, or what "categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes *a law of truth* on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him" (1983, 212, emphasis mine). These "laws of truth," or the stability required by social pressures to maintain a coherent identity formation, are antithetical to the mode of queerness. And while "It Gets Better" and "Born This Way" rely precisely on this type of fixed, declarative, and stagnant notion of what it means to be gay—just look at how the public act of coming out is framed as announcing the "truth" of your sexuality—Black Spark emphatically works to obscure, hide and keep secret his identity to cultivate an aesthetic of queer opacity. De Villiers situates the concept of queer opacity as a reappropriated notion of a "style of living," standing in stark contrast to rhetoric like "Born This Way," which relies on the idea of an overdetermined way of living. This idea of queer opacity is crucial considering that we have entered a social media age of over-exposure, which means that simply making the gay experience visible is no longer a queer act.



Figure 2.7. *Fag Face Mask*. Part of Zach Blas' "Facial Weaponization Suite" project, 2011-2014.

As a reaction against the indexical "truth" of the face, artist Zach Blas literalizes this idea of queer opacity into his art project *Facial Weaponization Suite* (2011-2014). In it, Blas has created a series of masks meant to counteract facial recognition technologies installed as part of security cameras, retina scans, Facebook, Google facial identification, and of course, the largest deposit of facial images—the U.S. State Department. As you can tell from the title of this mask (Figure 2.7)—the "Fag Face Mask"—there is a particular queer aspect to this project. Blas' interest in this project stemmed from a 2008 Tufts University study where 90 subjects were shown pictures of 90 faces against a white background—to hide distracting identification traits like hair, tattoos, and glasses—it turned out that the subjects were highly successful in identifying which faces were classifiable as "gay," even when being shown a face for only 50 milliseconds! Blas' project situates queer opacity as a way of counteracting corporate and nationalist rhetoric of willingly subjecting one's face for commercial and security purposes all for the sake of "convenience" and "safety." Blas articulates that this project "weaponize[es] the face through masks," and in doing so adopts an "anti-politics, anti-state, anti-recognition… politics of escape" (Blas). He explains that there is a "burgeoning political investment in opacity, imperceptibility, and escape" and that he is "exploring a queerness that invests and takes seriously such refusals of recognition and visibility; here, queerness is an illegibility or opacity, a refusal that remakes visibility and regimes of recognition outside of standardization through speculative and utopian experimentation and fantasy" (Eler).

It is interesting that Blas utilizes the word "fantasy" within this highly-politicized context. Pornography is also founded on the idea of fantasy. And while the contrast between the highly politicized nature of Blas' work stands in stark contrast to the apolitical, and at times problematic, politics of Black Spark and Keller, each is an example of how fantasy can help us traverse sexual and political "lines of flight" beyond what we can imagine in our physical world. These artists' examples illustrate how tapping into these potentialities depends on deconstructing the preeminence of the face. By exposing how the face is connected to the same verbal and emotional regime of discourse, these artists not only reposition the body to the forefront of sexual fantasy, but also help us understand the primacy of the confessional body as a vehicle for navigating a wider range of affective potentialities.

**"I have nothing to admit"**

While the fantasy created within these pornographic texts becomes realized as an impulse towards opacity for these artists, it is important to remember that the origin of de Villiers' study is the real lives of Foucault, Roland Barthes and Andy Warhol—all of whom were gay men embodying queer opacity by:

> "shak[ing] off" the closet and the epistemological, ontological, and political presuppositions on which it is based…by…relocate[ing] themselves against the massively overdetermined rhetoric of the truth, of secrets revealed, of bringing into the light, of clarity, of transparency, hence of confessional self-inspection, of self-rectification (3-4).

This is how de Villier's recognizes queer opacity stemming from a way of life, rather than solely from aesthetic practices. As de Villiers' makes clear throughout his study, the lines drawn between the "real" and the aesthetic are porous, and hence useful sites of dynamic conflations and contradictions. However, an essential difference between de Villiers' subjects and those I document in this chapter are the eras in which these people were raised. Western attitudes towards homosexuality during Foucault, Barthes and Warhol's time were much different than they are for Cervone, Keller, Black Spark, and Blas. Each of these older figures engaged their world-wide fame to compellingly fuse a closeted past with a newly aroused post-Stonewall period of gay activism birthed during their middle age. Each playfully structures a public persona combining both sides of their life-experience with a type of contrarian politicized existence via opacity. For my younger set of case studies, this confessional act of coming out has lost much of its political potency. They never knew of a time when homonationalism was not a fully incorporated part of Western ideology, never had sex without an awareness of AIDS, and grew up in a media environment where a neoliberal ethos of "inclusivity" was flourishing thanks to its institutionalization by corporate Human Resources departments. These changes mean that North American society has shifted from past generations where coming out was mostly forbidden, to a new generation where coming out is a given. With this being the case, how can we account for how these changes impact our contemporary notions of opacity and coming out, and how does this affect our ideas around gay identity construction?

While the performers in this chapter utilize masks as part of their identities after years of working in the pornography industry, studying in school, and art practice experience, I think it is important to contrast that with a subject who is far less considered and methodical in their actions. Someone who allows for their impulsive affective body to rise to the surface without consideration for the "refined," "proper," and highly aestheticized role of gay people within our neoliberal structure. Someone whose politics must be inferred because they are not explicitly stated. Doing so allows us to closely analyze a more typical online life of someone within a generation where coming out is no longer the primary signifier for being gay. And while many of the performers in this chapter are comfortable with producing work for a niche audience, it is essential to consider how an alternative realization of gay identity formation is framed within the popular media, and subsequently within the wider gay imagination. This is the focus of the next chapter. However, before that, I think it is important to establish my own perspective on what it means to be a part of a generation where coming out was a given, and how my own experience shapes my political outlook toward confession and the subsequent formation of identity that follows.

Personally, I have never really understood all the hype that much of Western society projects onto the idea and practice of coming out of "the closet" to another person. Perhaps this is due to my own experience of coming out to my mother when I was 16-years-old, which was so happenstantial and inconsequential. She simply asked me if my best male friend was my boyfriend. I told her that he was not because "he's straight." Like many parents, she was not so much cluelessly trying to find out if I was gay or not, but was merely waiting for me to confirm her suspicions. This "foundational" confessional practice of coming out that is situated as the primary linchpin of a gay identity was for me more ordinary than revolutionary.

So, while mainstream media, and popular gay rights groups have been working for half a century to situate this one-on-one confessional declaration as an essential confirmation of a pop "Born this Way" ethos, this rhetoric ignores the intense affective interactions that people have with media objects long before coming out to another human being. The relationships we foster with, and through, media texts and platforms are oftentimes a part of our first solo sexual experiments, help to facilitate our first in-person sexual encounters, work as outlets for our sexual desires, and foster opportunities for us to confess aspects of ourselves to ourselves and to

other people—including strangers. The popular internet era marked by wide accessibility to the internet within North America, and the subsequent innovations of Web 2.0, where web transactions became interactive rather than unidirectional, added yet another platform through which confession could be manifested, received, and subsequently manipulated.

My generation is perhaps the last that does not take these types of sexualized confessional interactions with media forms for granted. I am of a generation that came of age in an awkward transitional period where memories before the popular internet age are faint but vivid, and the emergence of the internet coincided with an immediate pubescent hormonal tumult. I remember my family excitingly testing out our first AOL CD-ROM, delivered in the (snail) mail—our gateway to the internet in 1995—at 13. I could not have imagined then just how profound an impact this technology would have on not only myself, but also my family dynamic. The same AOL chatrooms where my father would chat with other sports fans would later in the evenings transform into the chatrooms where I would have my first conversations with other gay people. I never needed to confess to these anonymous usernames that I was gay, it was just a matter of fact. Legitimizing the worth of this machine based on its ability to facilitate my confessions elevated its status in my own mind as an important new addition to the family, like a new pet. This made my efforts to ensure time with the computer away from the rest of the family an essential priority, because this was not only time for emotional confession through typing but also time to engage in a type of sexual confession through watching pornography. At its core, confession is an admission, and being able to admit to one's own sexual pleasures by enjoying it being reflected in pornography is its own type of self-admission—a confession. These experiences with pornography before coming out are surely part of what made my subsequent declaration to my mother so anticlimactic. How could it match up to my first encounters with pornography on the web? I can still remember watching the erotic loop of these two "perfect" Bel Ami boys making love to each other. The libidinal intensity of this moment for me represents a lingering memory lasting longer than most any of my own face-to-face confessions. In comparison, my confession to my mother was so much less visceral.

Part of what keeps this experience so live for me is that the interactive nature of the internet triggers a more immediate recognition of how one's sexual desires are part of a global circulation of affects shared, experienced, and indulged in via transnational digital platforms. The

dominant terminology at the time—*America* Online, the *World* Wide Web—testify to the affective geography embedded within the framework of the internet. Of course, this idea of global connectedness via technology did not begin with the internet. Discourses around the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, home video, ad infinitum all preceded what was to come with the internet. Even after many pornographic experiences with the internet, another of my lingering memories is staying up past midnight on an early October night in 2000 just so I could listen to (and record on audio tape!) the premiere of Radiohead's third album *Kid-A*, on New York City's 92.3 K-Rock station. Sharing a collective moment of musical bliss with fellow New Yorkers from the privacy of my own bedroom was an experience of non-internet connectedness. What connects this primal scene with Radiohead to pornographic experiences, is an active awareness in the indulgence of pleasure along with masses of people connected by technology. What would have been isolated experiences fostered by a networked community in the past (e.g. a bootleg music tape, pornography circulated within a brown paper bag brigade), now incorporates simultaneity as part of the erotic aspects of the internet. It is this drive towards immediacy and simultaneity within digital networks that moves us away from fetishizing the precious material collections of analogue archivists, and instead encourages us to indulge in the desires of floating through a digitized morass.[33] This shift in erotic sensibilities prompted by the expanded connectivity of the internet realizes Simondon's assertion that "the opposition drawn between culture and technics, between man and machine, is false and has no foundation" (2017, 16). Simondon's declaration is literalized in the ergonomics of masturbating in front of a computer. It takes little effort to situate a three-pound screen connected to a massive hard drive as the phallic representation of aroused genitals. The proximity of the two leave little room for interpretation. Being so physically and affectively invested in this pornographic moment mirrors what Arthur Kroker situates as Deleuze and Guattari's own "epochal confession for the age of the hyper-modern: the confessional statement of 'bodies without organs'" (108).

Ultimately, when confession is situated as a practice working to reveal the "true" interiority of a subject, it presupposes that discourse can function to effectively narrow and control our understanding of a subjectivity. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, such a concept

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[33] I expand on this idea of desire being embedded in our clicking from website to website in "From Flow to Float: Moving Through Porn Tube Sites" (2016a).

merely describes the "'black hole of dead subjectivity" (Kroker, 110). For them—and the subjects in this chapter who actively aestheticize the idea via masks that identity and subjectivity are "black hole(s)"—the assumed preeminence of the face, and the discourse legitimizing it, is a dead end. The intention behind "bodies without organs" is precisely to de-emphasize these types of stagnant notions of subjectivity centered around interiority, and instead argue that the body is in tune with an external realm of social intensities.

Deleuze expands on this idea when he explains that "there is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It can be compared to an electrical connection. A body without organs" (1977). This is how we can come to understand confession as something that exists outside of our body, and a fully incorporated part of wider social affects. After all, this must be the case if the confessional act of coming out was able to attain such prominence in the first place. Coming out does not reveal anything about an individual, these confessions merely work to swallow one's subjectivity into a wider gay narrative. It is the community that is reinforced by coming out, not the individual. In this era of over-exposure and hyper-confession, we are seemingly reaching a point of exhaustion regarding the utility of confession. Confession is practically coming out of our pores! Even before our current era, one can feel Deleuze expressing a type of impatience regarding the state of confession in his own time, writing that:

> As for the bunch of you, you are still busy provoking, publishing, making up
> questionnaires, forcing public confession ("admit, admit…"). Why should we? What I
> anticipate is just the opposite: an age of clandestine-ness. Half voluntary and half
> obligatory, which will shelter the new born desire, notably in politics…Thus I have
> nothing to 'admit'" (1977).

This liberating declaration about having "nothing to admit" speaks to the contradictory *fait accompli* of confessional practice today: a ubiquitous part of our modern media aesthetic, that has all too often been ignored. "I have nothing to admit" can be understood as a transition from a Foucauldian understanding of a Medieval/Victorian notion of confession that was ordained by disciplining institutional powers like the Church, the medical field, and the law, to a broader understanding of confession as an intuitive part of a control society valorizing technological liberation—while those same technologies actively work to limit radical possibility.

Situating confession within the framework of a control society is a crucial part of understanding its dynamic power in our popular internet age. Imagining that our understanding of confession can remain steady within this transitional moment is incongruent with progress. Affect is an essential part of understanding a control society because affective desire exists outside of the Foucauldian conception of a discipline society. For Foucault, sex and confession are products of power relations. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire's autonomy recognizes a range of intersecting power relations, ideologies, and affective registers at play. Massumi describes the conditions of a control society when he writes that:

> Affect hold[s] a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology. For although ideology is still very much with us, often in the most virulent of forms, it is no longer encompassing. It no longer defines the global mode of functioning power. It is now one mode of power in a larger field that is not defined, overall, by ideology (1995a, 104).

This is how confession and affects can be thought of as moving through a wide range of ideological assemblages. How this impacts our understanding of the context of identity and sexuality within a control society is explained by Jasbir K. Puar when she writes that:

> while discipline works at the level of identity, control works at the level of intensity... identity is the intensification of bodily habit, a returning forward of the body's daily affective sensorial rhythms and vibrations to a disciplinary model of the subject, whereby sexuality is just one form of bodily capacity that's being harnessed by neoliberal capital (2012b).

For Puar, within a range of intensities, identity and sexuality are autonomous affects. Each intensity is capable of its own ideological make up. Herein lies the complexity of confession as it relates to identity. While the queer potentiality of the masked performers in this chapter speak to a minoritarian strain of resistance to the all-encompassing nature of social media "selfie" culture, and a gay social movement still reliant on identity signifiers, we must train ourselves to recognize, and be literate in, how easily the dynamics of a control society also enables ideologies subverting queer ideality—like justifying one's vote for Trump! Additionally, because of desire's autonomy within a control society, "truth" can in no way be inherently linked to confession.

So, if there is a queer affective resonance to be read via the opacity of a masked performer, how do we interpret that body once the mask comes off? If affect is pre-conscious and

pre-verbal, how can we go about accounting for the sounds and words emanating from the body? What happens when someone's response to a multitude of social ideologies is an equally profusive physical and verbal response that does not fit within the typical realms of "rational" and "cohesive" communicative speech? This are some of the questions considered in the next chapter. The lessons learned about bodily confession from this chapter are transposed to the following chapter, where I profile a social media figure who utilizes both their body and voice to queerly subvert contemporary notions of both transmedia and queer identity formation.

**Boy in Machine**



Figure 2.8. *Boy with Machine*,
Richard Lindner (1954).
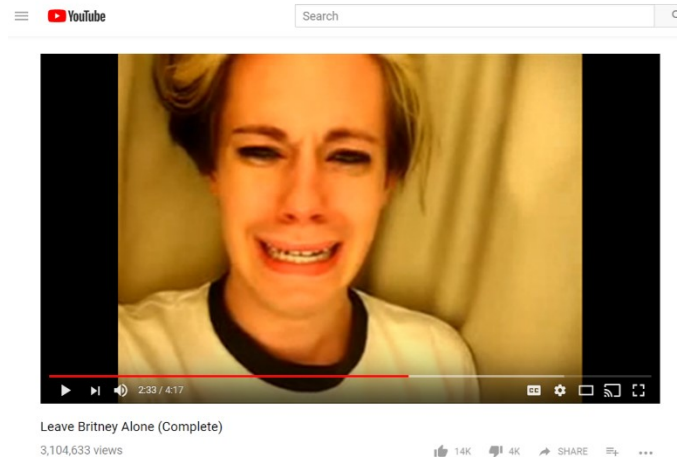


Figure 2.9. "Leave Britney Alone,"
Chris Crocker (2007).

When writing about the painting *Boy with Machine* (1954; Figure 2.8), Deleuze and Guattari describe the boy in the foreground as an "enormous undifferentiated object" with "No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No esophagus. No belly. No anus…the full body without organs" (1983, 7-8). Kroker takes the next logical step and declares the figure "a boy without sex" (104). These characterizations should not be understood as attempts to dismiss humanity, but instead as allegories illustrating how our desires are actually part of a wider circulation of affects contributing to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "desiring-machines." Desiring-machines connote the ideological, social, or technological assemblage in which desires circulate. And while the boy in this painting can be understood as being in a state of affective becoming with

the technological world around him—thanks to his inhuman characteristics and his blending into the mechanical background—the one aspect that remains unaccounted for in this image is his voice. This character's audible absence helps us to recognize that the spoken voice in contemporary media is what carries confession from the realm of the virtual into the actual.

In our contemporary mediascape we have transitioned from *Boy with Machine* to what we could call *boy in machine*. The ubiquitous outline of a screen framing a confessional voice is a foundational aspect of YouTube content. Making the voice a crucial part of *boy in machine* is my attempt to account for the humanity of the subject while simultaneously acknowledging the becoming enacted through the technological platform through which it is delivered. The reason *Boy with Machine* is an ideal example of a "body without organs" is its inability to talk back. However, we must dare to take on the talking subject, and all the contradictions that arise from such subjects. Analyzing subjects that can talk back will always frustratingly reflect back the limited range of relational possibilities and discourses available within our neoliberal social assemblage.

Most importantly for my purposes, I prioritize the sex within "a boy without sex." Regarding Kroker, he surely was not dismissing copulation (he most likely intended "without sex" to mean without genitals), but rather meant "a boy without sex" as a provocation. Such a provocation highlights how both affect and a "body without organs" are intriguingly caught in between a recognition of the sexual self and how that sexuality is delivered through a wide range of media platforms. Kroker explains it as:

> The social machinery of desiring-production, having completed its consummatory feast, finally speaks…This is the confession of all the humanoids, of beings half-flesh/half-metal, who, speaking from *within* the closed, liquid textuality of technology, ruminate longingly, and romantically, on a past in their telematic future (108, original emphasis).

One subject that fits well into this mold of *boy in machine* is the viral YouTube sensation Chris Crocker (Figure 2.9). Crocker came to the plugged-in world's attention in 2007 after he took to YouTube to react against the negative attention social and mainstream media heaped upon Britney Spears after her lackluster MTV Video Music Awards performance that night. The anger he expressed as a fan of Spears toward those who were criticizing her helped to dissolve

the line between a fan and a celebrity. Crocker then became a celebrity in his own right when this video titled "Leave Britney Alone" accumulated 11 million views in just two weeks. The virality of the video took Cocker's yelling, crying, and pleading out of context, and turned his image into a type of floating signifier that would be circulated, mocked, and parodied throughout the mediascape. Indexical markers like tears would be questioned for their genuineness due to their over-exposure. And his subsequent forays as talk-show guest, singer, documentary subject, and pornographic performer exemplify the ways in which a *boy in machine's* "half flesh/half-metal" subjectivity is continually/productively rendered as a transindividual in flux.

One of the most humbling lines of Crocker's defensive rant about Spears is when he yells that "she's a human!" Oftentimes when reading media theory it can seem as if the human element is minimized in an effort to make the theory work. I want to be able to utilize theory in a way that works with the subject, and takes their words and actions seriously. This is the aim of the next chapter focusing on Crocker. Taking Crocker seriously is rare considering that he is a figure who reached the height of his viral notoriety by becoming the butt of jokes. He became the face of an imagined weirdo who spends too much time on the internet, and cares too much about popstars. Interestingly, with all of the discourse surrounding Crocker at the time he went viral there was no talk about him coming out of "the closet." He is someone who was always already out of "the closet." And his pathos did not emerge out being trapped in "the closet," but grew out of empathy with a popstar. The people mocking him might not have known what to make of a subject actively flouting conventions regarding the role of confession and "appropriate behavior" regarding gay identity formation within our neoliberal social assemblage—or might have been homophobic. By analyzing Cocker within his transmedia context, I hope to reveal just how a contemporary gay life online exposes the contradictions embedded within older ideals of what it means to have an "appropriate" gay identity and show how an identity assembled from a relational realm of circulating affects forces us to rethink gay identity formation in the popular internet age.

CHAPTER TWO

**An Amplification of Being:**
**Chris Crocker and the Becoming of a Transindividual *Porn Star***

*We consider individuation to be life itself.*

Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual" (1992, 309)

**Who is Chris Crocker?: A Question of Identity**

"Who is Chris Crocker?" This is the most common response I receive when I tell people that I am working on a star study of the infamous gay YouTube celebrity. When I respond by reminding them that Crocker authored 2007's "Leave Britney Alone" (LBA [2011]) video, where he hysterically defended Britney Spears after media outlets criticized her lackluster performance of "Gimme More" (2013) on the MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) the night before, that is usually enough context to reawaken any lingering memory of the fugacious "viral" sensation. That many people can recall Crocker so long after the media frenzy that engulfed him has faded away is not particularly surprising. After all, in addition to the 11 million views that LBA accumulated in its first two weeks on YouTube, it has subsequently been watched over 40 million more times.[34] Yet despite the video's notoriety, it continues to provoke more questions than answers.

For those who are unfamiliar with its context, repeated viewings of LBA leave observers more curiously entranced by the degree to which Crocker embodies Spears' persecution from the media, and subsequently expresses it as his own. He provocatively dissolves the normalizing divide between fan and celebrity. LBA does not offer contextualization, just visceral reaction. In LBA one does not *see* Crocker as much as they bear witness to the collective affective trauma of Spears' fans around the world reacting to the VMA backlash via Crocker. Therefore, even for

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[34] That is until September 2015 when he deleted his YouTube channel without warning. He later explained that the comments on the site had become "very toxic and can break even the strongest of the strong down. But ultimately you gotta have joy out of doing it. As long as you enjoy sharing them on that platform the more power to you! I just lost the joy out of sharing there…But I am so happy in a way to inspire you!" (Tharrett). This will explain the missing citations for some of Crocker's quotes from YouTube throughout the chapter. However, if Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (2002) has taught us anything, it is that careful notetaking and memory can aid in effective analysis!

viewers who have a better understanding of the video's context—and of Crocker himself—the video frustratingly resists offering obvious clues that might help us answer the question: "who is Chris Crocker?" While Crocker's tears carry an indexical weight, his crying on cue casts doubt over the genuineness of his perfectly timed, camera ready, feelings. And because this video spread across the internet on its own—without the context of his other videos—LBA situates Crocker as a persona who is continually *out of context*.

And in the case of Crocker, the *context* is continually changing; he was not satisfied with just being a one-trick YouTube viral sensation. Instead, Crocker used his subsequent notoriety as a jumping off point to highlight a multitude of other talents and aspirations by leveraging his fame in attempts to become a television personality, a singer, a documentary subject, and eventually a pornographic performer across a wide range of media platforms. Throughout this process, he also articulated the wide span of his personality traits by espousing unpopular views about the gay community and revealing that he is a transgendered. Thus, the line between truth, performance, and genuineness are difficult to discern regarding Crocker. However, unlike other social media personalities who utilize their screen time to highlight specific aspects of their personality to strategically build an identifiable and marketable "brand" for themselves emphasizing what I call "identity aesthetics" over identity politics (a point I will expand upon later in the chapter), Crocker purposefully utilizes his varied transmedia persona to emphasize the mutating, contradictory, and relational aspects of his personality. Crocker allows the affective ruptures of his sensory life to override social pressures to streamline his personality traits into easily digestible video morsels. It is this tendency of Crocker's that compels this chapter to ask, what type of transmedia aesthetic is Crocker actively developing, and how do we subsequently go about accounting for this paratextual aesthetic within his pornographic texts? To answer this question, I will be utilizing Simondon and his notion of the "transindividual" to outline how Crocker's active identity formation over a range of media platforms can be understood as the development of a transindividual aesthetic. For Simondon, the notion of the transindividual is an acknowledgment of how a range of affective forces impact individuation. In this way Simondon effectively turns conventional notions of identity into an external relational proposition rather than an internal search for the core of someone's "true" Self (or subconscious). As Combes explains, "the transindividual appears not as that which unifies individual and society, but as a

relation interior to the individual (defining its psyche) and a relation exterior to the individual (defining the collective): the transindividual unity of two relations is thus a relation of relations" (26). By developing this transindividual aspect of Crocker's identity formation and by conceiving of the relational connections made across the entirety of his media oeuvre, we can better understand the nature of identity in the internet age, account for the queer aspects of the transindividual, and develop new ways of thinking about identity's relation to pornographic performance in the age of social media. Like many young people's experience in the popular internet age, Crocker began posting self-pornographic pictures of himself on the internet at a very young age. This practice evolved into him eventually performing in three gay scenes for two different companies years after LBA. Crocker's incorporation of a pornographic aesthetic as just another part of his transmedia persona reflects the way in which many gay men find themselves becoming pornographic via hook up apps and websites encouraging the exchange of nude images and facilitating sexual encounters. This chapter's aim is to analyze Croker's experience in becoming a transindividual pornographic performer as a way of highlighting pieces of a broader pornographic narrative that many gay males in the internet age might recognize as part of their own identity formation.

**Crocker and the Crisis of Gay Identity**

When trying to answer the question "who is Chris Crocker?," one is confronted with a subject whose allure is partly based on his ability to frustrate our preconceived notions regarding the nature of identity formation. It seems as if the more one sees of Crocker, the more one feels compelled to ask "who is Chris Crocker?" Viewers' weariness—or in some cases, outright refusal—to accept Crocker's crying and fandom of Spears as a genuine expression of his own feelings, helps to foster a degree of suspicion among viewers who doubt both his aural and visual identity signifiers. And how does one begin to account for the political aspect of Crocker's identity when the cause of his rage seems so trivial? Therefore, it is essential to read the content and subsequent impact of LBA because of how it triggers a crisis around notions of identity, "truth," and relationality. Only when we understand how LBA works as an affective expression of transindividual relationality will we be able to understand how such an experience ultimately impacts his pornographic texts.

