

no more potlucks

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EDITORIAL

L'amour est le thème du 18ième numéro de NMP, nov/dec 2011.

L'amour, as in:

- *infused with or feeling deep affection or passion*
- *a sexual passion or desire*
- *to take great pleasure in*

Amour, admiration, adoration, affection, altruisme, amitié, ange, attachement, béguin, charité, coeur, culte, désir, dévouement, entente, enthousiasme, estime, fanatisme, fraternité, idolâtrie, liaison, passion, penchant, relation, tendresse, vénération.

There's plenty to love in this issue.

Antonia Hernández asks: Is love a force? Andrea Zeffiro offers up traces of a secret love affair. Barbara Crow, Ana Rita Morais & Allyson Mitchell love grey, all the way. Tracy Tidgwell gives us an overview of Deirdre Logue's long-term love affair with the arts. And, 98% of Vivek Shraya's songs are about love.

But love is complicated.

Two NMP pieces consider community accountability in response to the impact of abuse in radical organising circles: regular NMP contributor Yasmin Nair in Fuck Love; and Ching-In Chen and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in their

discussion of *The Revolution Starts at Home*, an anthology published by South End Press.

In conversation with NMP, Isabelle Hayeur talks about the state of the environment, her inspiration, installations, and underwater worlds. Her photography graces the cover of NMP 18.

Indu Vashist is a queer feminist, community activist, and an independent scholar. She talks about the Indian Penal Code, diaspora, decriminalizing homosexual sex, and weaving queer and desi identities.

Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, in conversation with cultural theorist Lauren Berlant and political philosopher Michael Hardt talk about their use of love as a political concept. In the exchange they discuss how love can be used to think through a non-sovereign notion of both a political body and self.

And, in *Le jeu du pendu*, Lamathilde speaks of love lost.

Thank you to all the contributors who have made this another excellent issue of NMP. Thank you m-c for the ongoing curatorial genius and for taking on several interviews in this issue. Thank you Tamara Shepherd, Fabien Rose, Momoko Allard, Jacinthe Dupuis, Lindsay Shane, and Jenn Clamen. Huge thank you again to guest editor Sophie Le-Phat Ho and all the amazing contributors in the last issue, NMP 17: *magie*.

We are saving up to rebuild NMP in a a more stable content management system/version, so if you would like to donate toward this, please know that your money will go to anticipating and hopefully preventing the site from crashing. Any amount is good - it adds up!

Be sure to also come to the Meow Mix NMP benefit, Saturday Dec 3, 2011 at the Sala Rosa. Thank you, G!

If you would rather donate your skills in Drupal or Wordpress, please let us know.

You may now also pitch us submission ideas for 2012 issues, by consulting our submit page. Note that issues are booked almost a year ahead of publication, so contact us now!

Nous accueillons toujours avec grand plaisir et intérêt toute idée que vous souhaitez nous soumettre.

Follow us on Twitter for updates @nomorepotlucks.

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a fiery and unconditionally loving journal bimonthly.

Mél Hogan



Transforming Landscapes: An Interview with Isabelle Hayeur

NMP

NMP: Your photographs compel viewers to question our society's relationship to our environment, both natural and human-made. What sparked your interest in exploring this relationship?

Isabelle Hayeur: I have always been concerned with the transformations that landscapes undergo. Growing up in a suburb, I was faced with the spectacle of urban sprawl and the disappearance of so many things in its path. Like many people of my generation, I watched TV programs with Jacques Cousteau and David Suzuki. At age 21, I also worked for Greenpeace for about year, and I became more conscious of the state of the earth.

NMP: I watched your video installation Ascension in a Toronto church during Nuit Blanche. What was your intention for this installation? What is it like to show your work in this kind of environment – where hundreds or thousands of people are walking around at all

hours of the night, out to “see art”? Did you get the response you were hoping for?

IH: My intention was to create an installation in response to the architectural space of the church. I tried to address the specific context of a church; both the visual and the sound design echoed the space. I wanted to create an artwork that was intimate, meditative and mysterious, but also spectacular. The visual was a replica of the main arch of the front of the church and the audio component incorporated several different sounds, including clavichord and organ sounds. Sounds and visuals played randomly throughout the night. I thought it was a wonderful experience, and the public response was really good. We had almost 7000 visitors; I think most art projects get a lot of visitors at Nuit Blanche.

NMP: Do you use a digital or film camera? What did you begin your practice with and which do you prefer?



IH: I began my art practice in video in 1996 and then I started my first series of photography around 1997. I now use a digital camera, but I used to work with film. I like both, but I must say that the digital technology makes my life much easier. Digital photography is a faster process and you can see the result immediately.

NMP: Can you talk a little about your Underworlds series? What led you to start taking photos underwater? Technically, was it difficult to get the results you wanted? Is it this an ongoing series and if so, how do you plan on further developing it?