While the process of identity formation is rooted within the larger struggle of identity politics that has legitimized the specific social experiences of women, racial minorities, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community, there remains an underlying "reign of truth" within our understandings of identity acting as a regulating axis upon which society judges the social legitimacy, or "truth," of these marginalized identities. This idea of a politicized "reign of truth" is outlined by Foucault when he recognizes it as "the articulation of a particular type of discourse and a set of practices, a discourse that, on the one hand legislates and can legislate on these practices in terms of true and false" (2004, 18). Foucault's concept emphasizes the need for discursive particularity, which in the case of identity, is enacted through the disciplining framing rhetoric of cultural narrative coherence. Such narratives are essential rhetorical strategies activated in the creation of minoritarian histories and become embodied "truths" when conceiving of identity through our inherently political perspective. Any practice falling outside of this prescribed "truth" fails to register as an identity signifier. And while our first instinct may be to incorporate Crocker into the framework of LGBT identity politics, one must first recognize how his affective state in LBA—and in the sixty videos he made previously—work to cast doubt over the "truth" of his identity in the public's eye.

Eli Sanders explains the own lack of seriousness he had granted to Crocker's identity in an article for *The Stranger* when he writes:

> At first, I'd figured this level of border crossing and taboo tweaking had to be emanating from an urban area, from a source steeped in cultural collision and promoting some sort of high-concept agenda. I'd guessed Chris was an art student, young looking but not actually that young, who was lying about his age and living somewhere in Manhattan...I couldn't quite figure out what to make of the videos that featured Chris's "grandmother" sitting on her worn brown couch in a suburban-looking living room, but, with apologies to his grandmother, I'd guessed she was a drag queen and that a house on Long Island had been borrowed for some shoots (2007a).

Sanders' excerpt reveals that no matter how many visual signifiers emphasize a genuine locale, or familial relations, Crocker's hyper affective state in his videos renders these signifiers obsolete. Of course, this is Sanders' reaction to one viral video, and his reaction reveals that the

primary casualty of virality is the context from which the video emerged. Because even a cursory exploration into Crocker's work at that time would have revealed that Cocker has never tried to hide his southern accent, and he has detailed the specificities of his life in Tennessee many times. And regarding whether his grandmother is a drag queen, well, if she is, she is most certainly not performing for comic effect! And while Crocker at this time did not reveal the circumstances surrounding why he was living with his grandparents rather than his parents, he has subsequently explained that part of his hyper-affective response to Spears' performance was due to how she reflected the mental and emotional trauma he saw within his mother upon her return as a service member in the U.S. Army.

Crocker says that he sees "some of [his] younger mom in Britney [from] when [he] was a kid" (Parker). Crocker's mother gave birth to him when she was 14-years-old, and during the summer of 2007 she had just returned from active duty in Iraq, and as a result, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Crocker goes onto explain that she subsequently became addicted to drugs and moved from home to home. It was within this context that Crocker recorded LBA. And while journalist and scholars can be excused for ignoring contextualization within a maelstrom of virality, that is no excuse for characterizing the entirety of the platform as embodying only the superficial characteristics of virality. This mindset is infused in many media scholars' early readings of YouTube. Lucas Hilderbrand situates YouTube as a primary part of our "exacerbated culture of narcissism," and Alexandra Juhasz writes that within the YouTube era "it has become impossible…to see the difference between sincerity and satire. We can't" (Hilderbrand, 53; Juhasz). However, the problem with this logic is a suggestion that narcissism is a product of YouTube rather than a symptom, or that satire is somehow divorced from aspects of genuineness and sincerity. Juhasz's reasoning lies in her faith in the existence of a universally understood notion of sincerity. However, who can say what is sincere and what is not? Her longing for motivational clarity in our decentralized media age reeks of a nostalgic return to a past that never actually existed. I argue that sincerity occurs in degrees, and that we are seldom able to recognize genuine sincerity even when we are witness to it. Part of the aim within this chapter is to analyze Crocker's narcissistic and seemingly satirical YouTube outbursts as a way of reorienting how we understand and conceive of genuineness in the popular internet age. The goal is not to perform a factcheck of Crocker's media oeuvre, but to contextualize his affective

outbursts so that we can identify the queer potentiality embedded as part of his transindividual media persona.

In LBA specifically, Crocker's ranting about "leave Britney alone!" is interrupted by crying two separate times for multi-second intervals. Crocker is seen wiping away tears and unable to speak during these intervals because of his shaken state (Figure 3.1). Since this is the second part of a two-part video dedicated to defending Spears, the opening of this second part begins in a middle of an inhaled breath, which is exhaled into his first sentence: "how fucking dare anyone out there make fun of Britney." The interrupted nature of this gesture suggests both an impulsiveness and spontaneity to the video as a whole because of how heavy breathing, the inability to speak because of crying, and tears interrupt the flow of Cocker's monologue. He does not wait for this physical body to allow for an uninterrupted stream of speaking, and therefore, his physicality dominates the aesthetic of the video. And even when his words become the primary focus of the video—like when he says "her [Spears'] song is called 'Gimme More' for a reason, because all you people want is [*yelling*] MORE, MORE, MORE, MORE, MORE! LEAVE HER ALONE!!! You're lucky she even performed for you *bastards*! [*yelling*] LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!!! Please."—his frantic yelling gets distorted with the rest of the sounds emanating from the video—the crying, sniffling, and the rattling of the camera and microphone—and turns an aural experience into a physical one because of the resulting buzzing in the viewer's speakers or headphones.



Figure 3.1. Chris Crocker crying in "Leave Britney Alone."

It strikes me that these cacophonous howls mutating into a physical rattling experience is emblematic of why a type of "schizophrenic" logic is required when analyzing a figure like Crocker, whose media persona is predicated on embodying a multitude of genres and forms, both physical and aural. This is the type of analysis that this chapter will be adopting, mixing a philosophical analysis of Crocker's always shifting media presence—and its relationship with a modern gay identity—with a pornography studies perspective. This type of schizoanalysis developed by Deleuze and Guattari helps us to understand an individual's identity as relationally solvent, connected to wider social assemblages, and better understood within a perpetual state of disjunction. This is what happens to Crocker as a result of LBA; a collage of his physical identifying traits pass through LBA and enter into a public realm where those same typically reinforcing physical qualities that compose our understanding of an individual become diffused and disjointed within the virtual. Such a widely observed transition into the virtual (one more relatable today with the widespread use of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube) made for juicy mass media fodder back in 2007. Media outlets effectively encouraged viewers to mock Crocker because of his unwieldy and unpredictable identity. Crocker was singled out for not embodying "normal" characteristics of stability, or at least fitting into a typical narrative forming the idea of identity cohesion. It turns out to be easier to just mock Crocker instead of seriously considering his transindividual appeal.

It is essential to remember that an inherent characteristic of identity formation is its unwavering drive toward socialization and equal recognition in the eyes of the law. This is most evident in the recent gay civil rights battles over gays in the military, hate crime legislation, and gay marriage. And while affect is a fundamental part of creating wider empathetic networks of shared experience (a structure of feeling)—to facilitate social understanding—Nick Salvato notes how these affects must never compromise bodily coherence if one hopes to achieve social recognition, writing that "a body that cries too much, too often, or too extravagantly is not eligible for interpellation as a sincere body; it is abjected from the magic, inner circle of regulated sentiment" (73). Crocker's crying, bodily convulsions and rage are framed within the wider social sphere as a reflection of his unstable character, which lead to doubts about the sincerity of his identity. And when it comes to issues of social law, typically some sense of "order" is required.

And before one eagerly rushes to declare that Crocker has a place under the broader and more forgiving LGBT umbrella, it is important to remember that not all crying is created equal. In 2010 sex columnist Dan Savage launched the anti-bullying campaign It Gets Better (IGB) on YouTube featuring gay men and women recording videos where they reflect on their tumultuous childhoods' resulting from their gay sexual preference—retelling stories that sometimes brought the subject to tears—and conclude on a positive note, revealing that in adulthood everything eventually "gets better." The early videos in the campaign adopt the same DIY aesthetic of LBA: diegetic lighting and using the low-quality camera and microphone included with the computer. However, once the campaign went viral and mainstream—with video testimonials from corporations like The Gap (2010), and politicians like President Obama (2010)—it abandoned that amateur aesthetic, and the ambiguity of its initial participants, in favor of a polished, corporate, and sanitized campaign to maintain its mainstream appeal.

But the crying and trembling prompted by the past trauma of bullying from these initial subjects of IGB ironically work to reaffirm, rather than unsettle, the cohesiveness of their LGBT identity. IGB shows us that *collective* crying and bodily instability can coalesce into a singular, sympathetic, and victimized gay body. The organized and "serious" communal framework of the IGB campaign emphasizes the isolation of Crocker screaming about something as seemingly frivolous and ephemeral as Spears' performance. This contrast highlights the difficulty that our ideas of identity have in incorporating issues of the disjointed and chaotic present, and instead emphasizes the idea of existing within a longer stable history to legitimize the movement's social worth. For Ken Plummer, linking the type of storytelling exemplified in IGB to a wider history is an essential part of what forms gay identity, writing that: "a crucial strategy for story telling is the creation of a sense of a past which helps to provide continuity and order over the flux of the present" (40). Plummer expands on the narrowing qualities of the contemporary gay identity politics movement when he writes that, while the movement triumphed in changing the discourse of homosexuality from one of "sickness" (only in 1973 did the American Psychiatric Association remove homosexuality from this list of mental illnesses) into one where gay "men could come to identify themselves as 'born like that' and hence 'essentially' gay;" however, this *evolution* has "really been a double-edged one" (93). Explaining that "the old sodomites of the seventeenth century hardly had the basis for such a [gay] identity. And although the modern story of

homosexuality firmly disavows 'sickness,' it regularly affirms an essential and deterministic causality—a fixity of desire" (93).

It is this fixity that jeopardizes the acknowledgment of disjointed affects provoked by autonomous desire that dare not conform to the streamlined "progress" of contemporary gay identity politics. And while Crocker's physical and affective embodiment of the scorn directed at Spears in LBA helps us to understand him as relating to the singer within the framework of the transindividual, it also strikes me as heartbreaking that such an act of queer subversion would be cordoned off from a gay identity politics movement striving for mainstream acceptance by more willfully accepting those who respectfully reserve their pathos for something like the "seriousness" of IGB. Crenshaw speaks to the exclusivity afforded identity markers like this when she writes that "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (1991, 1242). Crocker's willingness to engage with the ephemeral present is what situates him as an outsider to much of the LGBT community. In 2015 Crocker remarked on this by declaring that the "LGBT community has disowned me and written me off from the very beginning" (Facebook).

## Gay Identity Aesthetics

Part of the reason why Crocker feels like he is shunned by the gay community is linked to his association with YouTube, and YouTube's subsequent position within the media hierarchy of September 2007, when LBA was released. The decade leading up to 2007 saw many high-profile "positive" representations of non-sexual homonormativity depicted on mainstream network television and basic cable, including: Ellen DeGeneres' character in *Ellen* coming out as gay (on the show and in real life) in 1997, two gay main characters on *Will & Grace* (1998), straight people eagerly looking to be made over by a gaggle of flamboyant gay men in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003), nightly news images of San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom defiantly marrying gay couples in the face of court orders denying their legality in 2004, and the anticipation of a new progressive political era promised by Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama's historic 2007 Presidential campaigns. In 2007 it seemed as if televisual gay representation and acceptance had reached a level of maturity and respectability to the point where it had become a

routine aspect of the platform's textual makeup. And in turn, this visual inclusion over the decade helped to finally incorporate gay identity aesthetics as part of the collective neoliberal imagination because of its enriching and unobtrusive contribution to the habits of conspicuous consumption.

YouTube's entry into this mediascape was initially perceived as a disruption to this newly-established order. The site's beta launch was in May of 2005, with an official launch in December of that same year. By July of 2006 the site reached 100 million video views per day with 65,000 video uploads per day.[35] And it was not until June of 2007 that the site launched in nine countries outside of the U.S. The primary impetus for the expansion into other countries was Google's purchase of YouTube in October of 2006. For those unfamiliar with YouTube's aesthetic at the time, it was a curious acquisition for Google considering that YouTube was so young and had never been profitable. The merger led to hand-wringing among media elites who worried about how the inclusion of a low quality, user-generated video site would disrupt the integrity of corporate media's future. An example of the condescension that the merger fostered within the mainstream media is exemplified by a NBC *Nightly News with Brian Williams* broadcast where he announces the deal:

> Tonight, there has been a big merger in the business world. One that may say a lot about our world these days and what we have come to value the most. Today Google bought YouTube for 1.65 billion dollars. YouTube is more of an idea than it is a place, now it's beyond big…It is a young person's game. The videos are quick. The fortunes are huge. Even though, they just don't make media empires the way they used to (*Me at the Zoo*).

While mainstream media outlets like *Nightly News* decried the amateur aesthetics and democratic nature of the platform as a way of subtly reinforcing their own dominance as informational and cultural gatekeepers, the aspect of the deal the media coverage recognized and responded to the most was the billion-dollar price tag. If the potentiality of YouTube's aesthetic was beyond the imagination of baby-boomers, the reality of the financial transaction convinced them that if nothing else, the business behind the platform was worth taking seriously as a threat.

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[35] While these statistics may sound impressive, they pale in comparison to how the site has grown heading into 2018. At the beginning of 2018 the number of videos watched per day is 5 billion, and there are 300 hours of video uploaded every minute (Aslam).

In another news report from that period a voiceover says: "alone, they're mostly low budget, often low-quality home video clips. You put them together, you've got a goldmine" (*Me at the Zoo*). Embedded within this quote—just like in the IGB campaign—is the idea that the strength of identity lies in the collective; otherwise, on their own, they are just "low budget" and "low quality." When covering this period of the merger in their documentary *Me at the Zoo* (2012) —which features Crocker as its main subject and covers the emergence of YouTube as a new prominent social media site—directors Chris Moukarbel and Valerie Veatch splice together a montage showing how YouTube's newfound wealth and prominence allowed the site to change its business practice. After the merger, users attracting a high number of views would now be eligible to enter into a "partnership" with YouTube where they would be eligible to receive a percentage of the advertising revenue generated from commercials playing before their own video content. The montage shows a series of young YouTubers explaining to their audience what a partnership is, and how they are looking forward to a future where they will be able to profit from their channel. With one user declaring: "keep getting me views, because now I get paid!" A montage later in the documentary shows how advertisers were eventually able to pay enough to these YouTubers to get them to talk about, and test, their products within the body of the video itself. One of the earliest examples of this type of overt product placement was female YouTubers trying on, and talking about, makeup on their channel. This type of user-generated advertising strikes an ideal balance illustrating how identity is shaped within capitalism. This negotiation is described by John D'Emilio when he writes that "this dialectic—the constant interplay between exploitation and some measure of autonomy—informs all of the history of those who have lived under capitalism" (102). It is precisely this type of balance between genuineness and becoming a corporate shill that has allowed YouTube to foster a sense of community that seems centered on affective connection rather than just corporate profits. This self-reflexive negotiation actively taking place amongst the users on their channels reveals the constructed nature of identity itself, just as Hall's understanding of identity reminds us:

> Identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the "naturalism" of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a

construction, a process never completed—always "in process" (2). However, while the partnership profit model might have initially seemed like a unifying modus operandi for YouTubers, Crocker immediately voiced suspicion over the new program. By doing so he ruptured the linear narrative of profit motives and emphasized disjunction—essentially embodying the primary way in which we can understand the ongoing "process" of identity formation.

Immediately, Crocker established himself as an outsider within the YouTube community by expressing cynicism toward the idea of a financial partnership with the site, and the effect it would have on the genuineness of the opinions and attitudes expressed by his fellow YouTubers. In one video, Crocker sarcastically explains that "the advertisers are gonna be looking at who all of these popular people are, and you know what, I'm kinda happy about it now because maybe I can fulfill my dream of being a video ho" (*Me at the Zoo*). Slut-shaming aside, his rejection of openly advertising products on his channel was a unique stance to take in light of the enthusiasm many young YouTubers expressed at the opportunity to earn their first paycheck from something that was initially thought of as a fun hobby.[36] Crocker also recorded a satirical video making fun of makeup tutorials that cosmetic companies capitalized on to make money off YouTubers.

It is not coincidental that makeup tutorials would be the initial target of Crocker's scorn, considering that makeup is a foundational part of his aesthetic. Crocker was wearing makeup before any boy on YouTube was paid to do so. It is also one of the primary points of confusion regarding Crocker—which is illustrated in Sanders' article—a question of whether Crocker is male or female due to the amount of makeup he wore at the time. The ruining of Crocker's *guy-liner* as a result of crying in LBA made smudged mascara a necessity for the countless LBA parodies recorded in the aftermath of the video going viral. The makeup and his effeminate voice not only led to confusion about Crocker's gender, but also contradicted the mainstream image of gay men cultivated within mainstream television over the previous decade. Crocker's was not a polished masculine gay professional living in a big city enjoying mimosas with his girlfriends or fighting to be a part of nationalist institutions to attain mainstream acceptance. Crocker's identity is insistently unpolished, with a southern accent, jobless, alone, and causing a commotion over

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[36] While Crocker never partnered with a sponsor to talk about products on this channel, he did join YouTube's partnership program where he receives a percentage of the advertising revenue generated from his channel.

something that has no lasting political value. Crocker represented the antithesis of what gay mainstream success looked like on television at the time. And while there had been many instances of gay and transgender representation before LBA, an awareness of the fluid nature gender pronouns and sexual self-identification were not as widely recognized on mainstream television. LBA took place before transgender characters gained more prominence as starring characters in award-winning and widely recognized "prestige" television shows like *Orange is the New Black* (2013), *Transparent* (2015), and even *I Am Cait* (2015). Over the previous decade, television had written a script for what it meant to represent a gay man in America via the medium's aesthetic dominance; however, through an upstart platform, Crocker was veering wildly off-script.

This is why LBA was met with such a quick and brutal backlash. The national news media held up Crocker as an example of the debauchery taking place on YouTube, and for a legion of social media users who might have felt ashamed of mocking a "conventional" acting gay man that they had grown accustomed to on television, any inhibition at that moment was set free because Crocker was not so much a gay man as he was a type of UFO (Unidentified Flamboyant Object). The eagerness—or dare I say, the necessity that some felt—to pounce on Crocker's perceived offence to the "decency" of normative televisual homosexuality is rooted in Hall's elaboration about how the need for a perceived "other" is necessary for our notions about identity to become legible. He writes that "identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside,' abjected" (5, original emphasis). The extent of this abjection is illustrated in *Me at the Zoo* where Crocker records himself listening to one of the many death threats he received over the phone in the aftermath of LBA. And in subsequent media appearances, there is a provocative dynamic between hosts who want to delegitimize the reality of Crocker and LBA, and Crocker defending his genuine personality traits while also playing into the idea that he is some type of aberration. When Maury Povich introduces Crocker as a guest on his show in the aftermath of LBA, he asks the audience: "is this guy for real?" (Goetz). Povich then praises Crocker for LBA, calling it "one of the finest acting jobs I've ever seen in my life" (Goetz). Crocker goes onto explain that while he has done "internet acting" for a year, and is signed to a production company, the one video that he is "honest-to-God" not acting in, the one "video that is a blog straight from the

heart" is LBA (Goetz). Crocker ends his short segment by looking straight into the camera declaring that "before I'm an American, I'm a Britney fan," flippantly usurping years of homonationalist efforts to associate gay rights with national interests (Goetz).

Of course, defining what "acting" means in the age of social media is not so easy. Declaring oneself an actor does not make it so. And so, if one acts differently in front of their grandparents than they do in front of their best friend does that mean they are "acting," or merely adjusting their behavior to fit the social circumstance? The range of affective registers for each circumstance is different, so of course our affective response to each circumstance will be different. And to claim that one could measure the degree of acting taking place in Crocker's videos would also be to claim that one could measure the degree of acting performed when one poses for a family photo or video. This is yet another question of degrees. However, in this moment with Povich, I understand Crocker's plea to take LBA seriously as a way of establishing the affective assemblage he was tapping into by contextualizing LBA, which is clear in his own experience, but absent from the media narrative around LBA. He tells Povich that "everyone that thinks this is fake, do your research! Look at my other videos where I have thousands of dollars' worth of memorabilia [about Britney]" (Goetz). So, while he comforts Povich by reassuring him that he is "acting" in some of his videos, Crocker reasserts genuineness by citing a history of video evidence proving his fandom for Spears. Instead of talking about making money from a YouTube partnership, he explains how, for him, being a fan means being a dedicated consumer. While this discourse of consumption reinforces our capitalist superstructure, the frivolousness of Crocker's Britney related purchases are examples of their own type of agency within a televisual echo chamber centered around the myth of gay "respectability." By singling out Crocker as an abjection of normative gay representation on television, Povich—along with every other pundit mocking Crocker at the time—is actively fabricating a dynamic where individualism is the subject of scorn, while the collective is regarded at the apex of normalcy. Ultimately proving that groupthink has no mechanism for incorporating aberrations.

Here we can begin to understand how the eternal struggle concerning how we conceive of identity plays out in new ways when new media platforms are introduced. Of course, a hallmark of network television's depictions of gay men relies on their onscreen sexuality being legible only through its limitations, because of it being very much under control, contextualized, and

discreet; and when flamboyance is allowed, it is a sexless flamboyance. These characters express enough to confirm what our social understanding of gay sexuality is without legitimizing those desires by having them playout onscreen. However, in LBA, Crocker expresses a type of desire that obviously struck both hetero and homosexuals as confounding, excessive, and out of control, based on the overwhelming disparagement the video received. And while the worshiping of female "diva" pop music stars is a foundational aspect of gay culture (Dyer 2004), the degree of passion that Crocker expressed seemed out of proportion to the typical level of fandom. The tears and mucus from crying connoted primary aspects of a "body genre" outlined by Williams, where melodramas and pornography both depict bodily secretions like tears and semen on screen while also eliciting those same secretions from off-screen viewers (1991). The disproportionate reaction, the degree of devotion dedicated to someone of the opposite sex, and all of those stimulated bodily secretions, confound notions of conventional gay sexuality and evokes a type of queerness that is summarized well in Teresa de Lauretis' description when she writes that "a text is queer, regardless of the queerness of its authorial persona, if it carries the inscription of sexuality as something more than just sex" (243). By having LBA play on newscasts and late-night talk shows to the degree that it did, I argue that Crocker's confounding expression of queerness towards Spears was thrust into the mainstream in a way that had not been seen in the U.S. since Christine Jorgensen graced the front page of the New York Daily News in 1952, claiming that she had been the first person in the world to undergo sex reassignment surgery. While the Stonewall riots in New York City in 1969 brought hard-fought political recognition to a segment of society that everyone already knew existed, the reaction to LBA proved there was a great deal of hostility and fear around the notion of this "new" unexplored "type" of queerness existing among us. And perhaps a level of discomfort was provoked within viewers upon seeing elements of a "body genre" without the structuring framework of a "genre" to deliver those type of affects. This is what contributes to the idea that Crocker is some type of free-floating abjection. Without the framework provided by genre, feelings of discomfort over LBA only grew, and that provided the fuel for those looking to an excuse to mock it.

Of course, the hostility directed at LBA has to do with its unabashed rejection of the homonormative tenets providing the primary contextualization of gay characters on network television at the time. While Spears is representative of a profit-driven music industry, Crocker

taps into an affective register that must be fostered for any icon of consumption if they hope to develop a dedicated fanbase. And while Crocker contextualized his fandom of Spears on *The Maury Show* by highlighting his consumerist dedication to her, it is his extra-consumptive, and hyper-affective, defense of her performance that made him queerly out of context. LBA can be understood within Foucault's understanding of a "hermeneutics of desire," because of the degree to which Crocker's interior passion for Spears becomes viscerally externalized in LBA. Foucault explains the condition as:

> The practices by which individuals were led to focus attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen (1990a, 5).

In LBA, Crocker unleashes an expression of a queer affective state organized around a reflective constellation composed of his own history of videos produced on YouTube, his mother's PTSD trauma, his transgender expression, his fandom, and his reaction against the mainstream narrative surrounding Spears' performance; all of which act counter to the neoliberal framework of gay male context perpetuated by network television and institutionally reinforced by the military, marriage, the prison-industrial complex, and consumerist buying power. Crocker does not escape these institutions; this is why we need to be intimately familiar with them to understand why Crocker is perceived as a rupture. In this post-LBA moment he is widely understood as an oppositional force to the conventions of gay identity typically entwined within these nationalistic institutions. It is within this rupture that we can understand how identity can be "understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity within a particular culture" (Foucault, 1990a, 4).

While I will document how the hostility from this moment has faded over time, Crocker's position within the hierarchy of social media gay personas has remained that of an outsider looking in. Perhaps the biggest lesson that queer YouTubers and observers have learned from this period is the regulating power that media has to situate a specific type of gay identity to the forefront of various platforms. As network television channels arranged their own financial agreements with YouTube to show and sell their content on the site, the platform has become more fully incorporated into the mainstream mediascape. Sure, anyone is free to upload as much

radically queer (non-nude) content that they would like to; however, because of YouTube's focus on profit, any videos too antithetical to financial motives are buried within the site's extravagant search algorithm, making them harder to find. And videos being uploaded by organizations not sympathetic to the goals of the U.S. Defense Department, and our expanded national security apparatus, have prompted YouTube to take steps to address "the threat posed by violence and hate" by working with "government, law enforcement and civil society groups to tackle the problem of violent extremism online" (Walker). Unsurprisingly, this shift in policy in 2017 to protect viewers from "terrorist" content and "hate-speech" is not limited to only those types of videos. Google's general counsel Kent Walker justifies this sprawling censorship effort by explaining that "YouTube will expand its role in counter-radicalisation efforts" by "taking a tougher stance on videos that do not clearly violate our policies—for example, videos that contain inflammatory religious or supremacist content…That means these videos will have less engagement and be harder to find" (Walker).

Unsurprisingly, this resulted in LGBT-themed videos being demonetized and demoted within search results. In September of 2017 YouTuber and author Gaby Dunn tweeted: "Welp it's begun. @youtube finally started demonetizing any and all LGBTQIA content on our channel. Bye bye that stream of income" (@gabydunn). After complaints, YouTube claimed that they would review their screening process, and said that "if you think we got it wrong and your channel had more than 10,000 subscribers, you can appeal, and we will review your unlisted video regardless of view count" (Priddy). With this statement, YouTube further institutionalizes the notion that identity, legitimacy, recognition, and accountability is based solely on the number of subscribers one has, and the type of content one produces. Anything existing outside of the parameters of 10,000 subscribers do not warrant recognition. Hence, one's YouTube identity can be erased due to non-compliance/non-conformity. Crocker's deletion of his YouTube page in 2015 anticipated this erasure prioritizing gay aesthetics over problematic queer identity politics.

Contemporary gay male Youtubers like Mark Miller, Tyler Oakley, and Joey Graceffa are prime examples of the insistently apolitical type of gay identity aesthetics that reliably fit into the flow of YouTube's profit motive. They get attention by performing viral challenges (like the "cinnamon challenge," where one attempts to swallow a tablespoon of cinnamon), and recording weekly vlogs documenting the most inoffensively benign aspects of their life in an effort to

widen their fan base beyond gay viewers so that they may attain mainstream marketing deals (like in the case of Miller becoming a spokesperson for Cricket Wireless), or acting opportunities (like Tyler Oakley being cast as a member of the 28th season of CBS's *Amazing Race* [2016]). Their consistency and de-politicized sexual commentary helps make them marketable "brands." Crocker's exclusion from these types of marketing opportunities further emphasizes the rejection he feels from both the YouTube community, and the wider gay social media network.

**Affect and the Transindividual**

For Crocker, this feeling of being "written off" and rejected strikes me as his sensing himself in relation to the conventional aspects of gay identity politics. And while this should be considered more as an embrace of his own queer tendencies—rather than a sorrowful regret—it ultimately resounds as a recognition of a transformative sensation of isolation. It is this feeling of solitude that is the initial recognition for what Simondon recognizes as the transindividual. Simondon writes that the transindividual is discovered "at the end of the ordeal [that the subject has] imposed upon itself, and which is an ordeal of isolation" (2005, 280). Here Simondon offers us a way to understand how fragmentation within identity politics is the beginning of a new process, rather than the morbid endpoint of bifurcation. In fact, isolation offers the reflective space needed to understand oneself anew in relation to bodies and forces. Simondon explains that "relation to others puts us into question as individuated being; it situates us, making us face others as being young or old, sick or healthy, strong or weak, man or woman; yet we are not young or old absolutely in this relation; we are younger or older than another; we are stronger or weaker as well" (2005, 266). This is what helps to make LBA such a sparkplug; instead of internalizing one of the shared pillars of the typical gay identity narrative—shame, pride, or victimization—Crocker instead embodies the traits of the transindividual by externalizing a force of kinetic energy and reflecting a collage of identity traits harvested from his winding journey through the mediasphere, as both an observer of, and participant within, media. Therefore, the question "who is Chris Crocker?" still lingers. Such an inquiry highlights the need to expand the vocabulary for identity formation in the popular internet age so that it can more fully reflect the diverse nature of an identity formation that is as multivariant as the amount of media platforms that it can be projected onto. This is the purpose of expanding upon the idea of the

transindividual.

And while each of us is perpetually enveloped in a process of affecting and being affected, it is Crocker's talent to shamelessly (and publicly) embody a multitude of identity traits—and develop that into a unique aesthetic—that makes him an ideal case study through which to understand the concept of the transindividual. As Simondon makes clear, "the individual is to be understood as having a relative reality, occupying only a certain phase of the whole being in question" (1992, 300). Crocker's ability to filter his identities through the genres of vlogging, music, documentary, and pornography not only provocatively mocks a North American culture valorizing the streamlining of identity for political relevancy, but also illustrates how media forms embody a multitude of affective registers that help us develop our own ideas about individuation and subjectivity. As Guattari notes; "subjectivity does not only produce itself through the psychogenetic stages of psychoanalysis or the 'mathemes' of the Unconscious, but also in the large-scale social machines of language and the mass media—which cannot be described as human" (9).

The notion of the transindividual is also useful because it offers us a way to analyze a concept of the individual that embraces its symbiotic bond with society rather than relying on a libertarian ideal where the individual transcends social circles—something that the rhetoric of "Born this Way" haphazardly promotes. While the transindividual emerges out of isolation, they can still only understand themselves through their relation to society. This is how they come to feel *more-than-individual*. Ironically, while identity formation relies on a coherence built upon narratives of shared cultural histories and universal struggle, identity as a concept emerges out of a need to situate oneself in relation to a more dominant culture. After all, the crux of being a sexual or gender minority relies on embodying relationality. However, being in a constant state of relation to outside forces is antithetical to consistency and continuity. A foundational aspect of relationality requires embodying aspects of flexibility and responsiveness. In this respect, Deleuze reminds us that "one is always the index of a multiplicity; an event, a singularity, a life" (2001, 30). This is what makes the concept of the transindividual so relevant to the minority experience, and an ideal perspective through which to build a contextualization for Crocker's content within the gay identity political movement. And while some have criticized affect theory for not adequately addressing the experience of racial and sexual minorities because of a

tendency to de-emphasize the inherent composition of the physical body (Hemmings), affect theory importantly pinpoints how the characteristics of the transindividual reflect the experience of the how the minority conceives of themselves on both an affective and physical level. Just as Deleuze reminds us: "a minority never exists ready-made, it is only formed on lines of flight, which are also its way of advancing or attacking" (Deleuze and Parnet, 43).

**Becoming Transindividual**

The question "who is Chris Crocker?" essentially asks how one goes about accounting for these types of disjointed affective states within the framework of the transindividual. For Combes, the concept of the transindividual emphasizes the idea that individuation is found within a continual "*rhythm of becoming*" (23, original emphasis). That in fact, individuation is an always evolving process, and that it is relational instead of inherent; and contingent on the specificities of the social assemblage one finds themselves a part of. Essentially arguing that the individual exists through their capacity to affect and be affected. Combes writes that "the individual here is in pure relation: it exists *between* two colonies, without being integrated into either, and its activity is an activity of amplification of being" (24, original emphasis). Here Combes identifies an essential characteristic that differentiates individuation from identity: amplification. For Combes, the concept of amplification recognizes the expansive range of potentialities available to the transindividual, in contrast to set definitions that define identity formations. She writes that "Finitude…connotes an incapacity for growth, signaling a lack of preindividual being that is required for amplification in existence. Rather, what characterizes the individual is limitation, which comes of the capacity of the limit to be displaced. The individual is not finished but limited, that is, capable of indefinite growth" (20). Conversely, transindividuation is characterized by amplification: the potential for "indefinite growth." This capacity for amplification is the potential upon which I attempt to understand Crocker's transindividuation throughout this chapter. Growing, expanding, and moving across media platforms and genres is inherent to Crocker's mode of existence within our mediascape; we must follow him through his trajectories in order to reach deeper levels of understanding.

The amplified grandiosity of Crocker's gestures—ranging from crying, to shaking, to screaming, to ejaculating—emphasizes his deviations from the "sincere body" that conceptions

of identity rely on so greatly. Pardon the pun, but these physical manifestations are what give affect its body. And what makes Crocker's bodily amplifications so potent is that they transform the uniform discourse-driven nature of identity formation into an autonomous resonating physical force that rattles the socially constructed boundaries composing our contemporary understanding of identity politics. Amplification's trajectory is not prescribed, and lacks a focused linearity; this is how Crocker's physicality can move him within—and in between—a multitude of identity formations. We see this literalized in how Crocker's physicality in LBA reveals less about him than it does about the relational forces impacting him so deeply. Each twitch and tear represent a reverberation within Crocker resulting from the narrative ripples generated by the social field criticizing Spears so scornfully that night. This is the affecto-physical dimension of the transindividual. This movement, and the affects exchanged and absorbed throughout the movement generated by amplifications, are the building blocks of the transindividual.

For the transindividual, "subjectivity cannot *contain* itself within the limits of the individual" (Combes, 33, original emphasis). And the only relief to this "tension" brought about by the confinement of subjective formation is found within the collective; therefore, the "subject is a being tensed toward the collective, and its reality is that of a 'transitory way'" (Combes, 32). While identity formation searches for a single defining characteristic shared amongst the collective, the transindividual is drawn to the collective to be moved by forces generated by a multitude of intensities. The discursive commonality of terms like "transit" and "movement" in describing the affective qualities of the transindividual not only highlights amplification's tendency toward kinetic projection, but it also recognizes its ability to reverberate within a space to produce dynamic identity formations and concepts. As Puar writes, "identities are multicausal, multidirectional, liminal; traces aren't always self-evident...there is an emphasis on motion rather than gridlock, on how the halting of motion produces the demand to locate" (2012a, 59). Exposing the resulting affects of social relationality in the immediate way Crocker does in LBA—without resorting to the rhetoric of an empowered "true" identity for authoritative legitimacy—strikes me as an exceptionally intimate act in a social environment that has replaced individuation with a blanket notion of identity politics. Its intimacy is revealed in the fact that no financial motive, or political cause is apparent. We ask, "who is Chris Crocker?" precisely

because we acknowledge LBA's intimacy, and we are just left searching for this intimacy's context. We will see this intimacy evolve most explicitly—and gain more context—within Crocker's pornographic work.

**Intimacy, Proximity & Pornography**



Figure 3.2. An image of a more "masculine" Crocker.

D. Travers Scott perceptively remarks that the overarching feel of LBA is "incredibly, uncomfortably intimate" (311). In recognizing intimacy as a key characteristic of Crocker's aesthetic, Scott identifies an affective link between LBA and Crocker's pornographic work. Crocker's pornographic scenes—just like his other forms of media—should be thought of as a locus for the spectrum of his affective registers, reflecting both the journey through his various media incarnations, and the always changing social environment that Crocker finds himself situated in. Tracking these affective changes through his bodily transformations (Figure 3.2) make the "body genre" of pornography an ideal form to understand the nature of this

transindividual media figure. However, before Crocker made the transformation from effeminate make-up-wearing teenager to butch *porn star* top, he fostered a relationship with his fans via his YouTube channel that reached a level of intimacy where the divide between himself and his viewers almost seemed to dissolve.

Crocker maintained his connection with his YouTube viewers by treating them as respected sounding boards for his trials, tribulations and random thoughts. Crocker makes this point about proximity literal when in one of his typical handheld poorly lit vlogs he says: "thank God for digital era and video blogging. What did we do before? Like, when I'm bored I just whip out the camera and talk to myself AKA, you guys. Isn't it weird to think that you guys are an extension of me?" By making proximity a fundamental part of his video aesthetic—and explaining that his identity is a fluid *extension* of his viewing audience—Crocker acknowledges the affective intensities fostered by the intimate relationality between himself and his viewers. This idea that the camera is a mechanism that increases the proximity between himself and his viewers—instead of accentuating a distance—is a theme repeated in all of Crocker's media incarnations regardless of the platform. This is how Crocker emphasizes the affecto-physical nature of his aesthetic. This metaphorical proximity that Crocker strives for within his aesthetic is also reflected in his literal proximity to his camera. The lack of a tripod, banging the microphone with his fingers, uneven lighting, and unbalanced sound that causes distortion in the microphone, realizes a type of aestheticized physical proximity. A phenomenon like this is explained by Combes' notion of "reversibility of individuation" (51). She explains this concept by writing that "the collective and structuration of emotion makes clear that the most intimate of ourselves, what we always experience in terms of inalienable singularity, does not belong to us individually; intimacy arises less from a private sphere than from an impersonal affective life, which is held immediately in common" (51). So even intimacy is a relational concept.

This point about proximity becomes important when trying to parse out specific texts to highlight within Crocker's oeuvre to begin a case study. Where does one begin? His attempts at post-YouTube fame included starring in a television reality show (he moved to Los Angeles after LBA in hopes of doing so), making music (he released an EP in 2011 titled *The First Bite*, another EP in 2013 titled *Walls Down* under the name Chris Cunningham-Crocker [his given name is Christopher Darren Cunningham], and a full album in 2015 titled *More Than Three*

*Words* [Figure 3.3]), and starring in the documentary *Me at the Zoo* (Figure 3.4). If there is a theme to be found within these various dalliances with other media platforms it is that these more established routes to celebrity are maintained within the popular imagination specifically because of their well-established narrative structure and distribution model. Figures are moved in and out of these media frameworks as their popularity ebbs and flows, but the model of television, music, and documentary star endure no matter who the subject is. There is a sense of being rooted within these media platforms through the discourse and practice of going to school for acting, working one's way through the amateur circuits as a singer, or having one's accomplishments (or embarrassments) archived in a documentary format. This sense of history is what helps to legitimize these media frameworks, and strike me as the primary reason why Crocker has failed to fully suture himself within these platforms, and match the same level of notoriety in these new ventures that he achieved in LBA. The heavy burden of history supporting these more "legitimate" media platforms weighs down on the poetic ruptures more commonly found on newly established, explicit or "illegitimate" media platforms.



Figure 3.3. Album cover for
*More than Three Words* (2015)



Figure 3.4. Poster for *Me at the Zoo* (2011)

If we are to analyze the affective qualities of Crocker's individuation we must look towards less "legitimate" media platforms not relying on the maintenance of an authoritative distance from their audience to establish the legitimizing qualities of "truth," and towards media genres that instead accentuate the aesthetic qualities of proximity. This approach will lead us to

blurred spaces where the constructed boundaries of media producer and user are broken down, and the poetic qualities of affect arise in their place. I argue that the post-YouTube genre that best accentuates these qualities of proximity for Crocker is his pornographic work. Therefore, characterizing Crocker's overall aesthetic within the framework of proximity is important, because doing so creates a sense of continuity with pornographic texts because of how they are considered within the artistic realm. In Kelly Dennis' *Art/Porn: A History of Seeing and Touching* (2009), proximity is situated as the defining quality of pornography, and what differentiates it from erotica and the fine arts; she writes that "pornography indicates, in fact, the absence of a discrete limit between viewer and image, the instability of the distinction between subject and object of representation" (3). Understanding how Dennis' categorization of pornography is reflected in Crocker's aesthetic helps us see how the qualities of physicality, amplification and individuation work to accentuate proximity by promising the viewer a type of relationality to the performer that no other media genre can provide in the same way.



Figure 3.5. An amateur pornographic image of Crocker.

**From Crocker to *Cockstar***

The first nude pictures of Crocker appeared on the internet almost immediately after LBA in October of 2007. Crocker posted them to his private MySpace page before LBA, and because of the media attention focused on Crocker at the time, someone was compelled enough to access the pictures and post them throughout the web. Gossip websites wasted no time reposting the pictures until Crocker claimed that he was seventeen-years-old when he took them; explaining that he "had a lot of alone time in the last half of [his] teen years [he was home schooled] and when you're young self-discovery...happens" (Sanders, 2007b). In late 2010 the first "mature" nude images of Crocker (Figure 3.5) started to circulate throughout the web, this time originating from his own Tumblr page. These photos and videos feature him doing things like masturbating in his bed, on the toilet, and twerking in nothing but a t-shirt to his own song, and in another video, to Justin Bieber's song "Boyfriend." The appearance of these nude images sparked a resurgence of interest in Crocker that had not been seen since the afterglow of LBA. Years of *respectable* "progress" for the gay community in the interlude between LBA and the circulation of his nude pictures meant that polarizing gay figures such as Crocker were mostly pushed outside of the mainstream media's spotlight.

Interestingly though, despite the gay community gaining respectability within neoliberal heterosexual circles during the late 2000s, gay male pornography endures as the primary communal nexus where sexual affects and varying discourses on sexual health, race, body image and celebrity meet in the last remaining media genre free(er) from the dictates of heterosexual norms. Sure, gay pornography depicts men marrying each other, joining the military, and even being bullied (check out Steve Cruz's 2012 necessary porn parody of the It Gets Better campaign titled: *It Gets Harder*), but unlike those real-world scenarios where the gay experience is reduced down to the individual's efforts to attain financial stability and be included in America's aspirational nationalistic mission, pornography ensures that homosexuality remains in a sexual realm embodying exploration, pleasure, community, and camaraderie. No matter how hard gay people strive for "respectability" in the form of corporate recognition, those first experiences of sexual arousal, experimentation, and gratification in front of a television or computer screen leave as deep an impression as any other on someone's sexual becoming. I argue that this is due to pornography's role as often the first—and sometimes only—media source that coalesces

sexual affects into a form emphasizing sexual relationality above all else. Not only relationality between sexual partners, but also affective relations with wider social networks whose commonality is linked to sexual practice. For Combes, affectivity and relationality are linked because this "affectivity, the relational layer constituting the center of individuality, arises in us as a liaison between the relation of the individual to itself and its relation to the world" (31). This is how even the most "private" forms of pornographic creation or consumption play an active role in the social circulation of sexual affects. Pornography's standing within the gay male community remains so vital because of the text's essential role in the development of "self-discovery" within a spectrum of the transindividual.

Crocker's nude images were more than just about sensationalism; their importance lay in how they helped to initiate him back into the wider gay social sphere by recasting his body into recognizable pornographic iconography (instead of as the androgynous figure he introduced himself as). It is the circulation of amateur nude images fostered by the digitized hook up culture of websites and apps that makes pornography a primary visual representation of sexual desire within social assemblages. Hence, it is not surprising that Crocker was welcomed back into the fold because of his amateur pornography. After all, self-pornographic practices of the popular internet age have made the pre-meeting exchange of dick pics more essential in some cases than a welcoming in-person handshake. Crocker's dick pics also reoriented him into the realm of masculinity. The sight of Crocker's dick revealed a transition from an androgynous feminine waif to a butch masculine young man; or as the website Queerty put it: "a super-hot twink fatale!" (Raymundo). This new butch perception of Crocker—dominated by the presence of his dick—highlighted the conspicuous absence of his high-pitched voice, yelling and crying that were so prominent in LBA. Gay pornography blogger Zachary Shire went so far as to advise him to "not talk or make noise during his [eventual] 'full-length porno'...That would be ideal" (2011). Besides the snide comments belittling Crocker's appearance and voice in LBA, for the most part, the reaction on the internet was overwhelming surprise, not only at Crocker's radical transformation, but at user's own feelings that they found Crocker attractive. GayPornFanatic's response was typical when they wrote: "I don't keep up with Chris Crocker like I used to back in the day...But I HAVE been keeping up enough to know that he's more than masculine (?) nowadays than when he wanted us to leave Britney alone...He looks rather hot. Maybe fuckable?

He definitely knows how to show off his best assets (and by that I mean his face and his dick. His butt looks nice too)" (2012). In these ways, we can see that pornography embodies relational affects that not only change our relationship to the world but also change our relationship to ourselves.

These nude images were intended as a tease to a larger pornographic project that was revealed soon after their release. In June of 2011 drag D.J. and director Chi Chi LaRue announced that she would be directing Crocker in a pornographic video titled *Cockstar*, which would be produced and distributed by her studio Channel One Releasing. When explaining the collaboration, LaRue detailed that she wanted the movie to "leave people asking themselves about the very nature of pornography and I want to incorporate everything that Chris Crocker is: the video diary entries, the music, the artist, the freak!" (WeHoDaily). It is interesting how LaRue cannot help but include all the various elements that make up Crocker's aesthetic; just *cock* is not enough! And the fact that this pornographic movie would have tried to capture the becoming spaces between Crocker the diarist, the singer, and the artist shows how all-encompassing he is as subject. Crocker's identity does not exist within a singular tense. And thinking about Crocker's identity as a culmination of relational forces is the most comprehensive way to understand the idea of him as a transindividual *porn star*. The amount of paratextual content that he brings to new media contexts connects these new texts to a vast network of unexpected social actors in ways that no other gay male pornographic performer before him has ever done.

Crocker is the most well-known man to ever intentionally venture into the realm of organized gay pornography. No other porn performer has ever had over two minutes of footage go viral on the internet (or any other pre-internet platform) with over 40 million views, nor have any performers had weeks of national television coverage reporting on, and replaying, that same footage repeatedly. This is an important point to make because of what it implies for the pornography made by Crocker. While the shocked initial reactions to Crocker's transformed physical body obviously represents our ingrained patriarchal ideas about what attractive masculinity is *supposed* to look like, I think another aspect to the reaction was excitement over the potential Crocker's pornographic performance had to incorporate new relational intensities into a media form so essential to gay male communal formations and sexual fantasy. Because of

his notoriety going into pornography, the mechanics of the texts themselves mattered less than the resonance they carried for the viewers who were confronting their own preconceived notions about the genre itself, the changing nature of contemporary masculinity, and the blurred lines between pornography and other media forms. This is how we can recognize the aesthetic of the transindividual; the degree to which their affective resonance emphasizes a sense of becoming with the other media incarnations. This is the remarkable aspect of Crocker's foray into pornography: the way in which its aesthetic not only accounts for Crocker's own journey through the mediasphere, but also how he turns pornography into an exercise in transindividual amplification.

And while many gay pornographic performers work on expanding their "brand" by performing in movies with directors working outside of the pornography industry (e.g. Francois Sagat in *L.A. Zombie* [2010]), becoming "sex educators" (e.g. Conner Habib), or singing (e.g. Johnny Hazzard's 2006 single "Deeper into You" [2012]), or flirting with the artworld (e.g. Colby Keller), many eventually leave pornography for a time to focus on these extracurricular activities. This helps to delegitimize performing in pornography as an artistic pursuit and robs the pornographic text of the opportunity to have active intertextual exchange with other media forms. Crocker's media journey led him in the opposite direction. The lead up to his pornographic debut was years in the making. By having his own personal history and affective identity traits so thoroughly infused within the consciousness of the viewer, Crocker embodies the nature of the transindividual by opening new relational fields within a pornographic text. Combes makes this point clear when she writes that "relation is not something that links together two preexisting terms but is something that arises by constituting the terms themselves *as* relations [;] then we understand how knowledge can appear as a relation of relations" (17, original emphasis).

**Crocker and the Maverick Men**

On the heels of the anticipation for *Cockstar*, it was announced that the documentary *Me at the Zoo* would premiere theatrically at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival and air on HBO later that year. Crocker is the main subject of the documentary that also focuses on the early days of YouTube and the changing media environment triggered by the site's creation. Because of the

promotional commitments attached to the movie, Crocker announced that he was canceling production of *Cockstar* to avoid scheduling conflicts. This change of heart was not particularly surprising considering that the coupling of Crocker with an established professional studio seemed like a mismatch from the outset. Despite the lip service paid to wanting to represent the diversity of Crocker's identity within the movie, the changing of his persona to *Cockstar*—along with contractual restrictions that prevented him from posting nude images on his own social media—made for an uncomfortable marriage that limited Crocker's transindividual aesthetic before shooting even began. In the summer of 2012, after the promotional work for the documentary was completed, Crocker announced that he would instead be working with the pro-am website MaverickMen.



Figure 3.6. Cole, Crocker, Globe and Hunter.

The couple who run the site MaverickMen (Figure 3.6), Cole and Hunter, became popular because of their sex videos on Xtube and eventually extended their tube concept to their own pay site. They direct and edit all the scenes themselves and each video features the two of them

having sex with an attractive young man—or two! One of the unique features of Maverick Men scenes is the way they incorporate extended pre-sex interaction footage with the invited performers. This footage—just like the sex scenes—is shot with a handheld camera, do not always have the best sound or lighting, and allow the performer's personal history—as he tells it—to extend the narrative for the sex about to take place. These features match up well with Crocker's vlogging aesthetic, and he cited the fact that they shoot "real sex" as the main reason why he decided to make his pornographic debut with the site. Interestingly, Crocker's scene with the Maverick Men included his boyfriend at the time Justin Globe. Crocker made it clear that this scene was not going to be a standalone one. His intentions were to start a pornographic website with Globe to solidify their financial future. Crocker mentioned on many occasions that the money he would make from his future pornography company would be invested in a home mortgage for himself and Globe. So even in the buildup to the scene, Crocker was not so much emphasizing the uniqueness of this moment as situating it as just another part of a larger narrative. Crocker expands on this point when he links his pornographic debut to his YouTube presence when he explains that:

> Sharing my sex life and sexual desires is no different than my day-to-day intimate videos…It's me letting down a wall most of society keeps up. That's my only talent. Being my 100% self on camera. The self most of us try to hide. What is porn anyway? Is it doing a shameful, crass act on camera... because if so, I screwed myself on camera years ago (Ayala).

Understanding the scene within this context will help us read for moments that represent Crocker's transindividual aesthetic. The Maverick Men shoot the scene with an awareness of Crocker's transmedia history. The ghost of LBA, and the personal traits of its star, haunt the video throughout.

**Crocker Becomes a Transindividual "Porn Star"**

In the description of the video on their site, Cole and Hunter comment on the enthusiasm that the fans have about this upcoming scene: "Since we started teasing about it, Hunter and I have been inundated with requests to show this video. Apparently, there are a lot of Chris Crocker fans out there that are just itching to see him get dicked-down by us! Let us know what

you think. I know the boys will be reading all your comments so show them some love" (Cole). Immediately Cole is emphasizing the degree of interactivity between performer and viewer in a way that is not typical of his other scene descriptions. Usually, Cole will create a made-up story about how they met their fellow performer and go onto describe what himself and Hunter will be doing to them sexually in the scene (I say "made-up" because the bareback nature of the pornography, along with the consistency of scenes released on a weekly basis, belies the casual descriptions of how the scenes come together). Instead, Cole's description here reads as an invitation to viewers to participate in the scene's afterlife on the web, acknowledging that the sexual desire is potent, whether one is a viewer or a participant. While all the scenes on the site have their own comment sections, a promise declaring that the two stars will be reading them adds an extra sense of importance and sexual enjoyment to the act of writing a comment; and doing so helps viewers to contextualize Crocker into this moment in his life, which brings its own sense of pleasure in making historical and transmedia connections. While we may think of interactive pornography as being mechanical extensions to our computer to help us get manually stimulated, Cole lays bare how affective interactions within a media assemblage can provide enhanced sexual stimulation over and above the typical performer/viewer relationship. Cole's assumptions about the eagerness of fans to view the scene were correct, because on the night of its release there were rumors on Twitter of the site crashing under the weight of the traffic.