IH: This photo series is an ongoing project initiated in the fall of 2008. It began during a stay in southern Florida when I made some exploratory shots with a small submersible camera. Leaving crystal-clear waters to vacationers, I preferred to capture the turbid waters of navigation canals. Since then, I have acquired a watertight tank that allows me to photograph underwater environments of all kinds. I dive into troubled waters of dubious, uncertain origin. Underwater worlds are fascinating and spellbinding. While seductive images of tropical seas readily come to mind, what I seek to show is something altogether different, playing on the sense of wonder usually associated with underwater shooting.

This inquiry has its point of departure in a personal experience. For over twenty years, I have lived by the shores of a river that has become very polluted. I have long been observing the transformations of this stream, the changes in its ecosystems, as well as the disappearance of some of the animal

species that used to live in it. I wished to create a body of work that would bear witness to these man-made upheavals. Ecological disasters such as the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico or the garbage slates forming on the oceans are becoming more frequent. Massive urbanization and industrialization have resulted in impoverished bio-diversity; they also bring risks for human health. The declining state of bodies of water certainly counts among the most worrisome environmental issues. Technically, it is not difficult to get the result I want but I need to carry a lot of material and to wear a suit, so most of the time I work with an assistant.

NMP: For many of the images in your Excavations and Model Homes series, you flawlessly blend two very different photographs into one image for a particular outcome. In some cases you have added or modified details (graffiti, garbage, windows and doors). Did you begin with a particular idea of what shots and locations you wanted to juxtapose, or were these images developed more arbitrarily?

IH: Some images were developed more arbitrarily and in other cases I had a specific idea in mind.

The photomontages from the Excavations series result from a union of landscapes which seemed to me to have opposite or contradictory significations. I worked with conservation sites rich in natural and human history, then with disturbed sites and their forms of disappearances. The works contain new housing developments combined with UNESCO World Heritage sites. I also combined fossiliferous sites with various landscapes shaped by economic needs, such as garbage dumps and mines.



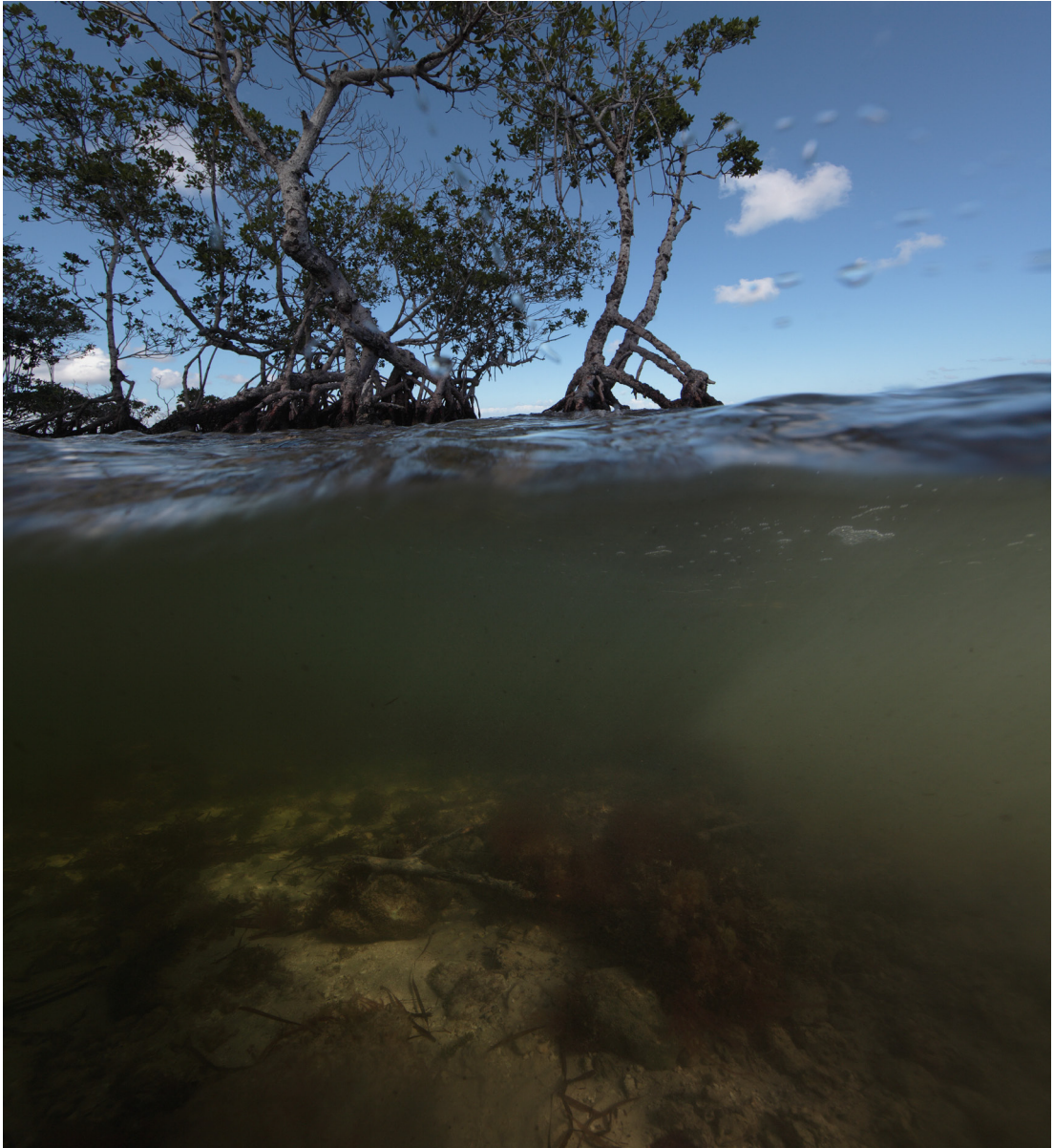


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The images from the Model Homes series were constructed using photographs of suburban houses and model homes. I photographed different types of dwellings, modest homes as well as more upscale residences. They mainly come from the new housing developments popping up on the periphery of Montreal, and from the facilities of a pre-fab home manufacturer. Using Photoshop, I alter each house and then re-position it in a new context. Each of my models is a portrait that develops a different aspect of the relationship between our societies and the land they use.

NMP: What is your technical process for manipulating photos and details in one image? How did your photography practice move in this direction?

IH: The image Roxane was originally photographed in the parking lot of a model home manufacturer. Using Photoshop, I removed the front door and a window, and added a satellite dish. I created the landscape around it from several different images taken in Cape Cod and in the suburb where I grew up. All the images were taken during the day, but I wanted to create a night scene, so I played with lightning effects to create a night ambiance and added a blue light in the remaining window of the house (like a TV).

I have worked on a computer since the beginning of my art practice, and I was always interested in the constructed image. During my BFA studies, I started to cut photographs with scissors and make photo-collages; then Photoshop was the natural next step. Since then, I have considered myself an image-based artist more than a photographer or

a videographer. I find that on a computer, distinctions of medium tend to disappear. I have made videos only from photographs and I have used images found on the Internet in my photomontages.

NMP: Through this kind of manipulation, you create startling realities in stunning images. You assemble dramatic scenarios that seem to risk being overshadowed by the beauty of your photos. The viewer is required to consider the political underpinning of your work to fully grasp the intention of every detail you create. Do you think that your objective is sometimes overlooked?

IH: I like the viewers to have a first look at my images and then to realize what they are. Usually people look at them and then read my artist statement. This is important for me because we then become conscious of what we actually don't see. I am using the reality effect to show what often goes unnoticed. We live in a highly manufactured world, and it sometimes becomes difficult to distinguish the natural and the man-made.

NMP: Much of your work points to economics as the force behind the devastation of our natural environments. What are your reactions to the Occupy movements mobilizing around the world right now? What do you think these movements have the possibility of achieving?

IH: I am totally enthusiastic about these movements. I went to Occupy Montreal for the first four days to document the occupation, and I was enchanted by what I observed there. There is a spirit of resistance of course but also of community.



More and more people are joining them right now. People want to create a better world, they want more social justice, more equity, less poverty, less greed, less consumption, no wars, and a greener world. It has been said that this movement is lacking focus but I don't think so. It points to a complete change of attitude toward humankind and toward the earth; there is so much to do. It is the first step to get people together and to send a message to governments and corporations around the world. Now people can really see what can be achieved if we work together.

NMP: You have written that you grew up in the suburbs outside of Montreal, and that now – because of all of the building developments – you have a hard time situating yourself when

you are home. I know that many of my childhood memories are mapped on and through the landscape surrounding my neighbourhood and small town. Do you find that suburban developments are not only contributing to a loss of a natural history, but also to a loss of personal and community history by destroying the land that holds these memories?

IH: Yes, and natural history and human history are connected but we don't always realize that. Rural areas that became suburbs have lost most of their memories. Urban sprawl is the dominant model in North America, generating landscapes that are surprisingly similar. These generic territories reflect the unprecedented standardization of our lifestyles and are indicative of the trend towards

homogenized cultures and experiences. Today there is a generalized shift from the distinctive and local to the uniform and global. Urban sprawl contrasts sharply with the city of the past, which resulted from sedimentary processes, embodying a collective memory. But our new suburbs are no longer just soulless places – anonymous, standardized and uniform – they have in fact developed their own identities. But these identities are fashioned from whole cloth, like movie sets. Vast tracts of land are now placed in the hands of developers, whose vision is inspired by the strategies of commerce. Developments usually have no connection to the original context of the sites where they are built; they are amalgams of cultural, imaginary and borrowed identities. The housing in these places suffers the same fate and is full of grafted-on symbols and references to histories that have nothing to do with our own. We are witness to the appearance of simulated villages, a style that could be called fake-authentic, a pastiche of vanished ways of life. Picturesque features are fabricated, pseudo-heritage values are invented, and the target is clients who like to think they are buying something special with a local flavour. This generates false perceptions of who we are.