When analyzing the scene to identify elements embodying the transindividual aesthetic of Crocker, it is essential to take a holistic approach that accounts for Crocker's previous media incarnations. In this regard, LBA is not explicitly mentioned throughout the duration of the Maverick Men shoot. However, there is a unique way in which LBA is referenced through plays on androgyny in the scene that would be out of place in a gay pornographic environment that typically emphasizes masculinity and fetishizes straight *gay-for-pay* performers. Yet here, Crocker's androgynous history from LBA is treated with comic affect to break the tension for viewers who might fearfully question their homosexuality if they find themselves attracted to someone who looks *too much* like a woman.

The opening begins in a curious way, with an iris-out on a children's doll—in the form of a wide-eyed Husky—being manipulated by Cole to give the impression that the dog is speaking. Off camera we hear Cole say "Look at how cute you are. Are you ready to fuck little puppy?"

Then, a very high-pitched voice responds by saying: "Why of course mister Maverick Man!" Whereupon we hear Cole laughing, breaking the illusion of the momentary puppet show. The camera then pans up to reveal that it was Crocker providing the high-pitched squeal of the stuffed animal. It strikes me that starting the video this way is an intentional reference to LBA in a couple of ways. Beginning the video with a black screen is already a deviation from how most pornographic internet studios introduce their videos. They typically start off their scenes with a series of title cards featuring the logo of the company, the title of the video, the name of the performers, and a series of copyright notifications and warnings that distributing the scene without permission is illegal. However, the black screen here represents a blank slate, freeing it from the traditional warnings about copyright infringement and other legalities that situate other videos as commodities owned and protected by official sounding jargon. There is no legal warning to open this scene. And the iris-out signifies an openness; a slow appreciation for the excitement inherent in pornographic texts, a more nuanced approach than just cutting straight to the sex. Calling attention to a transitional effect like this also creates a sense of continuity with a previous image. Editing effects are as much about connecting a narrative as they are about cutting away from an image. And in this moment, it is the head of the doll filling the screen—along with an androgynous high-pitched voice—that connects this scene to LBA. Though instead of the prolonged drama of incessant media coverage and online harassment endured by Crocker because of LBA, the laugh immediately afterward here helps to figuratively bury that trauma in a therapeutic way. The self-seriousness which the media and Croker embodied back in 2007 over the video has slowly faded with time, and the caricature that Crocker became because of LBA—symbolized here by a stuffed doll—is immediately pushed aside, replaced by a laughing, mature, "masculine," and sexually potent version of himself.

Additional visual cues acknowledging Crocker's transitional media presence are evident in the clothing both Crocker and Globe decide to wear during their pre-sex interview. While each is being played with on the bed by Cole and Hunter as they take turns holding the camera, we see Crocker wearing only underwear and a Boston College t-shirt, while Globe wears Superman underwear and an American flag tank top. Crocker's t-shirt immediately signals his relational nature, since the Maverick Men are based in Boston. Crocker purposefully chose not to wear anything from his native Tennessee. And Globe's attire complements Crocker's journey from a

teenager yelling at a camera alone in his bedroom to a viral media sensation. The striking dichotomy of childlike underwear—recalling the intimacy of LBA taking place in Crocker's childhood bedroom—contrasted against the symbol of an American flag—emphasizes the subsequent national reach of LBA emanating from such an intimate place. The idea of clothing emphasizing anything but an obstacle to the sex about to take place—or at most, a signifier of the power relations about to be enacted into sexual practice (teacher/student or pool-boy/homeowner dynamics)—is quite rare in contemporary pornography, and yet another moment where Crocker reorients our relationship to the pornographic text. Of course, all that clothing eventually comes off, turning these markers of LBA into someone that recedes into the past, and out of sight.

The importance of these moments and signifiers lies in how they help connect viewers to Crocker's media lineage. Crocker is not trying to establish a new version of himself now that he is a pornographic performer, instead he actively references LBA with his opening high-pitched provocation, allowing viewers to appreciate the "masculine" body they are about to indulge in while not allowing them to forget the "feminine" waif that remains a part of his identity. Crocker's reference to LBA within the context of pornography compels viewers to refer to a period of Crocker's life where both his gender and "sincere body" were in question, which in turn forces them to relate to Crocker's performance—and this one pornographic moment within a wider media sphere—in a new way. This is how Crocker builds upon his transindividual aesthetic.

***Trans*individual**



Figure 3.7. Crocker showing off his *man*gina.

While the scene eventually delivers an appropriate amount of "cock n' ass" shots to keep it from being confused with some sort of experimental pornography not interested in helping the viewer reach a sexual climax, there is a subversive flash in the preamble to the sex where Crocker indulges in his transgenderness for a fleeting moment. In a gesture lasting under a minute, Croker shoves his penis between his legs to show what he calls his "*man*gina" (Figure 3.7). And while such a move might disrupt the sexual flow of most other gay sex scenes, any potential tension is broken by the joyful laughter of Justin and the Maverick Men. Such laughing is something that is embedded as part of the Maverick Men's video aesthetic. They do not ever laugh to make fun of their guest performers (if anything, they go out of their way to express how "hot" they are, and how grateful they are to have them in their apartment). So, the laughing at Crocker's *man*gina cannot be understood as anything but part of the comfortable, happy, and welcoming environment the Maverick Men set up for their guests. In addition to the laughter, Cole even plays into the gesture by pretending to perform cunnilingus on the temporary *man*gina. This moment of transversive sexual play within a genre solely dependent on abiding by the norms of particular sexualities (there is no accidental or playful man-on-man dick sucking in

heterosexual pornographic scenes across the web) not only testifies to the Maverick Men's willingness to indulge in Crocker's transindividual persona, but also reveals a crucial connection between the queer aspects of both the transindividual and transgender.

Throughout this chapter, I have been chronicling Crocker's deviations from the "sincere body" through a mapping of his disjointed affective states. And while my emphasis has been on how LBA acts as a starting point for us to understand how the transindividual traits displayed in that video carry over throughout all his subsequent media incarnations, there is a point to be made about how his transindividual qualities complement his queer self-identification as transgendered. One reason why this point needs to be explored further regarding Crocker is the fact that it is—quite frankly—very easy to forget that he is transgendered. Mostly because Crocker does not conform to conventional ideas about a biological male's need to alter his outward appearance to fit into normative ideas of what a woman is "supposed" to look like. The articulation of the transgender experience via personalities like Laverne Cox, and the mainstreaming of cross-dressing performance seen in a show like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, have conditioned media consumers to think about transgender as an act that needs to be articulated through someone's outward appearance. We have come to understand the MTF transgender as someone who displays the journey of their gender transition through their makeup, clothing and manner. And in the process, many have come to universalize the idea of transgender and impose an artificial endpoint for transgender to ultimately strive for. Such thinking subverts the inherent queer aspects of what it means to be transgender. However, it is in fact Crocker's failure to meet these social standards that offer us a new way to think about the transitional nature of transgender via the aesthetics of the transindividual.

Reading Crocker's lack of conformity to the social norms of transgender appearance as a "failure" of transgenderness itself allows us to view Corker within the framework of Jack Halberstam's concept of the "queer art of failure." For Halberstam, queer failure is an inability (intentional or not) to conform to a heteronormative notion of "common sense," rooted in goals like "success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct and hope" (89). While quantifying the successes of an amateur YouTuber and social media celebrity is difficult in such conventional terms, Crocker's failure to land a reality television show when he moved out to L.A., his financial inability to permanently move out of his grandmother's house, and inability

to conform to a prescribed "look" of transgender all certainly align him with Halberstam's notion of the queer art of failure. Crocker himself acknowledges how failure is an embedded part of his aesthetic when he describes the nature of his fame in one of his videos:

> You wouldn't think that people would be mad at me for not being famous anymore, but they are…It's like they wanted to vicariously feel fame through me, cause they watched me go up…And it's like I let them down…They watched someone they never thought could become famous, become famous, me…people are really mad about it, that I squandered my fame. And I'm like, hmm, well with so many people telling me how I'm not famous anymore…that I'm a has-been…It got me thinking, if so many people are determined to make me believe I'm not famous, that counts for something...And Paris Hilton's in her own class, she's famous for being famous. And I guess I'm one of the first to be famous for not being famous. And I get that own category! You guys have really blessed me! So many people are determined to make me feel like I'm not famous, that all those people doing it makes me famous. So thanks, I'm famous for not being famous."
> (Chris Crocker's Deleted and Uploaded Videos)

Here we can understand how Crocker is actively renegotiating the parameters of fame around this own "failure," and creating a distinction of fame rooted in failure. By conceiving of success and failure on his own terms, Crocker's *man*gina gesture can be understood as queerly upsetting the "sincere" transgender body that has been established by an LGBT civil rights movement overly influenced within the mainstream by the same aspirational rhetoric that Halberstam's observations work to critique. Instead of emphasizing a "successful" endpoint to being transgendered, Crocker instead utilizes his transindividual aesthetic to highlight the transition's process of becoming.

While Crocker's vocal ranting and physical inchoateness in LBA established the parameters around which we understand his media persona, there is an alternative set of videos—that stand in stark contrast—where he not only calmly and thoughtfully articulates the complexities of the gay rights movement, but also expands upon the nuances of his own transgendered identity. Crocker has stated many times in his videos that he identifies as transgendered, but he does not have the money to transition, and that he does not feel the need to have surgery to justify his transgendered identity. Crocker says that he is "trans" to the extent

that his gender is "transcendent," and talks about an experience from his life to explain what me means:

> When I was just living in L.A. I was wearing dresses all the time. And I do believe that your environment makes a lot of things more conducive. I believe that when I'm in L.A. of course I feel more safe to wear dresses and makeup. And now that I'm back here in the south I'm more "this" [pointing to his to his current masculine features of short naturally colored hair and a five o'clock shadow]. And I'm more an everyday guy on the outside. But clearly when I talk, when I speak, when I walk, you can see my nature, my spirit, my soul (2014).

These references to his environment impacting this identity formation is discontinuous with the "Born this Way" fixity of contemporary LGBT identity politics as evidenced in the IGB campaign, and reveal the poetic traits of contradictory and relational social affects expressed through ambiguous terminology like "spirit" and "soul." The contradictions composing Crocker's identity do not end with his transgendered identity; his position as a subject in *Me at the Zoo* seemingly conflicts with his role as a pornographic performer. And the romantic YouTube videos and sexually explicit pornography shoots he shared with his boyfriend Globe, contradict the music video for his song "One Day" (2011), where Crocker laments the end of his relationship with that same (former) boyfriend. These contradictions contribute to the poetics of Crocker's image, and it is within these practices of discontinuity and failure that the aesthetic of the transindividual can be understood.

To understand Crocker's transgender "failure" recognizes how his transmedia aesthetic utilizes affecto-physicality to amplify affects that many other YouTubers (and the public) repress in an effort to maintain a "sincere body." Whether it be transgender or not, a "sincere body" is the primary attribute that allows one to be a "functioning" part of a social system, even though these systems do not always coincide with our disjointed affective intensities. What is produced within this uncomfortable fit between how we experience social affects and how we are expected to move through prescribed identity systems is a queer recognition that something is askew; this is what makes affects so queer. Affects, just like queerness, offer us the opportunity to recognize how we move across various and unwieldy intensities, instead of simply moving through a prescribed narrative constructed by our social realm. This idea of queerness invoking a

transitional sense of movement echoes Sedgwick's definition of queer when she explains that, "queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant.* The word 'queer' itself means *across*" (xii). And while our social systems systemize us into subjectivities, affects help us feel this longing for movement and extension *beyond* the bounds of subjective hailing.

Aligning the aesthetic of the transindividual with transgender becomes logical when one thinks about both modes as emphasizing the affective characteristic of kinetic movement. Here Crocker is not only attempting to move viewers past their fears about androgyny within the gay pornography text by turning it into a humorous gesture, but he also situates viewers back into the moment of LBA when they first were introduced to Crocker and were left to wonder whether they were looking at a boy or a girl. This effectively situates viewers in an in between space of becoming among the fields of LBA, transgender, and a sexualized masculinity. And to just add another dimension to the transindividual aesthetic, Crocker's final words after the sex is over is: "yeah, let's go fuck some women now!" Ensuring that the viewer is left with more questions than answers. Connecting a text to a wider media assemblage will do that at a times, evoke an abstraction in an effort towards eventual social clarity. Here Crocker is still very much in the process becoming by evoking abstraction to further develop his transindividual aesthetic.

**Ready for His Close-up**

Weeks before the release of the Maverick Men scene, Crocker announced that he had broken up with Globe. Crocker and Globe's relationship had never been a smooth one. And while the Maverick Men scene was meant to emphasizes the sexual passion, love, and camaraderie between the two of them, what followed was an extension of the pornographic text that is typically ignored because of the degree to which it veers from the pleasure of sexual fantasy. This extension played out on all of Crocker's social media platforms and in additional pornographic texts. In May of 2012 they made a YouTube video together titled "Friends Not Supportive of your Love Life?" where they spoke about their previous five-month breakup and how their friends felt compelled to choose who to be friends with following their split. Surely part of the reason they felt compelled to make this video had to do with the song and subsequent music video for "One Day" recorded by Crocker. In 2011 Crocker wrote this song detailing the

pain he experienced as a direct result of their initial breakup. The chorus of the song reads:

> One day you'll look back and see, all of the love that you left in me. How could you just throw it away? One day you'll look back I'll be, just a faded-out memory, I see it all slippin' away. It's never too late, baby don't wait, or this moment'll pass you by. And, one day you'll look back and see, all the love that you lost in me, and hate how you threw it away. I, I love you, I, I really do. I, I love you, I, I really do (Diana Kassel).

The music video consists of a collage of YouTube clips featuring happy moments between Globe and Crocker laughing with each other in bed edited alongside shots of Crocker staring longingly out across the ocean, and of course, crying profusely. Yet despite the turmoil portrayed in the song, they got back together, broke-up before the release of the Maverick Men scene, got back together after the scene, got tattoos of each other's names on their chests over a design of a heart, and shot another pornographic video afterwards with the professional studio Lucas Entertainment. As of this writing they are broken-up, but remain friends.

The dynamics of their on-again off-again relationship interplay within the texts of the two pornographic scenes they shot together in intriguing ways. The contradictions playing out in-between the pain that the relationship caused each of them on the PG-rated YouTube platform, set against the sexual passion portrayed in the explicit scenes, exemplifying both the bleed between the two media spaces and the types of affective poetics that I have been arguing are a central part of a transindividual aesthetic. Once again, Crocker's crying and ejaculating on cue for the camera provoke consternation and confusion for viewers trying to pinpoint quantifiable "true" identity traits. However, we should know by now that this is a fruitless endeavor. The affecto-physical layer of experience is not supposed to reveal "truths" as much as be a constant reminder of our always shifting relational states, and the degree to which our affective bodies are impacted by those states.

When considering Crocker in both LBA and his pornographic work, one cannot help but consider how the close-up of his crying and orgasmic face in these texts reveals an urge in the viewer to learn the "truth" about Crocker as a subject. When writing about Andy Warhol's 1963 film *Blow Job*—a film that is like LBA in both the camera's proximity to the face and harsh lighting—Ara Osterweil writes that "the close-up removes the mask of false expression and reveals the 'truth' of the subject. Like pornography, the close-up is animated by a drive for

knowledge about the subject" (446). While Osterweil acknowledges the futility of this assumption through her use of quotation marks around the word "truth," one can sense just how much the statement is infused with a problematic Balázsian assumption that "psychological interiority" can be found within the physicality of facial movements. One of this chapter's primary arguments is that we as viewers should move away from these types of assumptions about "truth" being found within individual texts, and expand textual analysis to include the various ways in which the text interacts with its relational field. This is exactly how the dynamics of media poetics are explored. Tzvetan Todorov explains that the nature of the "verisimilar is not a relation between discourse and its referent (the relation of truth), but between discourse and what readers believe is true...Public opinion therefore functions as a rule of genre that relates to all genres" (19). Crocker's tendency to react to his relational field and embody a range of intensities across media platforms reveals both the transformative nature of his identity formation and the qualities that make him a transindividual *porn star*.

**The Transindividual Goes Out to Play**

Chapter One of this dissertation questioned the inherent "logic" around gay identity and showed how strands of amateur pornography are queerly subverting that logic via bodily confession. This chapter took a more populist route by analyzing a gay identity that we assumed to know, and showed how Crocker's pornographic performance revealed new aspects of his identity formation across various media platforms. While both chapters document the political, social, and sexual dynamics of the genre and how it is diffused throughout our mediascape, I think it is essential to take a step back and consider how this virtual dynamism is playing out within a physical real-world scenario. Because while the popular internet era has allowed people to explore different aspects of their identity and sexual desires by watching pornography within the privacy of their own home, the metaphor of "the closet" continues to be an embedded dividing line within our collective cultural mindset prioritizing the publicness of coming out. Coming out of "the closet" as gay is a metaphor that not only groups one into an imagined collective identity, but also manifests in public physical gathering places, whether that be sporadically via parades and protests, or more permanently via neighborhoods like The Castro in San Francisco, Greenwich Village in New York City, or the Gay Village in Montreal. These

locales endure today not only because they add to the perceived cultural cachet of a big city and are thought of as urban sanctuaries for gay people looking to escape their small towns, but also because they legitimize the inherent "public" nature of the coming out narrative. If there are no more gay neighborhoods where would one come out/go out to?

Despite the family-friendly and real-estate-driven gentrification imperative infringing upon/being perpetuated by gay neighborhoods across North America, a pornographic aesthetic remains an insistent part of their streetscape. While there are many reasons for this, I argue that its primary function is to evoke a type of pornographic affective geography. This pornographic street aesthetic strikes me as part of an enduring struggle to maintain sexuality as a core identity signifier within a gay community finding itself ever more incorporated into a regimen of desexualized homonormativity. The final chapter of this dissertation will explore these phenomena further by utilizing Montreal's Gay Village as a case study. The choice of Montreal is of course due to my familiarity with the area (I lived there for four years), but also due to its unique position within the North American context. The cultural and linguistic differences of Montreal contribute to its image as an outlier to the cultural and linguistic English language hegemony dominating the rest of the continent. With Quebec having held two referenda on separating from the rest of Canada, along with its image as an oasis of libidinal freedom during the time of America's Prohibition, the active pornographic space of Montreal's Gay Village seemingly utilizes pornography to emphasize its own renegade history. However, while Montreal is an outlier within North American culture, I hope to show how its dynamic as an active pornographic space reflects universal trends seen across metropolitan gay culture.

CHAPTER THREE

**How a Networked Gay Village Becomes an Active Pornographic Space**

*No single text can create a public.*

Michael Warner, "Publics and Counter Publics" (2002, 62)

**The Meat Market**

The idea for this chapter originated from a seemingly innocent trip to my local supermarket. Having just moved to Montreal's Gay Village, [37] I quickly realized that my usual running-errands attire consisting of a t-shirt and sweatpants had absolutely no place within the cruiser-friendly aisles of Supermarché Club Métro. However, despite my feelings of fashion inadequacy, I headed to the market anyway, reasoning that I could at least discreetly ogle those who had the decency to show up to this party all done up. So, as I am pushing my cart through the vegetable section of this meat market, I see a man from behind resting his heavily tattooed arm on his hip. Since tattoos are definitely one of my major turn-ons, I begin to wheel my way around to his front side so I could see if his face was as attractive as his well-defined painted bicep. As I turn to finally see his face, I realize that this person is none other than French-Canadian gay porn star extraordinaire Pierre Fitch (Figure 4.1).
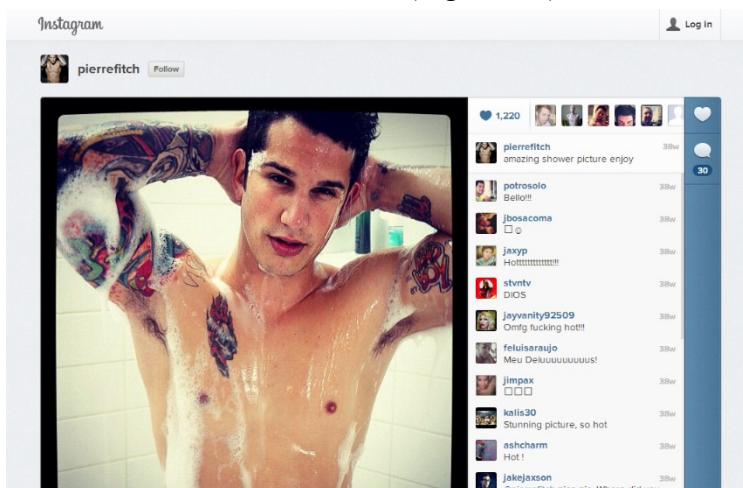


Figure 4.1. A shower picture from Fitch's Instagram.

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[37] For a more comprehensive analysis of the cultural and historical dynamics of Montreal's Gay Village see Donald W. Hinrichs' *Montreal's Gay Village: The Story of a Unique Urban Neighborhood Through the Sociological Lens* (2012).

Once I got over my initial shocked realization that pornographic stars actually do their own food shopping (!), I suppose what made the encounter so jarring was that in seeing Fitch, I was for the first time realizing how a person could so explicitly represent the sexual affects coursing through a physical space at a particular moment. I was totally feeling whatever sexual vibes he was giving off! But the question is, what exactly was I feeling? Well, since sexuality is sexual practices, discourses, and power relations incorporated as part of an assemblage, then my felt intensities in this moment reveal how these forces are experienced in relation to my affective body.

Of course, being in a supermarket with scores of other people conjures up a series of varying affects; however, at that instant there was no doubting that Fitch was acting as a signifier for the wider pornosphere and sexually attuned desires embedded as a part of Montreal's Gay Village. In my own attempts to understand a layered encounter such as this one, I find some degree of solace in Dyer's definition of intensity as "excitement, drama, affectivity of living" (2002, 26). What makes his definition so comforting is its embrace of how affect encompasses the totality of the lived experience and does not shy away from the messy expansiveness that the term conveys. These intensities that I felt at the market—sexual objectification, nervousness, recognition, physical interpersonal relationality, and excitement—are virtual affects that help shape a wider understanding of sexuality, desire, longing, and even pornography. Like the multivariate nature of desire itself, sexual affects are not just one thing, they are the accumulation of intensities experienced during moments of becoming. Sedgwick and Adam Frank explain this relational structure when they write that sexuality has always been a part of a larger "'co-assembly' with an affective system" (2003, 504).

My moment of relationality with Fitch at the market represented a particular point within this wider system, and helped me to understand how a person can embody, and subsequently make visible, some invisible sexual affects that typically go unnoticed amongst people within physical spaces. This is what I find so exciting about utilizing affect theory as a way to think about how contemporary internet pornography travels across various media platforms, virtual spaces and physical places. Doing so emphasizes how pornographic texts reflect the expansiveness of affect itself. The dynamic nature of sexual affects has the ability to transform our conventional understanding of places and spaces, and to embrace the contractions, overlaps,

and folds that are at the heart of the mode of pornographic interaction. This is an intriguing way to begin mapping a dynamic cultural object that actively resists prescribed readings. After all, life (and pornography) are messy—should not our readings of it be equally messy?

Upon arriving home to reflect on this experience—and of course update my social networks with news of the sighting—I was struck by how the encounter resonated with me in an affective way, and not within the ideological and epistemological confines in which I have long been conditioned to understand media as a result of my academic training. I was not noticeably concerned by the lack of racial and gender diversity (most Canadian porn performers are white), nor did I feel an explicit pang of guilt about shopping at the same corporate-operated, non-union, market as Fitch—despite my loyalty to Marxist teachings (it just happened to be the market closest to my apartment). Instead, in this moment of contemplation, I found it essential to account for the role desire and arousal play within my own public social assemblages. In considering these questions, I began to recognize the ways in which pornography studies has struggled to fully account for responses shaped by affect theory within reception, production, distribution, and display as a way of accounting for the resulting sexual desires circulating within a multitude of spaces and places. This chapter attempts to address some of these issues by using strands of affect theory as developed by Massumi and Paasonen to offer an affective reading of the sensory experiences created when a multitude of screens, apps, social networks, and pornographic performers actively work to create an active pornographic space. By isolating Montreal's Gay Village as a point within this assemblage we can better understand how contemporary networked pornographic media act as a transmitter for sexual affects composing our understandings of physical places and virtual spaces.

## Diversifying Our Understanding of Sexual Affect

As I outlined in the introduction, if we are to have a more comprehensive understanding of desire, we need to think about sexuality outside of its traditional understandings within a Freudian hierarchy of drives. We also must shift our thinking from a Foucauldian perspective, which makes clear that society's enactment of sexuality is centered around power relations rather than drives. Instead, I argue that it is more expansive to adopt Massumi's contention that sex is a precondition for human existence. Yes, sex is necessary to propagate the human race, but it is not

a required act in order to maintain one's individual existence, like the more conventional drives of breathing and eating. By deprioritizing these dynamics of sexuality as conceived by Freud and Foucault, and instead focusing on an affective understanding of desire, we can consider how sexual affects are part of a network of intensities enacting the process of becoming pornographic. However, if we are to have a comprehensive understanding of affects, we must acknowledge that they are in a continual state of emergence, and working to make new connections between contradictory forces, instead of seeking resolution. Massumi writes that affects are part of a network of intensities that "insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate" (1995a, 85). Massumi crystallizes the idea that affects are the way in which we work towards forming a notion of ourselves within social assemblages and help us understand our connection to a wider matrix of felt resonance that has no predetermined destination. By conceiving of affects in this way we can understand how sexual intensity, desire, and potential—the primary characteristics of sexual affects—are infused within practically every type of physical and social interaction. Doing so will help to flatten the constructed binaries of unidirectional/interactive, virtual/physical, public/private and place/space—or what Sedgwick and Frank call a "bipolar analytic framework" (1995, 500).