Isabelle Hayeur is an image-based artist, born in Montreal in 1969. She holds a Bachelor's (1996) and a Master's (2002) degrees in Fine Arts from the Université du Québec à Montréal. She is mostly known for her large-size photomontages, her videos, and her site-specific installations. Her artistic practice was initially centered on video. From 1997 to 2001, she belonged to Perte de signal, a collective dedicated to emerging work in media arts, being one of the founding members. Around the same period, her practice in photography was gaining in importance and she began to show her work regularly. The artist's works offer a critique of recent urban and environmental upheavals, by showing territories that appear "natural", though they have been created artificially. Her art proves to be both political and poetic, constantly striving to defy simplistic interpretations so as to highlight the ambivalence of our relation to the world.
<http://www.isabelle-hayeur.com>



Audio File: Intro to Queer Issues and Activism in India
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Indu Vashist on Queer India and Co-Existing Diasporic Identities

NMP

NMP: In July 2009, India's High Court issued a ruling on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code essentially decriminalizing consensual homosexual sex. Can you explain this ruling in further detail and tell us where it stands now?

Indu Vashist: Basically, the Delhi High Court read down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The judgment is based in constitutional morality, which emphasizes a fusion of moral philosophy and constitutional law. Essentially, that means that tenets of the constitution are prioritized over religious or social morality. So, when the constitution says that all people are created equally and have equal rights, it really does apply to all people. For example, it means that gays are natural people and thus should not be discriminated against because of their sexuality.

The Delhi High Court judgment was written in this language. This is a far better judgment than activists expected; they were not even campaigning

with the expectations that they would receive a judgment based on this logic. Currently, this judgment is being challenged in the Supreme Court by a whole host of religious organizations. As we know, these types of cases can go on for years, so it is hard to say when a decision will be rendered. However, the fact that the constitution was invoked by the Delhi High Court puts the queer movement in a fairly good place for the Supreme Court case.

NMP: In an article you wrote for 2B Magazine [1] you quoted Ponni Arasu explaining that decriminalization has allowed for an increase in public discourse and access to public space. How is this space being held by the LGBT movement? Has there been any major backlash or is this a welcome change?

IV: India is a very diverse country with an enormous range of cultures, languages, and a huge gap between the rich and the poor, the rural and urban. It is difficult to generalize because of the enormity

of the country. That said, within the English speaking (read: urban, educated, elite) there have been enormous shifts in attitudes towards queers. This can be evidenced by the way that queers are treated by the English press, television, and within the mainstream Hindi film industry. In most of the major metropolises, there are active queer organizations that host Gay Pride marches, and many queer club nights. This is, of course, in addition to organizations that provide individual support services. Within this milieu, the queers are out in full regalia.

The Hindi media is also now warming up to queer issues, but that is slower battle. Within regional media, there is still very little support. This is reflective of the urban/rural or educated/uneducated divide. The resources and organizations are concentrated in the cities and are primarily in English, and thus the result is that within the regions and regional languages, the support for the queer movement is less than in the metropolises.

In terms of backlash, it is uneven. On one hand, the Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad recently remarked that "homosexuality is a disease." He then had to retract his statement because of pressure from HIV/AIDS activists as well as from the queer movement. In another instance earlier this year, TV9, a local TV station in Hyderabad, aired a piece about gay life in Hyderabad in which they had entrapped young gay men through an internet dating site. The station aired footage of these men without their consent, thereby outing them to the world. After pressure from the queer movement, the Standards Authority determined that TV9 had "needlessly violated the right to privacy

of individuals with possible alternate sexual orientation, no longer considered taboo or a criminal act," and ordered the channel to pay a fine and broadcast an apology.

In essence, there is a backlash that is occurring against the queer movement; however, the movement to gain rights and counter these types of incidents is very strong.

NMP: Is the fight for LGBT rights in India tied to other struggles for social justice? Are there any differences in the movement throughout the country?

IV: The fight for LGBT rights was born from health-related activism, namely work on HIV/AIDS and the feminist movement. The work around HIV/AIDS provided resources for addressing the concern and provided visibility to a range of different people and identities that was previously unimaginable. These identities/communities include Hijras (historical MTF trans community, for the lack of a better translation), kothis (lower class effeminate men), MSM, and gay men. These groups are complimented by ongoing feminist movements, particularly by those feminist groups that embrace queer lives and struggles as part of opening up discourses of sex and sexuality. These two factors became very significant in making space for various queer people to come out and to claim their space in the public sphere, be it in the courts, in the media, or on the streets. In many ways, the queer movement is still very much tied to these broader movements. Many of the key actors are still active in both the feminist and HIV/AIDS movements, so much so that it is often difficult to

distinguish the two. The queer movement has yet to make any significant or meaningful connections outside of those identity-based movements.

Moreover, the queer movement is quite varied across the country. In my experience, each metropolis has its own dynamic or culture within the queer movement. Of course, the movements in bigger cities like Delhi, Bombay, and Bangalore, to an extent, tend to work on “national” level issues, such as high-profile legal cases. In other cities, there is more localized organising which is slightly disconnected from national level organising.

NMP: In an interview with Dykes on Mykes radio, you brought up some of the challenges of the Parents’ Petition. Can you explain what this petition is and how it has been playing out in both a legal forum and within the LGBT movement?

IV: The Parents’ Petition is a group of 19 parents of LGBTs who have petitioned the Supreme Court in support of the Delhi High Court’s landmark decision in 2009 that decriminalised homosexual relations between consenting adults. The Parents’ Petition argues:

It is Section 377 which is a threat to family values, as it directly affects the rights of the Applicants to safeguard their families from illegal and arbitrary intrusion from the state authorities. Section 377 invades the sanctity of the family, home or correspondence and allows for unlawful attacks on the honour and reputation both parents of LGBT persons as well as LGBT persons themselves.

The Petition itself is brilliant because it uses the right-wing language of family values to make a point about decriminalised same sex activity. Yet, there are fears that this type of language undermines the feminist movement’s aim of decentralising the family from the way that individuals are viewed. It was a strategic choice that has come under some criticism from people who are working to think of structures of support that are beyond the heterosexual, nuclear family.

NMP: You recently launched the project GlobalQueerDesi – a global South Asian queer webspace. Can you tell us about this project?

IV: Yes, this is a project that I started at the beginning of this summer. The aim of the project is to counter the isolation of many queer South Asians in the diaspora, as well as to share resources and provide support across borders within the region and across the world. Essentially, I have found in my travels that there are many interesting resources being produced on the subcontinent that would be of great use here in the diaspora. In many ways, the diaspora is cut off from the gains that the queer movements have made in the homeland; this is a way to bridge the gap across borders.

NMP: What have you been able to uncover about the movement in India through this project?

IV: Over last few years, I have travelled and worked in India fairly extensively. I have found it to be much more developed there than here in terms of resources and support mechanisms for queer people. I was fascinated by the fact that people

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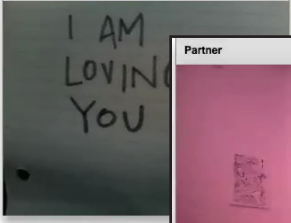
could easily integrate their queerness with their desi-ness. For example, one of my most memorable moments happened soon after I arrived in Bombay, when I went to a meeting of the queer organization Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA). After the meeting, we went to a local resto that served greasy Chin-jabi food and cheap drinks. I was there with all of these lesbian feminists, eating and drinking long into the night. At one point, I realized that we were all wasted and being incredibly loud and the whole resto was watching us being big old queers. At the end of night, one woman started singing old Bollywood songs and all of us gay-ified the songs and sang loudly together.


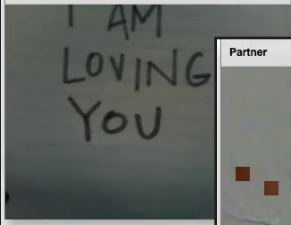
In the diaspora, if you are queer, the first thing that comes under attack is your relationship to your culture, family, and homeland. I found that by exposing myself to queers in India, I could gain confidence that it is possible to inhabit both identities. It was incredible to see so many friends' parents love them unconditionally. It gave me great strength to have seen that it is possible for queer desis to have functional, love-filled lives. I felt the urgent need to expose diasporic South Asians to this idea that our identities need not be fragmented, but can co-exist.

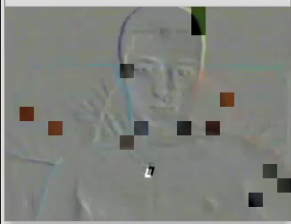
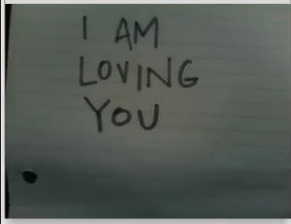
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Indu Vashist is a queer feminist, community activist, and an independent scholar. She currently works as a freelance journalist in both India and North America. Her work has featured in 2B Magazine, New Indian Express, and Kafila. She is on the editorial collective of SAMAR magazine (South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection) and hosts a weekly radio show on CKUT 90.3 FM called Desi Dhamaka. Her research interests include: the events and impacts of 1984/1985 in the Punjabi diaspora and in India; queer movements in South Asia; and rifts and bridges between diasporas and homelands. She has taught courses at McGill University, and currently is a research assistant at Concordia University.

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Performing Love #01: I am loving you.

Antonia Hernández

The power of love. What is love? Is love a force? If love is a force, then why it is necessary to build it up? How powerful is love? Is love independent of the beloved object? Is it a necessary object/necessarily an object? Why? Can it be a random one? Can it be an unknown one? How is love experienced? Can love be performed? Can love be performed through a computer screen? Can love be performed through a computer screen in front of an unknown person?

Performing Love #01: I am loving you is an attempt to tackle these questions. This exercise can be related to a broader inquiry into the nature of online relationships. I am loving you is a performance using the video-roulette site www.Chatroulette.com as its medium. There, random people are invited to be loved by someone behind a hand-made sign, in an attempt to avoid common biases related to gender or age. The song "Something Good" from The Sound of Music provides the soundtrack for the performance. This song talks about a face-to-face loving situation, reinforcing the performative character of love. The speed of the song has been changed in order to stress this characteristic.