For Massumi, affect is the coalescence of "resonating levels" (1995a, 94). These resonating levels not only include the notion of "mind" and "body," but also "volition and cognition...expectation and suspense, body depth and epidermis, past and future, action and reaction, happiness and sadness, quiescence and arousal, passivity and activity" (1995a, 94). With this listing, Massumi articulates what might be called an assemblage of intensities. And while his assemblage is not dependent on a media formation, it accounts for the contradictory intensities invested within, and towards, media objects—especially ones as polarizing as pornography. These contradictions highlight affect's most essential quality, its insistence on being autonomous. Massumi writes that "the *autonomy* of affect is in its participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness*. Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, potential for interaction, it is" (1995a, 96, original emphasis). This autonomous quality is what makes Massumi's formulation of affect so adaptable to media studies, the acknowledgment that media objects are representative of more than just an intent to make money, but are personal expressions of confused, conflicted, and

passionate feelings. These feelings are not only reflected in audience's reaction to media, but are also a part of the affective labor that people invest in creating media. Media can be thought of as a primary convergence point for the assemblage of intensities that Massumi outlines. With this in mind, he cites affect as being the "point of emergence" for these contradictory resonating levels (1995b, 94). He explains that affect is their "virtual coexistence and interconnection—that critical point shadowing every image/expression-event" (1995b, 94). This is what makes accounting for affect such a crucial part of studying media formations, particularly ones with as many wide-ranging platform and spatial variations as pornography.

When considering pornography as part of an assemblage I am expanding on Paasonen's definition of a "pornographic assemblage" (3). She describes it as a "complex nexus of flesh, generic conventions, technologies, regulatory acts and values—factors and actors that are both material and immaterial, human and nonhuman—in and through which particular images and texts become experienced and defined as pornographic" (3). This of course plays out over various platforms delivering pornographic content within a variety of different spaces. What gives the idea of a pornographic assemblage so much currency within the digital era is the way in which multiple types of media platforms have become a normalized part of public communal gatherings. And unlike the theatrical mode of watching movies, pornographic consumption happens within nebulous spaces, in starts and stops, as when one is watching it on a computer or DVD player, or seeing it for a split second as a pop-up ad, spam email, covertly on a networked device or communally on a screen in a public place. But regardless of which medium pornography is consumed through, Paasonen recognizes that the assemblage is only part of a wider environment that must also be considered when evaluating pornographic consumption. It is the adaptability of screen culture within our digital age that makes the places of pornographic consumption an even more essential consideration than it would be in a theatrical setting. This chapter accounts for pornographic media as part of an assemblage within specific spatial environments featuring public displays and exchanges of moving image pornography. Accounting for pornography as part of a public process of creation and exchange not only helps us recognize it as a kinetic mode, but also acknowledges a strong social impulse towards putting affect into circulation via sexual representation. This recognition will allow a strand of pornography studies to move beyond discussions of how technology *determines* gay public sex

cultures and instead begin to consider how pornography's circulation within the places and spaces of gay communal interaction turns the text into a social media amplifying a wide range sexual affects and practices. These public sites of pornographic interaction provide moments of rupture and recognition offering the most fertile ground for discovering the complex dynamics of becoming pornographic. As Mark B.N. Hansen notes, it is affect that can be thought of as "an interface between the domain of information (the digital) and embodied human experience" (209).

As a way to begin thinking about how affects are connected to the practices of media, let us consider Vivian Sobchack's point about their relationality to technological assemblages. She writes about how a multitude of media platforms can become "incorporated and lived by the human beings who create and engage [media] within a structure of meanings and metaphors in which subject-object relations are not only cooperative and co-constitutive but are also dynamic and reversible" (137). Here Sobchack makes clear that it is within the co-constitutive operative relation of human activity and the objects of technology that one can best understand how the practices of circulation and relationality help to create spaces where online activity and affective intensity are intertwined. One of the primary hurdles to reaching a deeper understanding of public sex culture is an over-reliance on analyzing its dynamics primarily through the perspective of market capitalism. Capitalism is one ideological actor within the assemblage composing both identity formation and media creation. To allow this ideology to overwhelm our understanding of either robs both of their affective potentiality. Imposing a neoliberal framework onto a media analysis sometimes assumes a perpetually closing window of freedom of expression regarding creative possibilities on corporate media platforms. I believe that this assumptive logic is somewhat of a dead end. Of course, concern over the corrupting ethos of capitalism is legitimate, and this chapter is in no way downplaying the urgency that is required among the citizenry to fight against a neoliberal ideology assuming that the financial markets, the institution of marriage, the prison system, and the military-industrial complex are working towards the best interests of North American civil rights and sexual freedoms. However, this chapter attempts to understand what drives the gay public sex culture in Montreal besides just profit motives. Concepts like production, consumption, exchange, and value have meaning outside of Marxism's materialist framework, and are utilized as notions that are equally essential to the ideology's

broader attempt to theorize an overall political economy reflecting on essential affects not wholly dependent on financial conditions.[38] Pornographic analyses interpreting it as a mode produced as part of an exploitative capitalist perspective have always left me wanting more. I find myself searching for the corresponding desire, passion, and despair in these studies that I feel with such intensity as I wander from one sexual rendezvous to another. What part does sexual affect play in contemporary public sex culture, especially for those who take the capitalist intent behind its mode of production for granted? I am not the first to ask this question. Hollis Griffin perceptively notes that, "of course, some presentational modes and cultural practices connected to sexual identity are easily folded into capitalism and, as a result, might serve as further proof of Baudrillardian theories that everything is embedded in a capitalist regime" (2008, 22). And while this may well be true, that should not stop us from exploring the myriad of other ways media operates within the public sphere. Griffin encourages us to expand how we consider gay public media and think about the ways in which a "reflexive circulation of discourse" is created between the space, the media shown within the space, and the people who inhabit the space (2008, 18).

**The Rhetoric of Pornography's Places and Spaces**

While there have recently been enlightening strides within media studies to address how the internet has altered the dynamics of pornographic viewership within broad conceptual spaces like "the home" or within the formation of virtual communities, surprisingly little has been written about how the most recent digitized networked manifestations of pornography is viewed, utilized and circulated in specific physical places of communal gathering. One reason for this is the limited ways in which pornography studies has historically utilized concepts like "place" and "space" in contextualizing texts. Part of the reason for this limited understanding is rooted in the approach that pornography's defenders took in arguing against the anti-pornography faction of second wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s.

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[38] Simon Mohun speaks to these affective communal aspects of Marxist analysis when he writes that "value is not something intrinsic to a single commodity, considered apart from its exchange for another, but rather reflects a division of labor of independent commodity producers, the social nature of whose labor is only revealed in the act of exchange. Value, therefore, has a *purely social reality*" (509, emphasis mine).

This is what happens when concepts and understandings arise as a result of ideological battles. These battles between those who, on the one hand, want to situate the pornographic text within a metaphorically fixed *place* where both female and male audiences are passive viewers who absorb the worst "inhumane" and "degrading" representations of pornography without ever enacting any type of subjective agency that might allow them to filter, contextualize, or subversively interpret the images presented to them;[39] this rhetoric contrasts greatly with concepts of pornography that, on the other hand, are a part of an open dialectical *space* animating the "windmills of a pornographic fantasy" that "offer freedom to exploiter and exploited alike" (Williams 1999, 22). Katrien Jacobs summarizes the dynamics of place and space in this line of argumentation when she writes that "places are distinct locations and imply an indication of stability, [while] spaces are constituted through movements and operations of bodies and minds" (74).

This "place" and "space" binary has been a major stumbling block against a more thoroughly complex understanding of the networks making up contemporary pornographic creation, distribution and consumption. A primary example of this is the ironic way the enclosed locale of the movie theater remains the primary site for liberal pornography academics to theorize about the progressive dialectical viewing space that something like pornography viewing affords.[40] In this formation, a physical place creates a metaphorically open space for diverse receptions of the pornographic text. One of the theoretical frameworks for this type of argument is developed through the writing of Miriam Hansen, as in passages where she states that the "theatrical experience," during the time of early cinema, "because of its paradigmatically different organization of the relations of reception, provided the *formal* conditions for an alternative public sphere, a *structural* possibility of articulating experience in a communicative, relatively autonomous form" (390, original emphasis). Hansen's influential theoretical construct of how an alternative public sphere—understood as being an "alternative (self-regulated, locally,

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[39] In addition to the writing of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (1989), other texts that assume a passive, non-dialectical, porn-watching experience are the documentary *Not A Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1981), the books *Eclectic Views on Gay Male Pornography: Pornucopia* (2004), *Gay Male Pornography: An Issue of Sex Discrimination*. (2004), and *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (2010).

[40] Some of the best accounts of the theatrical period include Samuel Delaney's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), José B. Capino's "Homologies of Space: Text and Spectatorship in All-Male Adult Theaters" (2005), and Brendan Gill's "Blue Notes" (1973).

and socially specific) organization of experience"—becomes realized through the racial, class, and gender-diverse social interaction and exchange facilitated by the physical structure of the movie theater, is a model upon which much of pornography studies adopted its conceptual understanding of place and space (390-391). The theater, being a quantifiable locale, is what provides the explicit boundaries around which discursive play can be imagined and contextualized. This is how Hansen's theory can come to accommodate any number of progressive theories regarding cinematic social experiences—from the theater in its earliest days being a place of female agency, to being a place of racial inclusivity. While situating pornography within this type of theorization has, historically speaking, helped to widen the cultural understanding of pornography's multifaceted role within society, it is perhaps because of this dominant framework that pornography studies has yet to fully conceive of all the ways in which the contemporary text is screened, exchanged and manifested in non-theatrical public venues.[41] The next logical questions become, what happens when pornography is enacted as a process of becoming when shown in spaces occupying the *in-between-ness* of the physical location of a screening room and the virtual space of the web? And how does one recognize an audience's experience with the pornographic image outside of the structural space of the theater? Considering that smartphone and internet technologies have only relatively recently been implicated within the facilitation of a digitized self-pornographic exchange, it has become necessary to reevaluate the spatial dynamics that pornography studies has already laid out for the discipline.

Now do not get me wrong. I do not mean to sound hostile to the investment in, or seemingly transcendent qualities projected onto, the physical places where one engages in what

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[41] In addition to the texts mentioned in footnote 42, consider how in *Screening Sex* Williams situates the theater as being the primary location where the cultural politics of sex and gender are expressed and challenged amongst the American public through the sexually explicit material screened there. Additionally, the overall (well deserved) influential dominance of Williams within pornography studies is rooted within a traditional cultural studies practice that tends to value the social discourses centered around institutionally produced (in this case Hollywood and studio pornography producers) moving image texts. I understand that Williams' work is a historical study, but that does not explain her lack of enthusiasm for the dialectical potential of interactive, non-theatrical pornographic texts and new technologies (*Screening Sex*, 314-315 and in *Hard Core,* 304-315)*,* or the political potential of distracted viewing and ambient pornography. This is an example of how theatrical exhibition remains paramount even when analyzing the cultural influence of contemporary texts (*Screening Sex* chapters 6 and 7). Far from placing the blame for this trend on one individual, scholars from communication studies (who have traditionally focused more on the apparatus and circulation of media) have not produced much work regarding the paratextual dynamics of pornographic viewership.

is one of the most sexually enlightening experience of any young person's life: one's first communal pornographic viewing experience. Even though I was born in 1982, and was too young to take the Staten Island Ferry ride over to Manhattan to take part in the heyday of public gay sex communities centered inside the pornography theaters of Times Square, my own first encounters with pornography were still communal and public in a different way.[42] The first video pornography I ever saw was in 1996 at a friend's house where a bunch of us watched this smuggled video tape with a sense of excitement and sexual intensity. To describe the experience as embodying a type of sexual intensity is actually quite apropos considering our young age at the time. Massumi describes intensity as a type of "incipient action and expression" (1995b, 91). Of course, at this time, my group of friends and I were all still virgins, and very much in the incipient stages of our own sexual development. Watching the pornography helped us to affectively imagine our future selves through the sexually active figures on screen, while as individuals, I am sure we each worried about our own approach to sex when we finally would have the chance to try it out for ourselves. Watching pornography together was a visual acknowledgment of both our (imagined?) collective sexual maturation and our individual coming to terms with it. And while I understand that my experience with communal pornography watching inside this private house cannot be considered within the same socio-diverse vein as Hansen's alternative public sphere, Massumi makes it clear that "intensity is asocial, but not presocial—it *includes* social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic" (1995a, 91, original emphasis). Forming communities around intensity is about relating to a level of resonance that is a part of the wider affective assemblage, but is, at times, difficult to imagine. By situating pornography as the visual manifestation of wider sexual affects, we can complicate traditionally held notions of private, public and sexual community, and begin to understand each in new ways.

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[42] To quickly explain, my shifting focus between Montreal and New York City within this chapter is not intended to flatten the cultural, linguistic, national or geographic differences between the two cities. I understand that comparing them here might come off as culturally insensitive to their differences. My intention is to situate myself within the active pornographic spaces of my own experience; growing up in New York City and living in Montreal for four years doing research for a PhD. I do not think it is appropriate to hide my own erotic curiosity that motivates a study such as this. My phenomenological experiences within these two cities are an essential part of how I understand what an active pornographic space is.

In considering the home as an initial example of how internet accessibility changed the interpersonal relations and the public/private spatial dynamics within the family as it relates to pornography, one needs to remember only as far back as 1996, when internet technology started to make its way into working-class homes. This was a time when many households centralized the "family computer" in a common area (like the computer room, dining room, or living room), and as a result, pornographic consumption was forced outside of the private domains of the bathroom and bedroom, and became implicated within the temporal rhythm and familial interaction fostered by social domestic spaces. Places that were figured into the architecture of the home for the purpose of social interaction began to be negotiated amongst the carved out private time that physical (literally connected to the phone jack) internet pornography viewing required—e.g. watching pornography when other members of the family were out of the house, sleeping in their own room, or just busy in the next room. This dynamic marked a significant change in the way that pornography began to make its public presence felt in physical spaces of communal gathering, not only because of the sexual affects and practices that became a part of the texture of the familial locale, but also because of the digital traces that were left behind as evidence of pornography's incursion into this new domesticated, networked public space. Unlike television programming, where sexually explicit content in the U.S. is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, or pornography on videotape, which is easily transportable and can still be hidden under beds and in the back of closets, digitized pornography left traces on "family computers" in the form of web cookies, increased data storage and viruses (especially in the early days of the internet). This not only slowed down the functionality of the computer, but through its digital footprint, pornography began to leave more noticeable remnants within a family dynamic where it was previously able to be hidden in the back of a closet. With this in mind, it becomes increasingly difficult to think of the introduction of the internet into the home as solely encouraging "a return to more private [pornographic] viewing situations" (Williams 2008, 313). This digital incursion of pornography into domestic communal spaces reveals that the concept of "privacy" is essentially an actively negotiated space within a public place.

To continue to write about internet manifestations of pornography in strict terms of "private" and "public" just builds onto practices within pornography studies that have established

redundancies in thinking about viewing and circulation experiences.[43] This practice also problematically breeds new work that correspondingly maintains the strict divisions established between "private" online pornography practices and "public" behavior. [44] While this may be the form that pornography studies has structured for itself, these binaries do not correspond to the lived experiences of people who incorporate the technological accessibility of pornography into their everyday communal interactions—or to what W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen call the "technical form" or "formal technics" of a "general mediality that is constitutive of the human as a 'biotechnical' form of life" (ix).

**Technology and Public Sex Culture**

Despite how efficient web users became in negotiating pornography, sexual chatrooms, and sexual hook ups into the communal spheres of domesticated space, one might wonder why pornography studies never seemed to account for how these same practices of negotiation would subsequently be utilized and incorporated outside of the home and in contemporary public spaces of communal gathering. After all, these online practices enhance both public sex and pornographic culture. However, even after internet use became common in many homes in North America,[45] going into the new millennium most texts about gay public sex cultures were framed within the most paranoid terms. A prominent example of this is Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner situating gay public sex within the specter of an American "national heterosexuality" (549). In their 1998 article "Public Sex," Berlant and Warner lay out a devastating future for gay

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[43] Excellent accounts of some of the elaborate private networks established for earlier pornography circulation can be found in Waugh's *Hard to Imagine* (1996), and Eric Schaefer's "Plain Brown Wrapper" (2007).

[44] Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy* is a good example of this. While his second chapter constitutes an excellent analysis of the nature and aesthetic of the bareback gay pornography studio Treasure Island Media (TIM), the difference between types of audience consumption (public/private) and the various platforms on which this content is distributed (DVD/internet) is never discussed. Does watching a TIM movie in the privacy of one's own home have the same physical and affective impact as when one watches it within a sex club with an active audience? Dean has an opportunity to answer this question in the other chapters where he describes the behavior within bareback sex clubs, but he does not situate the role that pornography plays within those spaces either. This is an instance where an excellent analysis of public gay sex practice and gay pornography culture is not brought to bear on a unified gay sex culture.

[45] The release of Internet Explorer 3 in the summer of 1996 marked a significant increase in the browser's popularity because it was included as a free part of the Windows '95 operating system, which meant that the browser was operating on 60 million computers by 1997. This strategy of giving away the internet for free put a significant dent into the pay-per-minute internet model established by America Online.

public sex culture in light of a wave of rezoning laws prompted by the increasing corporate takeovers of public space sweeping the country during the time of the article's publication. Using New York City as a prime example of this trend, they write that:

> Gay men have come to take for granted the availability of explicitly sexual materials, theaters, and clubs. That is how they have learned to find each other; to map a commonly accessible world; to construct the architecture of queer space in a homophobic environment…all of that is about to change. Now, gay men who want sexual materials or who want to meet other men for sex will have two choices: they can cathect the privatized virtual public of phone sex and the internet; or they can travel to small, inaccessible, little-trafficked, badly lit areas, remote from public transportation and from any residences (551).

It is telling how the bleak binary laid out in this passage—a physical public versus "the privatized virtual public"—shows little regard for how technologies like the "phone" and the "internet" are capable of facilitating new types of physical public gatherings and of weaving sexual affects into the architectural and environmental locales that are not traditionally considered sexual. This is not entirely surprising since their article is invested in dismantling the private realm of sexuality, which for them is the cornerstone of a repressive "national heterosexuality" because of the way in which a "privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just sex—is what [they] call heteronormativity" (554). This is how they go about situating *private* as correlating with the dynamics of neoliberalism, when they argue against the condition of privacy "in which sexuality seems like a property of subjectivity rather than a *publicly* or counterpublicly accessible culture" (559, emphasis mine). Of course, this neat binary established between the private nature of virtual technologies (the phone, the internet) and the utopian potential of subversive public material culture overemphasizes the singularity of each and undercuts their interdependent relationship. As Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise make clear, "culture is not something 'out there' out of which technology emerges or into which it is put. Rather, the particular articulations that constitute a technology *are* its context. There is no culture *and* technology; rather there is *technological culture*" (128-129, original emphasis).

It is important to remember that concepts and practices like public/private, place/space, and technology, rely on, and are perceived through each other. Berlant and Warner's article flattens history and avoids the multitude of ways in which technology has consistently enacted and enlivened mostly every aspect of public sex culture. To distance the utilization of the phone and the internet, and contextualize each as if they are somehow unrelated to traditional practices that have long brought people together in gay public sexual communities, is to ignore how new media technologies are less of an interruption within public sex practices than part of a technological continuum that has always constituted a critical part of the architecture, and promotion of, sexually-oriented locales. For instance, pornography theaters depend on a projector, bars and clubs utilize lights, audio equipment and televisions, while erotic shops require DVDs and sex toys made with factory machinery, along with books and magazines produced by printing presses, to fill their shelves. The publication of *Der Eigene* (the modern world's first known gay-themed magazine) in Germany in 1896 is just one example of the historical use of printing technology as a way to promote and form gay public sexual communities.

And, regarding how technology impacts the nature of public sex culture, Berlant and Warner undervalue its role in enlivening the political potency of public sex by conceiving of technology's "private" characteristics as somehow undercutting the more democratically "accessible" qualities of publicness. I argue that public sex has always been a private affair. The public dynamics of clubs, bars and sex shops depend on a wide range of factors limiting participation, from cover charges, to the legal drinking age, to the prohibitively expensive cost of sex toys and DVDs. Berlant and Warner's notion of public sex relies on a level of conspicuous consumption masking the degree of private privilege one must attain to participate in "public sex." However, they do point out the symbiotic relationship between those with the financial privilege to engage in public sex and those who do not when they mention public transportation and specify that while "not all of the thousands who migrate or make pilgrimages to Christopher Street use the porn shops…all benefit from the fact that some do" (562). While this observation acknowledges the financial limitations of gay social life, it also highlights how geography acts as an additional barrier to public sex. Mowlabocus expands on this point when he writes that "metropolitan gay culture is *physical*; it refers to the gay village, and the proliferation of clubs

and bars of shops and cafes that cater to urban gay men" (62, original emphasis). And he defines "metropolitan" as "refer[ing] to the most stable, socially recognized, politically assimilated and economically productive expression of homosexuality to be found in the West today" (62). The politics of public "accessibility" seem more difficult to romanticize once all the barriers to access have been accounted for.

In fairness to Warner, in 1999 he does elaborate on his definition of "public sex" in greater detail in his book *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (pp. 171-193). There he writes that "'public sex' is public in the sense that it takes place outside the home, but it usually takes place in areas that have been chosen for their seclusion, and like all sex involves extremely intimate and private associations" (173). And while I agree with his assertion that "public sex" is linked to intimacy, this dissertation is an attempt to move away from the idea that evolving technologies only foster "private associations" of public sexuality. Yes, the pornographic sex shops and theaters around Times Square and Christopher Street have been mostly banished, but their destruction does not diminish the wide-reaching sexual affects that have never been tied exclusively to a particular private physical location. Gauging sexual affects within public spaces showcasing imagery facilitated by internet-enabled technologies is my task for this chapter, but this could have just as easily been organized around clothing, occupations, or furtive glances on the street. These objects and actions embody symptomatic sexual affects that have always been a part of various public realms—even after the closing of these pornography theaters. This is part of what makes sexual affects just as difficult to legislate as they are to locate. While analyzing zoning laws and court cases is essential to documenting a history of gay rights struggles, it tells us very little about affect's ability to traverse a multitude of public locales, institutions, and laws.

**The Becoming of an Active Pornographic Space**

Of course, affect cannot be located. In this regard, Gregg and Seigworth remind us that "affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*; in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (1). And while I assume the unlocateability of affect, I argue that affect can be visualized. In many ways, contemporary pornography, and its participants, are the embodiment of this *in-between-ness* that is so fundamental to affect. In a literal sense, not only do professional porn performers exist

within the *in-between* space consisting of the corporeality of their physical and pictorial representations of their bodies, they also exist somewhere between the glamorous spectacularity of the pornographic world, and the banality of grocery shopping. The attempt by performers to showcase just how "normal" and relatable they are to their fans by showing bits of their everyday life through social media is responded to by amateur users eager to showcase their own explicitly sexual practices on the same social platforms as the professionals. I think of this as less of an attempt by amateurs to break into the industry, than as an effort to strip away pornographic performers' outsized dominance in circulating sexual affects within media targeted at the gay male community. In this way, affect manifests itself as an impulse towards representation. As Anna Gibbs notes, "what is co-opted by the media is primarily affect, and…the media functions as amplifiers and modulators of affect which is transmitted by the human face and voice...and also by the image. Moreover, the media inaugurate and orchestrate affective sequences" (338). With Gibbs' framework in mind, our task as pornography scholars should not be to parse the differences between professional and amateur performers, but rather to try and gain a deeper understanding of how each type of pornographic manifestation is simultaneously contributing to an effort to represent and elicit widely experienced sexual affects. Contemporary internet pornography exists in an *in-between* space where spectators are also the object of lust (as anyone who's ever masturbated on a webcam can attest to), and any place can turn into a sexualized space (as anyone who's ever viewed pornography in public on their smartphone can attest to). Looking at the various ways in which contemporary networked pornography is experienced within the public sphere becomes the best way to analyze the flow of sexual affects within a multitude of spaces.

Perhaps the best way to start mapping the pornographic assemblage of Montreal's Gay Village is to offer a more expanded narrative of my subsequent run-ins with Fitch around town— though I warn you ahead of time there is much less intrigue, passion and sex in this story than I would prefer! Every other time I saw Fitch in the Village he was completing equally mundane errands, similar to the first time I spotted him going food shopping. One time we waited in the same line together for the ATM at the Bank of Montreal, and a few months later I saw him at the post office where he appeared to be mailing off individually wrapped packages taking the

general form of his own branded Fleshjack.[46]  Add this to my eyewitness experiences of seeing other gay porn performers like Jessy Karson walking his dog; Adrian Long listening to music on the metro; Brandon Jones on the rooftop of the Sky nightclub; Gabriel Lenfant walking around the summertime closed-to-traffic section of the Village; Marko Lebeau working at the gay sex shop Priape; and Jake Bass (Figure 4.2) ordering a MacPoulet at McDonald's; I eventually came to realize that these real world sightings are emblematic of how Montreal's Gay Village is oriented around public displays of moving image pornography within its architecture and streetscape.
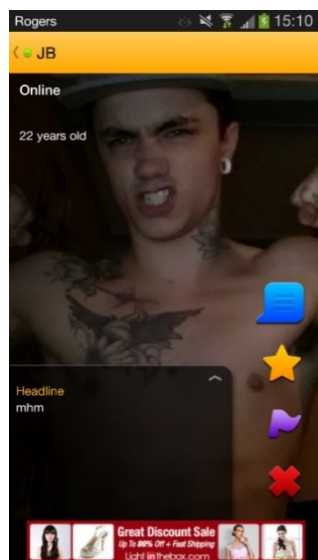


Figure 4.2. Jake Bass' Grindr profile

The city establishes a dynamic confluence between pornographic performers' innocuous daily existence and the more outwardly attention-seeking hard core moving images that are a staple on the television screens inside many of the bars, clubs, and bathhouses dominating the Village's storefronts. Even sex shops and strip clubs casually have large screens featured in their display windows directed at passersby on the sidewalk, playing sexually suggestive soft-core advertisements and promotions for their own establishment and gay-themed events happening around town. This set-up creates a unique kind of multifaceted pornographic sensory experience, one where the banal activities of the everyday and highly stimulating pornographic media

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[46] Fleshjack is a company producing sex toys molded from the actual mouth and/or butt of popular pornographic performers. The toy is modeled to take the form of a flashlight (which is why they are more commonly known as Fleshlights). One holds this 12-inch tube in their hand and inserts their penis inside the silicone tube for enhanced sexual stimulation.

conflate the sexual affects flowing through both spaces and places, whether one is a retailer, performer, consumer, or just a passerby. This is essentially the physical manifestation of what Massumi calls "an active space," one that is "composed by forces of interaction between dynamic elements" (1995b).