Over the last ten years, Antonia Hernández has been working to understand the complex domestic environment by focusing on its pornographic and ecological components, as well as its biodigital entities. She is currently finishing a Master's in Media Studies at Concordia University in Montréal. For more, see <http://www.corazondelatex.cl>

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le jeu du pendu



Lamathilde aka Mathilde Geromin est une artiste de video-performance-son, franco-canadienne qui vit et travaille à Montréal. Après des études de cinéma, une maîtrise en linguistique, Lamathilde retourne à ses premières amours l'image et le son. Son travail porte sur l'identité à travers le genre et la sexualité. Depuis 1999, son travail a été montré dans de nombreux festivals et galeries à travers le monde. Entre autres Pink Screens - Brussels, Festival des films gais et lesbiens - Paris, London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival , Mix Festival – New York. Depuis 2004 Lamathilde fait partie deu collectif de performance WWKA (women with kitchen appliances). Depuis 2008, elle collabore avec Coral Short sur des performances telles que, Sexnoys (Vancouver), Social (Montréal).

Regarder en ligne: <http://nomorepotlucks.org/>

Le jeu du pendu de Lamathilde

Mél Hogan

J'ai vue *Le jeu du pendu* (2010) au Festival international du film sur l'art. Je l'avais aussi vue sur YouTube peu après que Lamathilde l'y ait postée, et je lui avais demandé si elle pouvait être présentée dans NMP.

Je pourrais m'attarder un moment à réfléchir au fait que regarder une vidéo en ligne et regarder une vidéo sur grand écran participent aujourd'hui du même environnement technologique (technolandscape), et partant de là, au fait que je ne comprends pas la réticence à mettre de l'art vidéo en ligne. Je ne pense pas que tous doivent le faire, du moins pour toutes les vidéos et en tout temps, mais je crois toutefois que certaines œuvres, présentées dans un cadre et un contexte particuliers sont essentielles en cette ère du numérique. Parce que j'aime commenter l'art vidéo, l'accès à une version en ligne me permet de re-regarder une vidéo ... J'ai dû regarder *Le jeu du pendu* 20 fois, et je remercie Internet de m'avoir offert cette possibilité.

Mon point, c'est que ce que Lamathilde nous offre généreusement et qui prend la forme de vidéos disponibles en ligne – *Le jeu du pendu* en particulier – parle, d'un point de vue politique, à ceux et celles qui associent l'échange d'idées avec la possibilité de conversations plus larges et plus incertaines, mais attendues depuis longtemps, très longtemps.

Ce que j'aime de Lamathilde ainsi que de son travail (ces choses peuvent difficilement être séparées après tout), ce sont ses sensibilités politiques. Elle sait comment et quand s'imposer, mais elle sait aussi céder. *Le jeu du pendu* témoigne de cela, ainsi que de la préoccupation constante de Lamathilde pour les notions de communauté et d'amour, ainsi que pour le potentiel communicatif de l'art. Ces éléments ressortent clairement pour moi et semblent être ce qui rend la voix de Lamathilde si présente dans son œuvre. Avec cette voix – esprit, cœur, conscience et corps –, Lamathilde raconte la pendaison de son frère en ayant recours au jeu morbide du pendu comme dispositif narratif. La voix passe de la narratrice à la sœur à l'artiste, et elle est par moments, par la force des choses, sarcastique, frustrée, tendre, triste, autoritaire, et indulgente.

En seulement 1 minute et 39 secondes, Lamathilde fait des liens entre la mort, le genre, les discours de pouvoir, les valeurs capitalistes, et l'effet papillon. À travers la trame formée par ces thèmes majeurs et en faisant référence à un jeu basé davantage sur la devinette que sur la stratégie, Lamathilde invite le spectateur à méditer sur la responsabilité – sur le fait que les actions individuelles sont importantes pour le bien-être global de la famille, de la communauté, de l'humanité, et ultimement, de soi-même.

Merci à Fabien Rose pour la traduction.



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jolives/5148997381/sizes/o/in/photostream/>

Fuck Love

Yasmin Nair

Part I: I Never Promised You a Rose Mountain

It is 2007 and I am at the Rosemont conference center in Rosemont, a suburb of Chicago. I wonder why the place looks like the middle of nowhere, until I remember that everywhere in suburbia looks like the middle of nowhere.

It's a pretty name, Rosemont, I mused on the train ride, envisioning a mountain of roses, my favourite flowers. But when I arrive, there is nary a hill, only the flatness of the Midwest and not even a tiny, brittle mound of rosebuds in a tiny, dingy vase. The conference center is exactly that, mercilessly efficient with people in uniforms busily scurrying around and trying to stay invisible as they constantly arrange and rearrange tables and chairs in the meeting rooms.