In addition to the incorporation of a professional pornographic aesthetic into the rhythms of the neighborhood, what makes Montreal's Gay Village such a dynamic space of sexual affects is the role that amateur texts play within this pornographic assemblage. Throughout the bars, *dépanneurs,* clubs, restaurants, sex shops, and bathhouses that make up the Village, people are busy using their smartphones posting pictures and videos of their own bodies and sex acts on social networking sites like Xtube and Tumblr, and apps like Grindr and Scruff. Paradoxically, professional pornography performers are using many of those same apps and websites to not only promote their own sex scenes, but also to post pictures of themselves doing things, like grocery shopping, which makes them seem more relatable and accessible to their fans. This intertwining of amateur and professional pornography, side-by-side, distributed through virtual spheres and public displays, is typical of a new model of networked pornographic production, distribution and consumption. Mowlabocus conceives of this interaction between professional and amateur texts as "porn 2.0." It is a concept he describes as "smudging the boundaries between producer, performer, distributor, and consumer" (73). He's describing the ways in which evolving technologies allow pornography's audiences the opportunity to simultaneously become pornographic producers by distributing their own amateur content on the same internet distribution platforms as the professionals. Mowlabocus' term is a convenient shorthand for the assemblages facilitating becoming pornographic in these spaces.

This side-by-side model—which also plays out on the public screens and projections throughout Montreal—helps to turn an active (sexual) space—which has traditionally been formed around studio-produced pornography—into an active pornographic space, a space where amateur pornography is included as part of the tangible and affective exchange of public interactions. This active pornographic space distinguishes itself from the active sexual spaces of the 1970s and 1980s, which were to a large degree centered around theatrical exhibitions of studio-produced pornography. During this theatrical era, sexual encounters amongst gay men were facilitated by the privacy afforded by the theater's confines, and a sexual environment was

encouraged by the pornography. Today, computers, smartphones, and wifi/4G accessibility—coupled with the practices of amateur pornography—actively create new types of active pornographic spaces fostering the instantaneous creation and exchange of pornographic images of oneself. These types of internet-enabled practices allow for a technological response from the amateur to be manifested in the same digitized image medium as any professionally produced pornography. This aspect of the pornographic assemblage fulfills Massumi's definition of an active space, which claims that the "variations that occur within it are variations *of* it" (1995b, original emphasis).

**Le Stud**

In terms of inhabiting a physical locale, perhaps the one location within Montreal's Gay Village that best encapsulates the qualities of an active pornographic space is at the eastern end of the Village, at a bar named Le Stud. The reason I situate this bar as the epitome of an active pornographic space is because it not only facilitates the circulation of sexual affects through socializing, drinking, and dancing—as all gay bars do—but Le Stud also utilizes moving image pornography in a very prominent way to do so. Out of the twenty-one televisions that hang from its ceiling, six of them are connected to a closed circuit feed showing hard core pornography featuring performers who embody the muscular, hairy, and leather *bear* aesthetic that most closely mirrors the appearance of the majority of the bar's patrons.[47] And while pornography playing within a gay bar may not be particularly unique, the one aspect of the bar that struck me the most—both as a rare sight and the aspect that most closely realizes the concept of exchange required of an active pornographic space—were the presence of two computer stations installed in the corner of the bar, each of them sponsored by, and connected to, the hook up site Bear411 (Figure 4.3). Does the inclusion of these stations signal a more fully integrated digital future where we go to gay bars to hook up online? The inclusion of these hook up computer stations as

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[47] In an interview with the bar's owner Mario Goudreau, he informed me that the closed circuit pornographic feed was provided as a service offered by the gay sex shop Priape, located just a few blocks away (Goudreau). In a subsequent interview with the general manager of Priape, Daniel St-Louis, he told me that his company "provide[s] the streaming services for different bars, bathhouses, establishments who don't want to invest themselves into purchasing on an ongoing basis DVDs and having to manage that; so we provide the service and manage that for them. So, it was more in terms of offering a diversity of services as the industry is evolving and changing, and how the internet is becoming a key instrument in playing in all that too [*sic*]" (St-Louis).
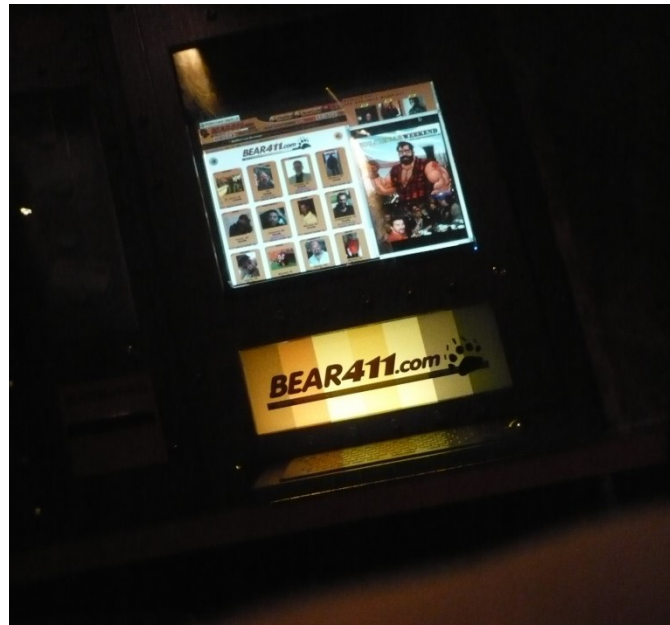
Figure 4.3. The Bear 411 computer station at Le Stud.

part of the bar's architecture institutionalizes the spatial aspects that emphasize the creation and exchange of online amateur pornography in environments already featuring professionally produced pornography. Thus, Le Stud provocatively contrasts pornographic texts in a way that most fully illustrates how Montreal's gay male public interacts within spaces that are both influenced by, and are a reaction to, professionally produced pornographic imagery. In this place of amateur and professional circulation of pornographic imagery, each text becomes interchangeable because its aim is less oriented toward helping its viewers reach an individual and immediate orgasm, but is instead resonating as an experience facilitating the circulation of sexual affects, which have always encouraged social gatherings in public spaces. The pornography is not the reason why the gay community is gathered in this space. However, unlike pornography's theatrical era where the professional text was the object around which socialization occurred, Le Stud's use of pornography reveals the *taken-for-granted* nature of the nude image as part of gay male public socialization. The inclusion of computers inside Le Stud acknowledges the degree to which the contemporary gay male is expected to make their online activities a part of their public persona, and vice-versa. A large part of one's shared public internet persona must include the exchange of one's nude image, whether that be through sending pictures through Grindr, Bear411, Twitter, or posting videos on Tumblr. Nude imagery is part of the currency of gay public life and its ability to be exchanged is an essential part of what

can turn most any public place into an active pornographic space.

In addition to the dynamic becoming between professional and amateur pornography so pronounced in Le Stud, there are also particular ways in which this over twenty-year-old establishment accentuates its pornographic aesthetic by showcasing its customer's bodies within its architecture, which make them an active part of the sexualized spectacle. Within the bar, the patron's body actively infuses additional layers of aesthetic, kinetic, and affective character into the pornographic circulation already underway. With an upstairs area and five bars spread throughout the locale, Le Stud's expansive square footage encourages unique and compelling *in-between* spaces between customers that not only provoke a range of sexual affects, but also create an erotic continuum among the surrounding pornographic screens. When one first walks in, the first bar is positioned alongside a bank of video gambling machines, the two Bear411 computer stations, and two televisions hanging from above playing pornography. This initial spatial relationship not only orients one toward the idea that screens are going to be a fully incorporated part of one's experience at Le Stud, but the set-up also implies that a patron is intended to assume a position as an active watcher. Believe it or not, the variety and quantity of screens one encounters within the bar are not intended to take time or space away from looking at other patrons. In fact, the screens encourage groupings of friends and strangers that not only form an additional focal point for cruising men, but also reveal the physical intentions behind these virtual images. Masturbating to these pornographic images in real time is not Le Stud's intention for their patrons; instead I understand the screens as instrumental in enabling a flow throughout the bar of both physical bodies and wandering eyes. With this dynamic in place, bodies and screens become incorporated within a process of pornographic becoming instead of working toward divergent aims. Additionally, there are even some corners where these screens are bright enough to illuminate patrons in the darkest reaches of the bar. The difficulty in maintaining focused attention on any one thing in a place with such a diffused lighting scheme not only forces one to take in the entirety of the spectacle, but eventually helps to subsume one as a part of the spectacle at any given moment.

One of the primary areas where one becomes a part of the spectacle—within one of the few screen vacuums throughout the bar—is on its downstairs dance floor. The dance floor is framed by eight floor-to-ceiling wooden columns that are joined together by four separate

wooden panels serving as a convenient place to rest your drink while looking at others gyrating on the dance floor. This set-up serves as the informal site for what Muñoz calls "the dance floor as a stage for queer performativity" (66). I do not utilize the word "queer" here to connote gay or lesbian, but instead I use it as the most accurate descriptor for the contradictory melding of a space that is supposed to be inviting to all (the dance floor), yet is typically limited only to those who are invited (the stage). Muñoz's description of such a space is appropriate for Le Stud's schizophrenic environment, which simultaneously encourages its patrons to be active voyeurs while requiring those same people to eventually be objectified on an informal stage at certain points in the evening. The conspicuous absence of pornographic screens around the dance floor implies that this spectacle of dancing men is meant as a visual replacement for the sexual affects typically manifested through the interaction of screens and physical bodies throughout the rest of the bar. On this dance floor patrons occasionally wear leather harnesses (obviously—it is a bear bar!) instead of shirts, and more often dancers take their shirts off because of the heat on the dance floor. These instances provide the porous surface upon which affective projections can both penetrate and emanate from the skin of the patron. Here the smell, movement, and perspiration of the patron act as the physical realization of the digitized pornographic image and reveal the degree to which the virtual realm of pornography can be realized within a physical space. Therefore, the physical aspects of an environment are essential to consider when reading an active pornographic space. Within these spaces the physical interplay with the video text actively becomes a part of an overall textual and spatial analysis.

There are also two pool tables near the back that serve some of the same functions as the dance floor. Each table is positioned next to a bar with one framed by two wooden columns joined by a drink resting plank (like those framing the dance floor). The other table is situated next to a wall with a bench jutting out from it where patrons can rest their drinks and have an ideal view of the players bending over the table with their butts high in the air. The area around the first pool table one encounters at Le Stud is positioned to create a uniquely layered viewing dynamic incorporating both a screen showing pornography and a large tinted window facing the sidewalk. Here the "stage" of the pool table (Figure 4.4) is established not only by the two wooden columns (outside of the frame of the photo), but also by the fact that the space of the pool table is sunken, so that in order to enter the space, one must take one step down into the

playing area. Standing just outside of the staging area, facing the window, one sees pornographic images literally projected onto the Montreal streetscape. This layered "screen" space expands the idea of the active pornographic space outside of the bar and extends it onto the city.



Figure 4.4. The "stage" of the pool table that becomes pornographic by incorporating pornographic visuals inside with the non-pornographic public street outside.

To argue for an inherent relationship between the pornographic media playing within the insular world of bars and the outside world of Village is not particularly far-fetched, considering that the Village is a hub for Quebec's television production industry. The Village is home to four media organizations: Radio Canada, TVA, CTVglobemedia, and Astral*Media*. Just like the gay bars, these companies were priced out of the centralized downtown business district and eventually clustered into this more affordable locale. This shared role between media companies and gay businesses in the development of the neighborhood's architectural dynamic creates a type of symbiotic relationship where media representation plays a prominent role in situations that might not typically call for it in other parts of the city. Perhaps the presence of these media

institutions normalizes media as a fully incorporated part of the neighborhood's rhythm, or maybe these gay businesses use pornographic media as a way to promulgate a counter-narrative to the widely accepted (state-financed and -regulated) representations perpetrated by these media outlets. Regardless of the cause, the presence of these media outlets permeates the Village and cannot be ignored when considering the space's configuration.

**Montreal as an Active Part of the Pornographic Text**

The aughts were a type of general rebirth for a city whose global reputation was established decades ago with the World Exposition of 1967, the Olympics in 1976, and Quebec's separatist referenda in 1980 and 1995. However, with the failure of the referendum in 1995, along with the strike-shortened baseball season in 1994—which stranded the first-place Expos in perpetual purgatory—coupled with a Stanley Cup drought since 1993, Montreal figuratively fell off the global cultural radar going into the new millennium. By the mid-2000s Montreal regained a spot within the contemporary zeitgeist because of the buzz surrounding the city's music scene, especially with the 2004 release of Arcade Fire's *Funeral*. On that album, they sing about a city where your "skin gets thicker by living out in the snow." The sensation that Arcade Fire generated amongst the throngs of hipsters rapidly gentrifying urban areas across North America bestowed a sense of *cool* over the city sparking a renewed interest in Montreal for a generation of people who do not think about the place outside of its association with hockey. Along with the music, there were a few other cultural and artisanal trends sweeping across the continent that Montreal was well positioned for. The popularization of craft beers, which emphasize the diverse tastes produced through small-scale breweries, brought attention to Montreal's expansive craft beer production.[48] And the recent search for "real" food within an industrialized and mass-produced food market has encouraged people to explore previously unknown regional cuisines. This search for the "genuine" within the local helped people around the world discover poutine, Quebec's unofficial national dish. After all, what culture in the world could say "no" to a pile of French fries drenched in gravy and sprinkled with cheese curds? And while some of these trends highlight aspects of Montreal that were already a part of its cultural makeup, there were also

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[48] Beer Connoisseur named Montreal as one of the top 20 "Best Beer Cities" in 2015 (Thibault).

intentional maneuvers initiated by Quebec's government to position Montreal as a city prepared to embrace a digitized future. A significant part of this effort culminated with Quebec's investment in the video game industry to the tune of $491 million (CND) worth of labor tax credits from 1998 to 2010—resulting in the building of a Ubisoft studio in the Mile End neighborhood in 1997 (Chung). This same studio would go onto release the wildly popular game *Assassin's Creed* in 2007. Canada's beneficial exchange rate for Americans, and a strong engineering student population, turned the city into a prominent North American technology hub. Out of this confluence, a culture and industry based around the web has flourished, and as a result, a robust pornographic production and distribution scene has emerged within the city.[49]

Unlike the music, beer, food, or video games that can be indulged in outside of, and decontextualized from a Montreal context, the pornography shot in the city actively brings viewers into the specific physical, acoustic, demographic, architectural, and geographic space of the city. While most of the products developed specifically for the French-Canadian audience remain local to the province, Montreal's pornography is able to project a sense of the *local* out to a global audience. The appeal of pornography shot in Montreal lies in its emphasized regional differences from most other North American productions. For instance, there is, of course, the particularly eroticized aspects of the Village that are showcased in most of the productions—like the places and performers from the fully nude gay male strip clubs that are unique to the Village and have no counterparts in places like New York City, Chicago, or Los Angeles. Coupled with an exotic French-speaking culture that appeals to both English-speaking Americans and native French who are turned on by a Québécois accent, the elements of a unique pornographic product are evident.

Another aspect contributing to the local nature of the pornography created in the city is that the majority of owners and directors of gay pornography produced in Montreal are native Québécois. Stefan Sirard worked for Motorola in the Bay Area of California for many years before returning back home to Montreal to found a modeling agency, which eventually evolved into the gay pornography company Next Door Studios. Next Door Studios currently produces movies and recruits talent in both San Francisco and Montreal. Marko Lebeau worked as a

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[49] For a more thorough analysis of the gay pornography scene in Montreal see Mao Lei's *Men of Montreal: An Ethnographic Study of the Gay Porn Industry* (2015).

pornographic performer for many professional sites before founding his own site MenOfMontreal. Jeremy Roddick started broadcasting live cam shows while working on his degree in marketing and web design in Montreal. After graduation he performed in studio-produced pornography until he founded his own set of sites: VideoBoys, Squirtz, and a self-titled site. Today VideoBoys and Squirtz are run by another Montrealer, Ian Duncan. Duncan not only runs these two sites, but his most widely seen and praised work is featured in scenes where he is the satellite director for the studio Cocky Boys. Under the ownership of American Jake Jaxson since 2010, Cocky Boys has re-branded itself as a company attracting some of the most popular names in the industry by producing high-quality movies that at times strive for the artistic heights of Hollywood's most well recognized directors, and at other times he embraces the playfulness of reality television tropes. Within a 350-mile radius, Cocky Boys has been able to diversify the look of their videos by filming in three distinct locations: an apartment in Williamsburg, a house in the woods of Chappaqua New York, and Montreal. While the scenes shot in Montreal do not necessarily share an aesthetic continuity, the narrative parts of the videos featuring footage of the Village are actively infused with the affective qualities of their performers in order to lend the cityscape enough of a universality for viewers around the world to project their own desires onto the text. However, despite the centrality of the performers, the image of the city is crucial in many of these videos, and help the city become an integral part of the wider global pornosphere.

While most Cocky Boys scenes shot in Montreal are limited to the interior of a hotel room, there are scenes showcasing performers interacting with each other in the Village and in other parts of the city. Throughout the site's video catalog there is an aesthetic emphasizing a type of affective potentiality between performers, developed either through a scripted narrative, or via the personal confessions of the performers incorporating the dynamics of the locale. The Cocky Boys' video *Austony: A Love Story* (2012) is emblematic of this visual trope focusing on potentiality. This video's theme is love, specifically the first time that these real life boyfriends remember saying "I love you" to each other. The scene starts out with Anthony Romero explaining the dynamics of his long-distance relationship with Austin Wilde while perched on the windowsill of a Montreal hotel room, with a view high above the city looming behind him. Romero lives in Indiana, while Wilde lives in St. Louis. However, Romero explains that because

of calling and messaging "we're never really apart, even if we're not in the same city. We're always connected." This acknowledgment situates Montreal as a type of *in-between* space where meeting in person is an aberration from the normal rhythm of their long-distance relationship. This intriguingly situates Montreal as an affective and idealized background embodying the potentiality of what their *love* would look like if they lived in the same city. However, despite the indexicality of the city's locales, the impact of the architecture lies in its potential to act as a meeting place for these long-distance lovers. So even when they are sharing an ice cream while sitting on the curb in the Village (Figure 4.5), or throw coins into the Amphitrite enshrined fountain of Montreal's World Trade Center (Figure 4.6), or walk along Old Montreal's pier, the focus remains not so much on laying out the specific geography of the city but instead these structures and streetscapes work more importantly as a framing device for their romance. Sure, these Montreal sites are visible in the video, but for those not familiar with Montreal, there is no visual evidence differentiating this location from an American city, French speakers are not featured, and the city's name is never identified. And while all of this points to a lack of concern over whether viewers recognize Montreal or not, I argue that this line of thinking misses how a video like this fit1s within a wider pornographic assemblage.

Figure 4.5. Sharing an ice cream in the Village.     Figure 4.6. Throwing coins in a Montreal fountain.

First, the bits of Montreal featured in videos like this help to break up the visual and geographic dominance of cities like San Francisco and resorts like Fire Island, which are recognizably entrenched within the lore of gay pornographic history. Secondly, and most importantly, including the city within a wider pornoscape recognizes a physical geography that was effectively lost during the early years of the popular internet age. This was a period highly

inundated and influenced by an amateur aesthetic that delved deep into the interior spaces of bedrooms and bathrooms, and for the most part, forgot about what the outside world looked like. The non-specific way in which Montreal is treated in *Austony*, and in the rest of the Cocky Boys catalog, might be understood as an attempt to reestablish a polished pornographic urban architecture in an internet environment dictated by the low-fi pixelated amateur aesthetic. The fact that this urban locale is set apart from the media hubs of New York City and Los Angeles lends the space a sense of potentiality for something beyond the typical parameters of media production. So, the lack of specificity regarding Montreal's centrality within a video like *Austony* should not be thought of as diminishing the role of the city, but rather as helping to add Montreal to the always expanding visual vocabulary of a pornographic assemblage. These shots of Montreal join the music, poutine, beer, and video game exports defining the city in the new millennium. Not everyone knows where these cultural manifestations emanate from. However, it is the weaving of these individual strands—not a single thread—that composes the visual fabric of a culture.

With this understanding about how gay pornography fits within Montreal's urban aesthetic, we can now focus on how the particular dynamics of the city's streetscape help create the conditions for an active pornographic space. The first part of understanding how an active pornographic space is created is to think about how a pornographic aesthetic, which is developed in a virtual space, becomes projected onto the physical places of a particular locale. Interestingly, much internet discourse is composed of a rhetoric emphasizing the transcendent virtues of globalization, yet, in many ways, the internet mostly increases our knowledge of, and interaction with, our immediate local environments. The marketing of local music bands, businesses that service the home, how we meet people for dates, and who we have sex with, are just some instances of the enactment and enlivening of our local surroundings through internet technology. This accentuation of the local is one embodied by contemporary pornographic performers as well. When I mentioned earlier in this chapter that I witnessed Fitch mailing off his own sexual merchandise (old fashion social networking), it was not just a happenstantial encounter. It was also a telling sign of the changing nature of what it means to be a pornographic performer in the digital age. With the influx of amateur content on the web, many professional performers must rely on alternative ways of making money outside of shooting scenes, which means maintaining

a fan base through social media. This is the type of publicity work that is rarely provided by the pornography companies anymore because of the constant need to find new and cheaper talent. Sightings of Fitch in person at the post office and the supermarket, in addition to following his blog where he posts pictures of himself at local restaurants, bars—and even doing yard work in front of his house (Figures 4.7 and 4.8)—are examples of his ability to intertwine himself as an *everyday/everyman* pornographic persona with the rhythm of activity in Montreal's Gay Village. Montreal is as much a part of Fitch's public persona as his pornographic performances. And Fitch's interaction with his home city is a typical activity shared amongst many contemporary pornorgraphic performers.
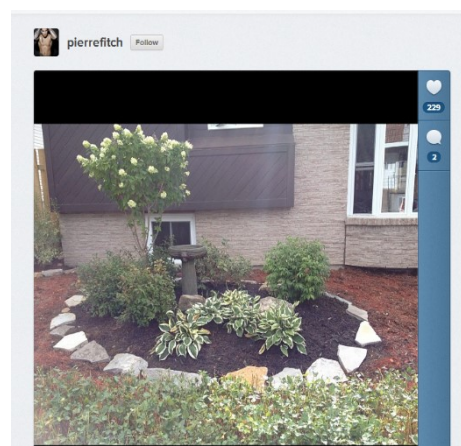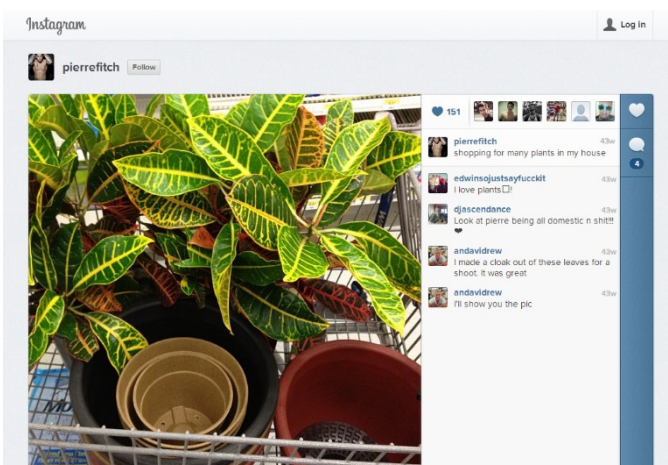


Figures 4.7 and 4.8. Fitch's journey from the plant store to his front yard.

Most performers make their home within a city or region that not only hosts a large gay male population but also, in many instances, houses the headquarters of a large gay pornography studio. Along with Montreal (Next Door Studios, Men of Montreal, Video Boys), some other North American cities and regions that feature most prominently within these type of pornographic and networked non-pornographic, real-world social interactions with porn performers are Los Angeles (Randy Blue, Bi Latin Men), San Francisco (Titan Men, Falcon), San Diego (Sean Cody, Helix Studios, 8 Teen Boy), Las Vegas (Corbin Fisher, Guys In Sweatpants), Southern Florida (College Dudes, Bait Bus) and New York City (Cocky Boys, Lucas Entertainment, Dirty Boy Video). In addition to many of these studios shooting in the city they are located in, the social media interaction through Grindr, Twitter, Instagram, Chaturbate, personal blogs, and Facebook by porn performers who live and work there accentuates the

locality of the contemporary pornographic text and illustrates how our local physical environments are the foundation of our virtual interactions. This social networking offers a visual representation of the sexual affects infused within the interactions of a city and projects a pornographic aesthetic onto the physical space of a city.

**Pierre Fitch, the Amateur, and the Projection of a Pornographic Aesthetic onto Montreal's Gay Village**
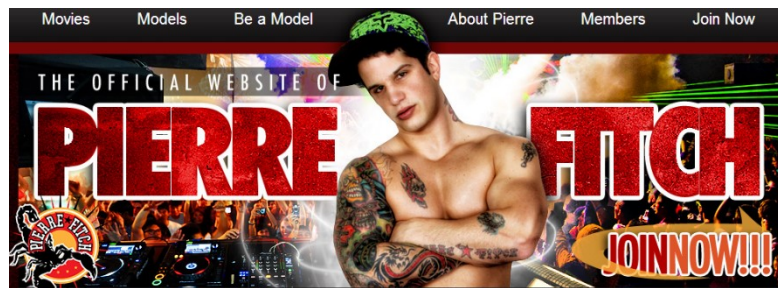

Figure 4.9. The header to Fitch's website.