My friend V. and I are here at a bigbigbigbig radical people of colour/gender/queer conference. It's flush with people who have either built their lives

in the alternative non-profit industrial complex or are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed about having just begun their careers. She's here representing her workplace, while I'm here mostly to browse and observe. On the morning of the first day, I wake up and make my way downstairs to the breakfast tables where there are stacks of indifferent bagels, overly acidic orange juice, fruit, and cream cheese: standard conference fare. I try to be good and get some fruit but I'm more interested in the cream cheese, which I slather onto a bagel in an attempt to disguise its cracker-like consistency. I take all this and a bottle of juice into the plenary session room and wait while people file in.

I had come here earlier the previous evening as an invited participant in some sort of survey/discussion about race, a traveling show of sorts put together by a bigbigbigbig funding agency, the sort whose very name invokes hushed tones and much genuflection in the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) where money is always tight and funders

are revered like major gods. I think the broader idea, for the agency, was to go around the country and solicit suggestions on how to end racism, the sort of lofty goal the non-profit world is always signing up for. At any rate, the discussion prompts are ridiculously stilted, and are based on the assumption that solving the problem of racism will solve the problems of the world. It's the same old essentialism that's so prevalent in the non-profit world, where capitalism is assumed to somehow exist outside of communities of people of colour, and where rapacious boards can be fixed simply by making them ethnically and racially "diverse."

It was a frustrating evening, with several of us trying to complicate the conversation, while the lead researcher wrote our points down on the mandatory flip boards positioned around the room. It became clear to me that he had no real interest in a sustained conversation with any of us, that we had been brought into this room in order to fulfill a mandate that the survey be taken to groups of activists in various cities and that, in effect, the answers were already written down somewhere. I was reminded of *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, where the answer is 42 but no one knows what the question is. In this session, we were, in effect, told that the answer is racism, but the question – what was it, exactly, that we were expected to combat or solve? – remained a mystery.

In a few months, a final report, on very good paper, will be mailed to me, with a note of thanks for my participation. The survey's results will state, in a thicket of non-profit-speak, that racism is bad and must be eradicated.

All of this is to say: I attended a "discussion" where the insights had already been determined in advance in keeping with the mandates of an NPIC where there is little space for original thought, and for which I had made my way to a pathetically rose-less Rosemont out in the middle of nowhere.

I am not happy.

The air is thick with the vocabulary of the NPIC; words like "solidarity," "intentional," "affirming," ring around me, and the unctuousness of the cream cheese offers little comfort. I place my half-eaten breakfast under my chair.

A main reason why I even stay for the conference is that it allows me to meet up with V., one of my beloved and long-time friends who I get to see whenever she swings by Chicago, usually while traveling for work. Seeing her is always a rare pleasure, and I'm happy to have her sanity around me. Besides, she knows me well, really, really well, and today she frequently grins her support for me as we both circle around and do our thing, hobnobbing and chatting with people. She can tell by the look on my face that I am dissatisfied and not happy, but we both find ways to laugh about it. She points me to some of the people in the room, naming names and organisations. Sitting in the aisle across from me, an Asian-American woman, is someone considered a bigbigbigbig name, one of the first to take on the issue of AIDS long before it became a fashionable one. I am actually impressed.

The plenary panel, on the other hand, leaves me much less so. Suffice it to say that this is an orgy of identity politics, the sort I had hoped we had left

behind in the 20th century. But here, identity now combines with consciousness-raising as each panelist affirms that she – they are all, as I remember, identified as female – does not simply think about her “intentional” politics but that she lives her oppression. She is Native American and thinking about indigenous communities, she is a rape victim and thinking about sexual violence, and so on.

As the panel drags on, it becomes clear that, really, experience is everything. And so it is that, at the end, the last speaker ends on a dramatic note. She begins by asking people to stand up as she calls out their experiences: “Who here has suffered sexual assault?” People stand up. “Who here has suffered sexism?” People stand up. “Who here has suffered racism?” People stand up. The room is finally filled with people standing up. The speaker continues with a few other forms of oppression and declares that our facing of them will change the world. I sit all the while, with my arms folded across my chest and with what I know is a look of irritation on my face. I can feel a slight flutter of discomfort around me as it slowly becomes obvious that I am the only one not standing. The bigbigbigbig AIDS activist finally turns and glares at me with a look that signals that I should be standing up. “Surely,” her face says, “You have been oppressed on one of these counts!”

It’s true: as a brown, queer woman, I am both the perfect subject and object of the neoliberal game of oppression being played out here. Yet, I find the whole thing utterly problematic in its location of critique so firmly on the bodies of those who would change the system. Or, rather, it might be accurate to state that what is being called for in

this room is not a systemic change but an invocation of lived experience that somehow grants particular bodies the magical ability to change things by dint of who they are, rather than what they do or think. It’s one thing to acknowledge that lived experience can allow one to gain particular insight. But it’s quite another to so fervently and obviously insist that one must wear one’s oppression on one’s sleeve, or that this sort of public declaration is somehow either desirable or a motor of change. Furthermore, I can’t help but wonder how or why it’s okay to think that everyone’s public declaration of oppression – rape, for instance – is necessarily entirely voluntary in an atmosphere so charged with the onus of self-revelation. Witness, for instance, the Asian-American activist’s implicit demand – a silent if ineffective attempt at coercion – that I should, in essence, reveal some form of abuse or oppression.