In the case of Fitch, he is not shy about sharing his experiences within Montreal's Gay Village via his blog PierreFitch. On the site, he promotes his club appearances as a D.J., sells his own trademarked sex products, advertises sex scenes that he produces himself and those produced by major studios that he moonlights for. He also used to maintain a written blog where fans could read about his most recent home improvements, his workout regimen, and his late-night adventures around Montreal. His written blog has essentially been replaced by his photo blog on Instagram. Fitch became famous in the mid-1990s, as an exclusive star with Falcon Studios, before the popularization of amateur pornography on the internet. And even though being a pornographic "star" today may not be what it used to be in terms of financial gain, performers' popularity within the gay male community remains high because their professionally produced content stands in stark contrast to the low-fi aesthetics of amateur pornography and because of their accessible engagement within the gay populace through both social media and personal appearances. It is the dynamic blending of the contrast between the professional aesthetics of studio-produced pornography and the performer's willingness to engage in the same social media platforms that amateurs utilize to distribute their own pornographic imagery, that encourages the sharing of social platforms where a pornographic aesthetic is established and subsequently projected onto the physical locales of most any given metropolitan area with a high

population of gay men. An example of this is illustrated in a November 18, 2010 blog titled "Time with Friends" where Fitch writes:

> What's up, guys? It's good to be back home. Yesterday I spent some time hanging out with friends. It's been a while since I've been able to do that because of my busy schedule. We started out at a friend's house then went to the Saloon Bar where I got totally shit-faced, LOL. After that we went to the Stock Bar to see some hot dancers. It's been a while since I've been drunk, haha (Fitch) (Figure 4.10).

Stock Bar is Montreal's most well-regarded gay male strip club. The club is fully ingrained as part of the pornographic text of the city in its role as a performer-feeder for the gay pornography studio Next Door Studios. It has also served as a set piece in Lucas Entertainment's *Open Bar* (2012); and the club's nightly strip performances are live-streamed on their website NudeMaleDancers.[50]



Figure 4.10. Fitch's blog post about his night out on the town in the Village

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[50] The relationship between the club and the studio extends beyond an agreement to share talent. The web branch of Next Door Studios runs Stock's nightly web feed through the site NudeMaleDancers.

Figure 4.11. Half-nude mannequins displayed outside Priape

With these interactions in the greater pornosphere, Stock acts as an obvious focal point for those people within Montreal's Gay Village who are looking for somewhere to project their sexual intensities—even without the help of Fitch. However, what Fitch's blog post does is facilitate becoming between the sexually infused locale of Stock Bar, and the otherwise not explicitly sexual restaurant Saloon, and makes them part of an active pornographic space within the affective assemblage of the Village. After reading a posting like this, a gay male visitor to Montreal might think to themselves, "OMG! When we get to Montreal lets go eat at Saloon, we might see a porn star there!" This post also suggests the typically random rhythms of movement a visitor to the Gay Village engages in while traversing from location to location. For instance, while waiting for a free table at Saloon, patrons might wander down the block to the Priape sex shop



Figure 4.12. Porno Bingo at Stock Bar

(Figure 4.11) to pose in front of embarrassingly elaborate sex toys while their friends take pictures. Or post-dinner plans could include anything from a night of porno bingo at Stock Bar



Figure 4.13. Not-so-soft core imagery outside G.I. Joe bathhouse.

(Figure 4.12) to visiting one of the three bathhouses in the Village (Figure 4.13). Each of these locales feature hard core pornography playing on their televisions inside. This is to say that even *respectable* dinner plans at one of the Village's most posh restaurants could very well be sandwiched in between receiving a lap dance

and giving a blow job to an anonymous stranger through a glory hole; each activity is located just blocks from each other. To conflate these experiences within the course of normalized activity in Montreal's Gay Village—as Fitch's post does—not only projects the lived experience of a pornographic performer onto the Gay Village, but also illustrates how sexual affects have the potential to become enacted through association with sexual activity and pornographic consumption within places that may not originally be perceived as sexual or pornographic. However, through pornographic performer interaction with the locale via a blog post, a restaurant known for hosting first dates or brunches after a long Sunday morning of sex become implicated within a dynamic assemblage of active pornographic spaces. It is a type of pornographic becoming by affective projection.

In a less innocent posting by gay pornography performer Jonathan Agassi titled "My Dirty Fun in a Canadian Sauna!" from September 17, 2010 (Figure 4.14), he describes some of his late night activities while visiting Montreal to be with his family for the Rosh Hashanah holidays on his blog. He writes:

> But sex life here is a bit umm.. BORING! Don't tell anybody, but I went to a sauna hehe!!!!! Three floors of dark rooms and private rooms and whatever, now I'm not a big sauna fan, but a man's gotta do what a horny man's gotta do! Right?? So after 1 hour (!!!!!) I saw this French guy, with jocks on (I was totally naked and innocent) he was sucking this guy which I totally thought was inappropriate!!! HE SHOULD SUCKING ME OFF!!!!! So I kind of got in the middle, and two minutes after that we were in my private room, which cost me 9 dollars for 6 hours, and we humped like dogs! Totally the best 9 dollars I spent on this trip.

Now that is what I call a porn fantasy come to life! These kinds of posts fuse together the private lives of pornographic performers, the virtual space of the internet, and the physical places that gay men frequent. The ease with which the internet further encourages a conflation of virtual, pornographic, and public places helps one see how fluidly sexual affects traverse a myriad of seemingly differentiated spaces. For the blog reader, it is literary erotica reflecting sexual affects through the written word. For the man who is able to visit the sauna, it fosters the

Figure 4.14. Photos from Jonathan Agassi's blog post about his trip to Montreal.

potential for physical pornographic interaction. And, for the men who engaged in sexual activity with Agassi that night, they are realizing pornographic becoming. However, while the experience for all three different audiences is dependent on the level of physical proximity to Agassi, the sexual affects engendered upon this locale through the description of his sexual activities contribute to both his website and the bathhouse as being a dynamic part of an active pornographic space.

In formulating the concept of an active pornographic space I hope to portray a more complete picture of the passion, desire, and sexual intensity infused within the multitude of pornoscapes that myself and other gay men traverse on a daily basis. The key point to remember is that these intensities are not linked to particular instances of pornographic creation or consumption; intensities are formed within assemblages encompassing the totality of a felt experience. This is where the importance of space within pornography studies makes itself evident. As screens showing pornography become even more ubiquitous in public spaces we must account for the various conditions under which these texts are viewed and utilized. This awareness of pornography's context will help us understand how both our locale and our bodies

carry an affective potentiality to become pornographic at any moment. We are, and always have been, the active pornographic text.

**Pornographic Resonance Beyond the Gay Village**

While the pornographic screens within Montreal's Gay Village are illustrative of the unique sexual architecture of the neighborhood, a coherent analysis of them would be incomplete without expanding upon their relation to the pornographic screens outside of the Village. Doing so not only offers an opportunity to conceive of the rhythm of gay life outside of the Village, but also allows us to consider how heterosexuals interact within active pornographic spaces. Admittedly, I cannot help but believe that my own interest in this topic stems from imagining these types of pornographic spaces as substituting for what I missed out on as a New Yorker who grew up alongside a Disneyfied version of Times Square. It is very rare that someone wishes to be older—especially in the gay community! However, as a sexually curious and adventurous man growing up in New York City, I cannot help but feel that I missed out on something essential in the pre-internet age—when Times Square was awash in pornography theaters, peep-shows and bathhouses. While trying not to fall into the trap of nostalgia, it at least would have been exciting to experience what type of interactions these formal structures encouraging public sex fostered. How would the laborious physical search through a darkened theater, or a cavernous bathhouse, result in a different type of sex than the kind fostered by the instantaneous swiping through apps like Grindr or Tindr? While there is still public sex to be had in New York City,[51] the larger question for people of my generation is: how can we go about accounting for the physical dynamics of sexual interactions when our social environments are increasingly oriented around a virtual interface?

The reason why these physical locations are disappearing is because New York City prides itself on relentlessly dismantling its sexual history to facilitate more "respectable" and profitable neoliberal fetishes like "safety" in the form of a militarized police state, real-estate, gentrification, and glorification of the Stock Market. This is how one can conceive of a *boy*

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[51] In a 2017 article by Rich Juzwiak titled "The Slutty Resurgence of New York's Underground Sex Parties," he details how gay people in the city are creating their own spaces for public sex to replace what was lost after the recreation of Times Square. This resurgence also seems dependent on the new attitudes of a generation coming of age in an era where preventative medications like PreP are promising an HIV/AIDS-free future (Juzwiak).

*without sex* as a model for the *city of the future*. The aesthetics of "progress" must make a show of aggressively omitting sex. Because of living in this New York City bubble, I was unaware that there were cities within North America that preserve their sexual history for the sake of recognizing a lineage within their cityscape, and utilize architecture to let their history inform their future. I only came to this realization once I moved to Montreal to start my PhD in 2010—my first time ever moving away from home. It was there in Montreal when I first came across an operational porn theater within the center of a city. The fact that this theater, named Cinéma L'Amour, is located in the posh neighborhood of the Plateau—rather than in the Gay Village where I was living—proved to me that Montreal was going to be quite a different experience from the sexually conservative and corporately sanitized culture that I was moving away from.

The centrality of Cinéma L'Amour emphasizes the point that I have been making throughout this chapter, essentially that the influence that pornographic affects have over the Village's architecture, streetscape, business structure, and social interactions, are qualities found in other parts of the city as well. Part of this stems from Montreal's image within national and international media as playing a significant role in the formation of our contemporary pornographic economy. In addition to an internationally famous brand like Cocky Boys utilizing Montreal as a primary background within its texts, there is also the example of a special 2017 podcast series written and hosted by Jon Ronson titled *The Butterfly Effect* (2017). In the series he details the effect that the proliferation of free pornography is having on the players within the professional ranks, and how their business model has changed because of this trend. On the first episode of this seven-part series titled "A Nondescript Building in Montreal," Ronson interviews Fabian Thylmann, a German who until 2013 was the owner of Manwin, which is a conglomerate of amateur tube sites and professional websites dominating much of the pornographic traffic on the internet. Until 2013 Thylmann's holdings included 20 different sites, including some of the most trafficked heterosexual pornography pages on the internet; PornHub, RedTube, YouPorn, Tube8, and Brazzers. The reason why Thylmann's largest North American administrative and technical offices are in Montreal (the company is headquartered in Luxembourg City for tax reasons and has six additional global offices) is because of the company's 2010 acquisition of the websites Brazzers and PornHub, which were both founded by Concordia University graduates in Montreal.

Ouissam Youssef, Matt Keezer, and Stephane Manos met through the city's competitive-Foosball circuit while attending Concordia. In 2007 Youssef and Keezer launched their first tube site: PornHub. Then the three of them would go onto create the tube sites JuggWorld, AssListing, KeezMovies, and XXXRatedChicks. They eventually started to produce original straight content for their site Brazzers. To do so they contracted with producers in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Miami. Their company's growth within the industry and the city was rapid, going from 80 employees in their Montreal office in 2007, to 150 in 2008, to 250 in 2009. After their entities were bought by Thylmann in 2010, he merged his original web properties with these new acquisitions. The company's name changed from Manwin to Mind Geek in 2013. Today Mind Geek claims to have over 1,000 employees worldwide, and over 115 million daily visitors to their network of websites, and is widely believed to be the largest pornographic content distributor in the world. Their Montreal office is located just northwest of the Notre-Dame-De-Grâce neighborhood on the western side of the city.

This history of PornHub and Brazzers' founders was detailed as part of *New York Magazine's* 2011 "Sex Issue" (Wallace). The substantial role that Montreal plays in this issue (there was also a feature story about the owner of Cocky Boys, Jake Jaxson, living in a polyamorous relationship with two other men) only accelerated journalistic interest in the city as a hub of pornographic and erotic culture. The most prominent peddler of this narrative is the alternative magazine/website *Vice*, which was founded in Montreal in 1994. Some past *Vice* headlines written about Montreal include "We Spoke to Montreal's Premiere Art Vandal about her Naked Army" (Noël 2016), "I Took Two Tinder Dates to a Montreal Swingers Club" (Keefe 2015), and "I Took My Tinder Date to a Porn Theater for Valentine's Day" (Keefe 2014). With articles like these it is no surprise that this narrative about Montreal's sex culture has flourished into a worldwide reputation. Despite the sensational nature of these articles, there is a unique way in which the French-speaking culture of the city insulates it from much of the reactionary neoliberal ethos that prides itself on eliminating sexual culture. Additionally, the city's position between two economic and media juggernauts—Toronto and New York City—situates the perception of Montreal as a convenient exotic respite from the relentless grind of capitalism that dominate life in these more overtly business-oriented cities. While I am ill-equipped to speak about Montreal's sexual culture in relation to Toronto, I can say that part of the embedded

narrative of talking about New York City today centers around romantically recalling its past as a crime-infested and pornography-riddled locale. While there is little urge to return to that time when the city was more violent, claiming to have experienced some of the city's seedier past acts as unofficial proof of being a "genuine" New Yorker. Part of the contemporary allure of Montreal for people living in New York City is the ability to experience sexual bathhouses and pornography theaters, and being able to participate in something now that is very much a part of New York's past.

Perhaps one reason why Cinema L'Amour has avoided the wrecking ball is because of the history infused within the building itself, and what that history means for the city. The theater was founded in 1914—back then the theater was named "Le Globe"—and located in what was then the heart of the Jewish neighborhood in an area today known as The Plateau. The Plateau's main street running north and south is boulevard St. Laurent. This is one of the most important streets in the city due to it being the "unofficial" dividing line between the English and French speaking parts of town. English language dominates the west side of St. Laurent, while the French speaking culture occupy its eastern section. Cinema L'Amour's physical positioning at this crucial intersection connotes the idea of it being a unifying link between the two cultures. The majority of the pornographic movies screened in the theater are in English and all the screenings feature heterosexual sex (in addition to lesbian scenes intended to titillate straight men). So even though all movie theaters east of St. Laurent dub English movies into French, since 1969 Cinema L'Amour has been maintaining the linguistic integrity of the contemporary pornographic videos that they screen. I suggest that part of the reason the theater remains above the fray of the city's linguistic and cultural divisions is precisely because it resonates within both communities as an over one-hundred-year-old symbol of a shared architectural history resonating beyond the pettiness of intra-cultural factions. Within the theater, pornography is Montreal's unifying language. And thanks to a local government that prioritizes and financially supports local businesses, Cinema L'Amour has remained a family owned, which also shields it from a suspicions local community weary of outsiders. The current owner—who also owns the entire building—and is the grandson of the original owner—says that he hopes the theater will "be around…forever" (The Canadian Press). There is certainly a poetic tone to this aspiration that hints at pornography's endurance despite the multitude of new media technologies that have

emerged since the theater's opening in 1914.



Figure 4.15. Outside of Cinema L'Amour



Figure 4.16. Inside of Cinema L'Amour

Upon walking into the theater, one is welcomed into a well-lit vestibule plastered with a collage of pornographic movie posters, DVDs for sale, and a surprisingly well-stocked candy and popcorn counter. Before I was even able to inquire about the price of a ticket a very energetic employee jumped out from behind the counter to greet me and outline the assorted deals they offer their patrons. Their primary upsell is access to their "VIP Section," where for $40 dollars the more "privacy-minded" couple is offered what the website describes as a "touch of comfort and class away from the main cinema room" (V.I.P. Section). And this deal is not merely described to me, but expanded upon as my tour stretched upstairs so I could actually see one of the private booths in the VIP Section. Oddly enough, my tour might have disturbed the perks of privacy for a couple whom we stand behind while he explains the benefits of buying a VIP ticket. He eventually leads me downstairs where he elaborates on the history of the theater in greater detail while pointing out the architectural specificities of the main screening room. Considering that my friends and I had not yet paid, I thought that perhaps this guide's over eagerness was a ploy to set my mind at ease about spending my money at a pornographic theater considering that we were younger than the other patrons; however, online reviews suggest that this habit of giving new visitors a tour of the theater is compulsory.

The eagerness with which he gave us this tour struck me less as a sales job and more as a reorientation with the physical dynamics of a communal pornography-watching experience, which is something that has been chipped away at in the digital age. And, in a way, his

enthusiasm seems to have rubbed off on the patrons of the theater, considering that there actually seemed to be more people engaged in this social experience centered around the movie—in the form of cruising or talking. And from what I could tell, not many of them were using their phones in the theater. In fact, I have seen more movie-goers using their cell phones inside the theater at my local multiplex on a typical Saturday than I saw that night at Cinema L'Amour. Part of this constant movement and engagement is of course part of the physical dance that takes place in locales facilitating public sex. So, while my two companions were glued to their chair as a result of paralyzing fear, I left them behind in order to find out what was happening in the darker corners of the theater where men go to congregate. And in the process, I got the opportunity to see José B. Capino's point realized, that within spaces like this, "pornography is consumed by the body," and that "moviegoing at adult theaters may be the ultimate spectator workout" (54). When conceiving of an active pornographic space these types of physical activities revolving around a pornographic text are precisely the type of interactions one must prioritize.

**Le Bain Colonial**



Figure 4.17. Le Bain Colonial

Just like Le Globe theater, the Bain Colonial bathhouse was founded in 1914 just a few blocks away in the Plateau. And in the 1960s the owners added an upstairs addition to their antique basement saunas, showers, and jacuzzi (added only in the 1990s) to include a rooftop deck, private "changing rooms," and a room exclusively set aside for watching gay pornography. My own interactions within this locale—which converted to all-male in the 1990s—differ greatly from half of the other patrons who read as eastern European or Jewish and reflect the history of the locale's original patrons who used the sauna as part of a cultural tradition. They mostly speak to each other in Hebrew, Russian, or Ukrainian while in the sauna or having a drink or snack in the television room on the first floor. Their presence here harkens back to the bath's opening when the Plateau was the center of the immigrant Jewish experience in Montreal. Of course, indoor plumbing was a luxury at the turn of the century. In 1905 the "annual report of the City of Montreal" produced by City Hall estimated that "75% of housing in working-class neighbourhoods doesn't include a bath or shower" (Généréux Bath). As a result, the city initiated a campaign to build a public bath in each working-class neighborhood between 1910 and 1930 (Généréux Bath). And the popularization of the baths in Jewish communities is heightened due to religious edicts about ritual cleansing.[52]

As indoor plumbing within the city became normalized, the Jewish community began transitioning out of the neighborhood to move to more upscale parts of town, and generally became less orthodox about ritual bathing traditions. The Bain Colonial seized on this transitional period of the 1960s to cater to their gay male clientele by adding an upstairs floor to their antique basement sauna featuring a roof deck, private "changing rooms," and a room where gay pornography is continually screened on a tube television. A 1962 article describing a police raid on the bathhouse reveals the cultural *knowingness* [53] around the changing nature of

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[52] The bathhouse is essentially a public version of a Mikveh: a bath used for the purposes of ritual immersion in Judaism to achieve ritual purity. It is used by woman to achieve ritual purity after menstruation or childbirth, and by men to achieve ritual purity after ejaculation. So, the historic and religious use of the bath in Judaism is inherently linked to sexuality.

[53] I utilize the term "knowingness" here to acknowledge what Michael Moon and Sedgwick identify as the "structuring strategy of a homophobic culture," which they describe specifically as "the culture's need to revivify itself constantly with the energies of gay experience, while maintaining a semi-plausible deniability about the gay history and sexual specificity of that experience" (1993, 222). They go onto explain that "the 'knowingness' most at the heart of this system is the reserve force of information about gay lives, histories, oppressions, cultures, and sexual acts—a copia of lore that our public culture sucks sumptuously at but steadfastly refuses any responsibility to acknowledge" (1993, 222).

bathhouses in the city and how they were inherently understood as highly sexualized spaces:

> The sensational raid conducted by the city police at the Colonial Turkish Bath located at 3963 rue Colonial has not surprised anyone, to say the least. Indeed, city residents have known for ages that this business, where one can actually enjoy some excellent and affordable steam baths, has become a favorite location for Montreal's homosexuals, if not the province's. We are not attempting to attack the honesty of the business' owners. As is true of any business, one can't choose one's customers. If the customers of this Turkish bath mainly come from the local inverted community, it is clearly because they find the location's character attractive. It is self-evident that, in a Turkish bath, one doesn't have to go around wearing…a fur overcoat. Nudity of the intimate sort is tolerated, which is not uncommon in such institutions (as cited in Maltais and Koussens).

My own introduction to Bain Colonial was through my advisor at Concordia Thomas Waugh, who hosts a weekly Tuesday-night nonsexual group outing to the bathhouse composed of assorted members of what is known as Montreal's *radical queer* scene, their friends, and certain of his gay graduate students. Within our tradition we use the weekly outings as a time to catchup with our comrades on both our personal and professional accomplishments for the week while absorbing knowledge at Waugh's feet via the Socratic method. The gay sexual energy we bring to the locale on Tuesday nights has not only gained the attention of other neighborhood gays who have now made the weekly ritual a part of their own routine, but has even impacted Google's algorithm for informing potential guests how busy a business is on a given night—there is a curious spike in attendance on Tuesday night's infographic that remains unexplained to the uninformed public. This queer rupture on Tuesday nights reflects the Balkanized nature of the locale itself, which emphasizes the traditional Eastern European qualities of its antique baths downstairs while simultaneously—and awkwardly—catering to a gay clientele upstairs.

Unlike the incorporation of pornographic texts into the center of activity in Village bathhouses like Oasis and G.I. Joe, one must typically be made aware that there is an upstairs to be explored at Bain Colonial. Many visitors are surprised to learn there is an upstairs area unless they are guided up there by someone familiar with the intricacies of the place. Once upstairs, there is a room just to the left of the top of the staircase with a semi-circle of about 15 plastic chairs surrounding a tube television playing pornography. The awkwardness of the setup is

immediately apparent upon walking in. It is rare that one walks in while someone is engaging in sexual activity considering that the layout of the room seems antithetical to sex. The flimsiness of the chairs, along with the fact that they have armrests, emphasizes a strict divide between patrons. And even if two grown men were to figure how to have sex on one plastic chair, the structural integrity of the chair would surely be compromised in the process. I suppose that is part of the reason why the "changing rooms" equipped with beds are situated directly across the hall.

Another aspect to the experience distracting from the sexual mood of the room is, surprisingly, the pornography itself. The reason I say this is because the pornography is being played from VHS tapes on the tube television. The texts themselves reflect the latter period of the VHS era, mostly featuring movies from the late 1990s and early 2000s. Despite the proximity of the time this porn was produced to when I started going there in 2010, the styling of the performers, the music, the sets, the storylines, and the onscreen visual texture resulting from its VHS playback initially struck me as a jarring rupture from the type of pornography I have become used to watching in the popular internet era. The sexual affects of the texts themselves are easily overshadowed by a wondering mind compelling one to analyze the haircuts, grooming habits, and telephone landlines of what seems like a bygone era. It is ironic that such adherence to current fashions that testify to pornography's trope of eroticizing verisimilitude within its texts to emphasize that "genuine" people are performing in "real" places are also the aspects that can distract us most from their erotic potentiality once they are viewed outside of their own time period. Unless, of course, one is turned on by vintageness (Church 2016).

When trying to figure out where to situate these older VHS tapes into the wider becoming pornographic narrative of this dissertation, I worried about whether this final destination for this extinct technology represented a sad conclusion for these tapes, waiting out the years until either the television or VCR breaks and the owners are forced to update their technology. It is obvious from the investment in the bathhouse that the owners care little about the place except maintaining a minimum standard of upkeep. And the heterosexual owners' hostility towards my own inquiries about the source of the bathhouse's pornographic collection leads me to believe that the movies, the room, and what happens in the room, are not the most pressing issues on his agenda. Having reached a dead end with the owner, I wondered whether this active pornographic

space would remain nothing but a utilitarian place within the wider scope of this project. After all, it is hard to imagine what other affective registers these public texts could be tapping into if one is able to simply mimic the actions on screen without reservation. In that moment all other impulses are secondary.

After being stonewalled by the owner and not finding any other outside sources describing any aspect of the bathhouse's pornography room, one night on a lark I just asked a friendly cashier if they could shed any light on the origins of the porn that is screened there. After prefacing his remarks by saying that he does not want to be cited as a source of information at the request of an owner that does not want to open any aspect of his business to public scrutiny, he said that most of the tapes screened in the room were willed to the bathhouse by a longtime customer who wanted his pornography collection donated to the Bain Colonial upon his death. Learning this changed my opinion about the nature of the tapes. They instantly went from being merely cheap functional relics from a bygone era to embodying the sexually affective impulses of a deceased patron. It strikes me that this attempt at having one's sexual desires exist beyond one's lifespan is emblematic of how the sexual affects we feel within our own bodies get projected out into the world and become manifest into pornographic texts. This is why both professional and amateur pornographic texts remain an essential part of the aesthetics within gay communal formations. And within the context of this bathhouse, knowing about the origin of the tapes links visitors to a lineage of desire; a desire that connects us to an abstracted imagined history of past patrons via a tangibly visible pornographic experience. This dissertation's aim is to read gay male pornography within an affective lens to attune readers to the potentiality imbedded within seemingly benign pornographic texts. Knowing about how these tapes came into the bathhouse's possession connects them to a wider circulation of sexual affects and desire that contribute to this locale being yet another part of Montreal's many active pornographic spaces.

CONCLUSION

**Heavenly Affects**

*My only drug is porn.*

Kanye West "The Passion of Kanye West" (Ogunnaike)

**Worldly Discourses**

Ultimately, the term "becoming pornographic" is intended as a discursive expression for feelings, impulses, and desires that are difficult or impossible to articulate. While sexual desire does not always necessarily gravitate towards pornography, the resulting affects are oftentimes awkwardly positioned in between social registers where the process of becoming must be negotiated. Such ruptures resulting from becoming actively conflict with the aspiring stability of identity formation, which is a practice reliant on discursive support. The current LGBTTQQIAAP2 (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, pansexual, two-spirited) acronym is evidence of the futile reliance that marginalized communities have on discourse to act on behalf of their salvation. However, for theoretical approaches looking to prioritize affect over discourse, a discursive response must be developed to accomplish this aim. While affect is pre-conscious, for many its impact can only be understood to the degree that it can be articulated. However, theorists must be careful to situate discourse itself as a process of becoming. As I have demonstrated, the foundational texts of academic queer theory written almost 30 years ago have now been coopted by right-wing political forces to expand a neoliberal ethos aimed towards expanding economic and national power globally. This happened because the theory of the time was written with the intention of ameliorating particular political crises. Those political concerns, coupled with neoliberalism's adaptability to incorporate homonormativity as part of its power structure, are how many gay people actively work against queer ruptures upsetting normative identity formations. However, resistance to queerness is both a natural fear, and an active neoliberal project. For identities working against the monolith of heterosexuality, the idea of stability is comforting and

normalizing.[54] This has caused queerness to be in a state of crisis. And if Sedgwick's queer understanding of homophobia is now being utilized to enhance reactionary nationalist interests, then affect theory must become a tool that can counteract against such cooptation in the future.

My key conceptual hooks of becoming pornographic, bodily confession, transindividual "porn star," and an active pornographic space are my contributions to an affective discourse intended to emphasize process over stagnation, to emphasize unruly desire over the functionality of sex, and to emphasize impulse over strategy. My faith in the political viability of the process of becoming is validated when I observe the ways in which these processes are continually delegitimized, mocked, and dismissed within Western culture. Within this dissertation, Crocker is a primary example of someone who enacts immediate and impulsive desires throughout the assemblage composing his mediascape, and as a result, he is relentlessly belittled. While he activates a rage of affective registers and responses, a regime of "truth" enacted by the mainstream media descended upon him for a type of digitized public flogging. All for the sin of being emotional, being harmlessly irrational, loving a pop-star too much? In terms of proportionality, it seems that the media is the only institution with the license to amplify stories beyond any type of rationality—like in the way they emphasized the lies about Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction in 2003, or the way they granted Trump over $2 billion worth of free media time during the 2016 Presidential election (Confessore and Yourish). Amplification is only "rational" and "sensible" when it is in the service of state power. Amplifying affects is merely a waste of everyone's time, and an act so offensive that it necessitates mocking.

While some might think that this dissertation represents a call to make pornography a more culturally accepted mode in order to more fully incorporate the stimulating instances of queer rupture I have documented, I believe that such an occurrence would only work to impede the ability of the genre to facilitate such affective ruptures. Our understanding of pornography's radicality can only be judged against society's conventionality. Hence, pornography must remain a culturally marginal *dirty little secret* to maintain its visceral charge. However, that does not prevent us from taking the lessons we learn or the discourse we develop around the genre out

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[54] In *Feeling Normal: Sexuality and Media Criticism in the Digital Age* (2016) Griffin deals with the question of what it means to grow up in a transmedia environment where homosexuality is a normalized part of neoliberal media formations. His book is evidence that media studies is just starting to come to terms with what it means to feel "normal."

into non-pornographic realms. That is the process of becoming pornographic. In becoming pornographic, Crocker illustrates how identity is understood within multitudes in the popular internet age. His twitching, crying, and yelling are testaments to the lack of popular discourse capable of expressing affect as a process. Sad, depressed, angry, and happy are emotional states existing in the past tense.

Being able to follow Crocker to this day in his journey as a transindividual helps to not only enliven the other studies in this dissertation, but also to consider the alternative modes of communicative aesthetics that are continually enacted as forms of affective expression. Crocker's post-viral absence from the mainstream spotlight reflects the type of post-identity-politics hangover exemplified by masked pornographic performers like Keller and the Black Spark. These two performers intentionally utilize masks within a genre relying on total physical exposure for its erotic charge. This tactic forces us to reconsider the physical grammar of pornography. Importantly, their use of masks is not enacted out of fear of homophobia, but is instead positioned as a way of questioning assumptions behind race and social hierarchy. Unsurprisingly, this is a messy process. Keller's work both reinforces racial stereotypes, while also offering alternative perspectives on the black experience in America via queer opacity and sexual desire. Similarly, Black Spark emphasizes opacity through masks and dark lighting to reorient the aesthetic qualities of pornography. By emphatically declaring that his work is "not porn," he provokes us to reconsider what pornography is, and what it might be in the future. Perhaps he said his work is "not porn" because what "is" porn today is such an incorporated part of our mode of existence that it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate between what is pornographic, and what is not. His is a provocation that reveals the usefulness of the term becoming pornographic. Their desire to move confession away from the face and onto the body realizes a type of affecto-physical expression similar to LBA. However, while Crocker was subject to mass exposure, Keller and Black Spark's opacity offers a new understanding of identity formation and the Self in a social media age of over-exposure.

The resulting fluidity of becoming pornographic is epitomized in the active pornographic spaces of Montreal's Gay Village. Its marginality in comparison to New York City and Toronto enables Montreal to increasingly incorporate the marginal mode of pornography as part of its streetscape. As sexual locales continue to be exorcized from these other rapidly gentrifying and

overdeveloped cities, Montreal remains a type of oasis where the potentiality for intermixing between virtual and physical spaces can be explored because the city is not in a rush to tear down its bathhouses, sex shops, or pornography theaters. This is not a question of valuing physicality over the virtual, but recognizing that there are valuable possibilities for becoming when the two come together. Montreal's role as the leading global pornographic distribution hub, along with its active pornographic spaces, situates pornography as a mode enlivening distinct aspects of an affective life that cannot help but be experienced as dormant in other locales. One wonders to what degree Quebec's unique position within North America as its only French speaking territory has to do with its ability to maintain their sexual locales and incorporate pornography, while all of the rest of the surrounding English-speaking provinces and states are working to destroy them in preparation for a digital future filled with more high rent tenants?

Once again, this question of discourse is crucial in trying to figure out the role that affective considerations can play in future understandings of a city, an identity, of confession, and of course pornography. But what happens when discourse is lost? Interestingly, it would literally be impossible for me to write this dissertation as it exists if I were to begin writing it all over again today. The reason for that is that Keller's *Colby Does America* project, along with the entirety of Crocker's YouTube channel is currently unavailable on the public internet. The videos composing CDA are now behind a paywall, where Keller is selling them to those who are willing to pay. And Crocker deleted his YouTube channel in 2015. Their visual discourse is lost. I cannot help but think of these erasures as a (perhaps unintentional) part of the overall mode of how I interpret the projects themselves—which is to queerly upset homonormative conventions of gay identity formation. If this dissertation is to be understood as valorizing my subject's efforts to upset the conventions of identity formation, then I wonder if I have the right to bemoan their queer acts of erasure. Is the immediate sense of loss we feel as a result of these types of erasures more normative than we care to admit? Marika Cifor expresses the typical call to action adopted by theorists of the archive when she declares that "LGBTQ persons and communities, like many marginalized groups, have been ignored, deliberately silenced, and otherwise neglected in traditional archives and archiving processes" (14). Such conceptions of homosexual "neglect" within the archives must be addressed by fighting for recognition, right? However, before embarking on such a crusade, it is perhaps worth considering whether recognition from archival

institutions preserves the queerness of a moment, or does it merely dilute its potency by emphatically situating objects produced with a radical impulse into a distant and safe past?

Queer theorists of the archive Heather Love (2009) and Ann Cvetkovich (2003) situate archival practices and alternative conceptions of historical understandings as capable of reanimating seemingly lost affective registers. Love recontextualizes novels that are "too depressing" as a way to reclaiming "the dark feelings" of a pre-Stonewall era to recall a radical queer sensibility before homonormativity. And Cvetkovich situates archival materials as "repositories of feelings and emotions," as a way of conceiving of affects as an embedded part of objects (7). And while each approach develops a complex understanding of the ways affects and the archive intersect, I wonder if there needs to be more consideration about the practice of active erasure as an affective strategy. Can something maintain its affective charge if it can be looked at, situated, and felt?

Ever-expanding databases promise a digital future where anything that can be coded can be archived for eternity. However, just as we are coming to terms with the anxiety of our digital traces existing on the internet forever, an equally nerve-racking prospect emerges as a result: *what if my identity is totally erased from the internet forever?* This quandary brings me back to the idea of Crocker actively resituating the painting *Boy with Machine* to a contemporary idea of being the *boy in machine*. The digitized nature of Crocker's aesthetic is what helps us to conceive of him as a boy within a transmediascape. This idea of *boy in machine* recalls Andy Warhol's sentiment that "everybody should be a machine" (88). He goes onto explain his analogy as exemplifying the habitual nature of the human condition: "Well, because you do the same thing every time. You do the same thing over and over again" (Warhol, 88). The predictability and reproducibility of the human condition within a capitalist mode of living was in 1963 already being acknowledged by Warhol as the basis upon which our increasingly mechanized future would be modeled. This is how we come to anthropomorphize our understandings of technology. So, if machines are made to archive an infinite amount of information about ourselves—and we are the "machines"—we must consider efforts at erasure queer ruptures within this seemingly habitual cycle.

This this idea has already been reflected in artistic practice by Michael Landy's *Break Down* (2001). Landy's installation entailed systematically destroying all 7,227 physical items

making up the entirety of his worldly possessions over two weeks. Landy recalls this period as "the happiest two weeks of my life" (Sooke). And James Lingwood—who commissioned *Break Down*—explains the project as responding to the socially enforced rhythms of capitalism, saying that:

> The insistent pressures on people to consume have become more and more present in our culture, and there is an increasing feeling of discomfort about how alienating these pressures can be. Michael, through *Break Down*, put his finger on a deeply troubling part of our contemporary condition (Sooke).

This is how one can conceive of Crocker and Landy's intervention respectively as an active rupture of both digitized and material archival practices. The erasure of texts lost during the writing of this dissertation should be thought of as *becoming-non-archival*, a process actively questioning the utility of the archive and queerly rupturing future narratives of historiography. This is why this dissertation should be considered as capturing a singular moment of resonance as it relates to pornographic affects.

## Heavenly Impulses

Where to go from here? In all reality, when it comes to pornography, the possibilities of where to go from here are seemingly endless! However, while I was focusing on writing about pornography and affect theory—without realizing it—I wound up doing so within a celebrity studies perspective. Albeit, on a micro-level. Another chapter of this dissertation might have explored society's affective relationship to pornographic "celebrities," and would have tried to understand the dynamics of how the affective exchanges between fan and celebrity play out between various identity assemblages. It strikes me that our admiration for celebrities stems from their embodiment of affective registers that we aspire to embody. And I am not just referencing their material wealth, but affective desires like love, lust, power, and even hate. The affective exchange that we share with celebrities constitutes our bond to them. This is no longer as much of a unidirectional relationship as it once was. Social media allows for a uniquely direct relationship between fans and celebrities narrowing our affective distance from them. We do not even have to articulate our feelings into words when tweeting at them directly, an emoji is enough!

While this dissertation focuses on the ways that pornographic performers expand their identity formation within non-pornographic assemblages, I feel as if the next logical step would be to explore the inverse: how do non-pornographic performers broaden our understanding of celebrity culture by expanding their identity assemblage into pornographic realms? With the distinctions between professional/amateur, pornographic/non-pornographic, and celebrity/non-celebrity becoming more porous with every passing year, it strikes me that a deeper consideration of how and why these boundaries have been blurred is required. Additionally, while this dissertation operates within comfortable queer assemblages where a pornographic aesthetic is expected, pornography is more often greeted with disdain and disgust by the masses. And celebrities who dare to reach into pornographic realms are also treated to the same vitriol by the mainstream media and non-fans.

Therefore, as a postdoctoral project I intend to take the lessons learned from this dissertation to develop a project centered around three celebrities who evoke a lot of love, with an equal amount of hate, from the media and the masses because of their engagement with pornographic aesthetics: Madonna, Howard Stern, and Kanye West. This would effectively be a type of sequel to Richard Dyer's 1992 *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (2004). Just like Dyer's profiles of Marylin Monroe, Paul Robeson, and Judy Garland (plus her gay fanbase), my selection of performers is also representative of a cross-section of various gender, ethnic (Jewish), and racial identities. Accounting for these differences allows us to analyze the universality of the audience reception of pornographic aesthetics while being able to deconstruct the particularities of how those aesthetics are executed according to the identity assemblage of each celebrity. Each figure is also closely associated with certain decades: the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s. Each period represents different eras of a celebrity culture working towards a more popular and fully integrated media identity incorporating pornography. In the 1980s Madonna used her sexuality to flip the popular narrative espoused by the anti-pornography feminist claiming that the sexual objectification of women within pornography and the mass media was the visual realization of patriarchal dominance. Madonna instead situated her sexualized body as a point of empowerment over men—like in the video for 1986's "Papa Don't Preach," where she declares her feminine agency to keep her child and not have an abortion despite her father's

wishes (Madonna). She does so by singing "I made up my mind, I'm keeping my baby," all while shaking her breasts in a bustier. The conflation of social empowerment and sexuality remains a signature aesthetic of Madonna. Because of her outspoken sexual nature, she remains the focus of much scorn from both the media and religious institutions looking to profit off her celebrity. Much of this culminated with the publication of her book *Sex* (1992), where she posed nude, and with gay pornography performer Joey Stefano. Analyzing her insistence on maintaining a pornographic aesthetic throughout the 1980s via the framework of objectification would expand on existing literature and offer the opportunity to situate affect theory deeper into contemporary feminist discourse.

The 1990s was one dominated by the self-declared *King of all Media* Howard Stern. He not only had the most wildly popular and top-rated radio show across the country, but he had a record-breaking pay-per-view special in 1992 titled *Butt Bongo Fiesta*, and a number one best-selling autobiography in 1993 titled *Private Parts*. In 1997, the book was adopted into a movie starring Stern himself, which grossed over $41 million at the box-office. Stern's future sidekick, Robyn Quivers, says that she became intrigued with the possibility of working with him because the first time she ever heard *The Howard Stern Show* in the 1980s he was interviewing a sex worker, but instead of situating her as an abject *other*, he was talking to her like a human being. While non-fans of the show typically have a bad impression of Stern, his interactions with sex workers, pornographic performers, and regular fans wanting to "take their top off" in the studio, reveal a career-long dedication to normalizing and humanizing sexual discourse within America. Stern also reveals his own sexual hang-ups, from his frustration at his moralistic aversion to cheating on his wife, to his masturbation habits, to expressing his insecurities about the size of his small penis. Via his radio show, every weekday morning a wave of sexual affects would broadcast across the nation and listeners would respond back by either angrily calling into the show to express their disgust or thank Stern for making them laugh so hard. Strangely, enough, as the movie *Private Parts* reveals, polls showed that people who claim to "hate" Stern actually listen to the show for longer periods of time than people who claim to be "fans" of the show. Analyzing the interactions that Stern had with fans, and the dynamics of the political nature of the "love" and "hate" directed at him, would offer a compelling dynamic within which to study the nature of fandom across various media platforms.

Another performer who elicits a lot of love and hate is Kanye West. Say what you want about West, but he is the only artist who has provoked three consecutive U.S. Presidents to make a public statement about him. West is another transmedia figure who has produced music, directed music videos, has appeared alongside his wife on the reality television show *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, and has been highly successful designing sneakers and clothing for Adidas. In addition to marrying someone who became famous as the result of a sex-tape made public, in 2010 Kanye West's nude photos were leaked onto the internet. This moment essentially marked West's full incorporation into the realm of becoming pornographic. However, this was not surprising for anyone who had been following his career up to this point. For example, West had previously admitted that "my only drug is porn." In her biography *Raising Kanye: Life Lessons from the Mother of a Hip-Hop Superstar* (2009), Donda West recalls punishing her young son for his interest in adult magazines and videos. On his 2007 mixtape *Can't Tell Me Nothing*, there is a track titled "Porno (Interlude)" where West talks about being jealous of his friend because he attended the Adult Video News Awards show. West explains that he would *love* to go, but he worries about whether that would jeopardize his chances of appearing on the cover of *Jet* magazine. While West is open about his pornographic fandom, he is also a self-admitted Christian. One can sense him coming to terms with his religious conflicts, his nude photo, and the MTV Video Music Awards incident involving Taylor Swift on his apologetic magnum opus *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010), where he raps: "She find pictures in my email. I sent this bitch a picture of my dick. I don't know what it is with females. But I'm not too good at that shit." Later in the album, on the song "Hell of a Life," he raps about falling in love with a porn star on the dancefloor. And though he's never confirmed it, many people have guessed that the "porn star" in question is the women that he would eventually marry, Kim Kardashian.

The story of a non-pornographic celebrity becoming an amateur pornographic performer is not anything new. Kanye's trajectory into pornographic stardom merely reflects our contemporary pornographic environment where social media platforms like Twitter, Snapchat, Chaturbate, and Tindr openly facilitate the easy creation and world-wide exchange of self-pornographic imagery. However, while this phenomenon has become normalized, it hasn't been

adequately analyzed. I bring up the example of West not only because he embodies and admires the sexual aspects of a pornographic aesthetic, but he also embraces the extra-sexual affective aspects of pornography. It's important to remember that pornography is defined as "the depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction" ("Pornography," def. Merriam-Webster). Many of the most highly publicized moments of West's career—from his declaration on live television that "George Bush does not care about black people," to his recent embrace of President Trump's *Make America Great Again* ethos—speak to West's intention to provoke exactly this type of "quick intense emotional reaction."

The two primary reactions to such provocations are, firstly, that he is "crazy," which West addresses on his latest album *Ye* (2018), when he declares that his mental state is not a disability but is instead a "superpower." Or secondly, that he is merely trolling. It strikes me that the word "trolling" has become a new catch-all word to dismiss anyone expressing an opinion or performing an action that one does not approve of. Calling someone a "troll" is like calling someone a "terrorist," a "communist," or a "slut." These performative insults are intended to disassociate one's self from a contrary way of thinking, so no one is accountable for actually considering the legitimacy of the "troll's" words or actions. Whitney Phillips argues that trolls are not aberrations as much as they play off of—and have a homologous relationship with—the mainstream media. The media trolls us all the time; just think back to a couple of recent front pages of the New York Times, where they published a picture of a Parisian police officer right before he was shot in the head during the attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in 2015 (Figure 5.1), or the 2014 front page picture of a dead Palestinian infant on a beach (Figure 5.2),



Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2

or the continual hysteria over Russia hacking the 2016 Presidential election, despite the fact that poll after poll reveal that this issue is of no concern to the vast majority of Americans. Phillips writes that for both the mainstream media and the troll "audience distress is courted and exploited for profit. Granted, trolls' 'profit' is measured in [LOL's], not dollars, Still, the respective process by which these profits are achieved are strikingly familiar, and in many cases…indistinguishable" (Phillips). Situating West within this framework will allow for a deeper understanding of internet trolling via affect theory.

Analyzing these pornographic ruptures within popular culture via the aesthetics of Madonna, Stern, and West further offers us the opportunity to consider the autonomous nature of sexual affects.

**Capturing "Sex Radiation"**

This dissertation contemplates the various ways in which we attempt to connect with sexual affects—with pornography being the visual manifestation of the complex intensities composing sexual affects. The point is not to celebrate the accomplishment of pornography to fulfill people's desires towards this effort, but instead document the erotics embedded in this continual process of reaching towards an affective horizon than can never truly be reached. This is what makes affect so queer, its resistance to ever being fulfilled. The third chapter of this dissertation takes my articulation of becoming pornographic from a theoretical formation and situates it within a physical realm. Doing so helps to offer the reader the lived-in dimensions that the concept can embody within a particular locale. This is an important part of making theory accessible to readers and helps them understand the ways that theory in enacted within people's everyday lives. While situating the concept of "becoming pornographic" in Montreal's Gay Village is connected to my own experience of living there, and getting to know the city intimately, there are even more universal ways in which anyone reading this dissertation might be able to connect becoming pornographic to their own everyday lives, no matter which city they live in.

At the conclusion of my own research on this project, I became more acquainted with the work of biologist, psychoanalyst, and political theorist Wilhelm Reich. In many ways, Reich's

work can be summarized as attempting to identify and catalog—by establishing a solid basis in laboratory science—the biological manifestations of Freud's affective conception of sexual libido. Reich tried to prove that libidinous energy had a physical presence. In a 1936 diary entry, Reich writes: "sex radiation—if each body radiates, then the sexually excited organ must radiate as well. It only has to be discovered, but how?" (Strick, 187).

I am less interested in whether Reich was ultimately successful in proving the biological legitimacy of libido. That is best left to biologists to evaluate. However, as an expansion of Freud's psychoanalytic work, I believe Reich's theorizations about libidinal energy are important to consider when trying to formulate theories around sexual affects. Afterall, Reich's use of the terms "sexually excited" and "sex radiation" fit comfortably with the sexually affective discourse utilized throughout this dissertation. And in the same way that my subjects prioritize the affective nature of their sexual desire to actively reshape their perspectives of the world by queering the normative aspects of confession, identity, and their physical locales, Reich also connected his patient's capacity to participate within the "normal" rhythms of social existence to the degree they could satisfactorily release their own sexual energies. In short, "Reich noted that the energy source behind neurotic symptoms increased when patients did not experience any sexual discharge and decreased when they did" (Strick, 12). Reich even went further than Freud in emphasizing the affective qualities of sexual encounters over just the physicality of the act itself. While Freud was initially measuring the exertion of sexual libido by measuring the amount of sex the patient was having, he eventually noticed that the amount of sex had by the patient did not correlate with their level of sexual satisfaction or general happiness. Reich instead worked to measure the quality and satisfaction of the sexual encounter itself in order to measure the amount of libido utilized. James E. Strick explains that Reich "concluded that the key to relief of neurotic symptoms was 'orgastic potency,' not merely having sex (in any quantity), but the ability to completely discharge the dammed-up sexual tension in a fully gratifying sex act" (18). Reich's approach prioritizes the affective over the physical. Hence, whether one conceives of sexual affects via a theoretical mode like Deleuze and Guattari, or scientifically like Reich, both approaches understand an affective and desirous intensity as a primary indicator for how one activates their own libidinous desire, and subsequently moves through the world.

Just like that autonomous nature of affect that I adopt in this dissertation, Reich's

articulation of a tangible sexual energy is connected to his broader concept of "orgone energy," a specific biological energy—it "also existed in the atmosphere and in the cosmos beyond Earth" (Strick, 2). Hence, this affective biological energy is not limited to the sexual realm, but it is a broader force that circulates throughout the physical world. Reich "thought the movement of energy, and the direction in which it moved, more likely to be the fundamental driver of emotions and libido. It was movement, and not the underlying details of structure or biochemistry, that most attracted his attention" (Strick,10). In attempting to capture this energy, Reich developed a physical apparatus he called the Orgone Energy Accumulator. The outside of the apparatus was typically made of wood, but the inside was lined with metal. The concept behind the box is that it would collect autonomous orgone energy from the atmosphere, but since it was lined with metal, the energy would be incapable of seeping out once trapped inside. The patient would sit in the box for a period of time and have the collected energy reflect back onto them. By being in the presence of a concentrated amount of orgone energy, Reich was attempting to reactivate the lost libidinal energy that was actively repressed by society. The effectiveness of this practice relies on the idea that the free flow of energy determines the health of one's emotional state.



Figure 5.3: Wilhelm Reich with one of his subjects in the Orgone Accumulator.

The idea of needing to maintain a healthy affective state centered around libidinous energy by retreating to an isolated box is one that not only fascinates me, but also fits comfortably within the parameters of this project. Each one of my case studies is an example of the opposite strategy. They utilize their own amateur pornographic aesthetics to not only actively confront studio produced aesthetics, but also rupture non-pornographic public spaces and audiences with sexual aesthetics. They are working from their own isolated spaces and projecting sexual affects out into the world. However, a future incarnation of this project should consider the particular isolated spaces where these amateur pornographic aesthetics are produced. When thinking about the Orgone Accumulator as being an isolated space where libidinous affects are indulged in, I cannot help but think of one of the primary isolated locales where many amateur pornographic tableaus are created—the naked bathroom mirror selfie. Naked bathroom mirror selfies are a foundational aesthetic of Grindr, Twitter, and pre-censored Tumblr sexuality. The similarities of the bathroom to the Orgone Accumulator are evident in their ability to encourage an active engagement with libidinous energy. However, while the Accumulator relies on faith in what remains unseen, the bathroom allows for a unique sense of freedom from the rest of society encouraging physical indulgence of sexual affects realized via physical manifestation—from masturbating, to having sex, to ejaculating. One also has permission to liberate the body via urination and defecation. The bathroom is our own type of everyday Orgone Accumulator where we are free to reconnect to our own physical libidinal energy. And the pictures taken from within this bathroom "Accumulator" are the visual evidence of the affective manifestations of libidinal energy.


Figure 5.4: Bathroom mirror selfie.

The freedom that some feel within the bathroom counteracts the various ways in which we are forced to suppress our libidinal desires in the ways outlined by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*. With Freud's work as a theoretical framework, we are continually forced to disconnect and suppress the energies and desires defining our unique affective selves. Because of this systematic affective suppression, we are forced to seek refuge within spaces where we are free to express and indulge ourselves affectively. For Reich, this is the organizing principal of life itself: "the regulator of instinctual life is the 'pleasure-unpleasure principle.' Everything instinctual is a reaching out for pleasure and an attempt to avoid unpleasure.' Everything that removes instinctual tension produces satisfaction that is pleasurable" (Strick,121). By reconnecting with this "pleasure-unpleasure principle" via the Orgone Accumulator, or the privacy of the bathroom, we actively attempt to counteract the repressive societal condition described by Freud. These are the spaces where we go to escape from affective suppression. By highlighting the importance of these spaces, we can understand the spatial dynamics required to "become pornographic." By tapping into the longer theoretical and biological history of people attempting to reconnect with their libidinous affects within a Western society reliant on actively suppressing those affects, one is made aware of the urgency required in needing to recapture this crucial affective sensibility. Affects hold the key to desire, and desire is what makes us uniquely human. When desire is lost, we cease to be human. This makes the issue of affects a matter of *life* or non-life.

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