I glare back at her and remain seated. I glance over at V., who is looking at me and biting her lip, trying not to laugh. I smile at her, mouth the words, “What the fuck?” and roll my eyes – something I will do a lot over the rest of the conference.

Part II: It’s Just You and Me, Baby

That conference solidified my sense that I don’t entirely belong in the world of activists and organisers, even as I have, over the past decade or so, increased my profile as both. I found the conference grating in its hypocrisy. Over the course of its remainder, I was struck by how often organisers and attendees alike expected us to keep revealing parts of our personal life, and how little relation any of this really had to our actual organising.

Yet, over and over, it was expected that we would throw our lives out there and reveal our vulnerabilities. To justify all this, the word “love” was thrown around a lot: we were not only expected to love our work – and what that meant for those whose work was unpaid or underpaid was quite unclear – but to love each other, to believe that we were all in the struggle together.

Radical organising frequently draws upon a notion of “community,” the idea that “we” are all in this together and that we are all fellow travelers. Much of this is in fact true – after all, it makes sense that those of us committed to a world without prisons or oppression or hierarchies or sexism or racism or who seek anti-capitalist frameworks are also in fact working in communitarian ways that are antithetical to the pursuit of corporate happiness, driven by entities which deploy the above to keep us in check (keeping in mind here the U.S. Supreme Court decision that corporations are people and, presumably, as given to emotions as the rest of us). But radical organising increasingly falls under the purview of the NPIC, which often not only emulates the worst of the corporate world but surpasses it precisely because it can draw upon the collective goodwill and desire for change on the part of its soldiers, who are willing to work for less and under strenuous work conditions.

In critiquing the NPIC, we tend to forget that it exists alongside a world of volunteer-run and -driven organising, without which the NPIC would not survive: a cadre of people and organisations who can be called upon at will to donate time, labour and, on occasion, money. It’s easy and even fashionable these days to be critical of the

NPIC, but as someone who has worked for years in that “sector,” I know only too well how easy it is to forget that even unfunded grassroots organising is prone to the brutality, oppression, and exploitation of the NPIC.

What forms might all this take? Exploitation of labour is one. Most non-profits, including the ones supposedly devoted to social change, employ hierarchical models, and this is frequently reflected in the immense disparities between the salaries of executive directors and those hired to take care of the actual work and day-to-day operations. The website Guidestar.com, which discloses industry details like salaries is immensely revealing. In the world of unpaid organising, cultural and political capital is the currency in trade, and it’s not uncommon for a few with the resources and ability to act as public spokespersons and become the public figures for “movement-building,” while others toil unacknowledged behind the scenes.

There are arguments to be made that the leadership of organisations should be well-compensated and that, after all, their salaries are nothing like those paid to the heads of for-profit corporations. That is, of course, true – but the point is not the amount of money being paid, as much as it is the disparity between incomes at certain organisations, and the unfairness of salary scales. We could also argue that, in unpaid organising, it’s the cause that matters, not the question of who gets credit for the work done. While that’s true to an extent, and while it’s often true that leadership is in fact key to good organising (and as someone who has frequently had to work with utterly disorganised people who are too happy to sit around and shoot

the breeze without tending to the business at hand, I know of what I speak!), we tend to forget that it does a great disservice to the work itself if we think of it as the outcome of a sole genius or work of one person. In other words, if we are to organise for a radical new world, it is also necessary to acknowledge that change comes about collectively, not individually. That's even putting aside the danger of weighting so much of the work upon the talent of one person – take away the person, and the organisation flounders.

The recently published book, *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities*, adds a further complication to all this by bringing up a topic that many of us in the world of radical organising have known about but not quite known how to confront. It addresses two issues: the first is the prevalence of intimate partner violence within activist communities; the second is how to set up systems of resolution that do not invoke the traditional mechanisms of the prison industrial complex.

As the book argues, and as many of us know too well, the issue of partner violence amongst radical organisers who are otherwise committed to a less cruel and more just world is fraught with complications. How is it possible, we often find ourselves asking, that an organising world so devoted to the ending of violence also includes, too often, people who exploit and harm their partners while simultaneously calling for an end to war and brutality? How do we confront and lessen the harm done by these individuals without calling upon the prison industrial complex and furthering that system of state violence which we are so committed

to dismantling? We need to think of how our communities often assert power relations in such a way that gendered and sexualised violence gets erased under the belief that we, who spend our days thinking through complexities – for instance, “intimate partner violence” is intended to substitute for the older and more heteronormative term “domestic violence” – in fact might have created ways in which such violence is shielded.

These are necessary questions and issues to take up, and this book is a laudable attempt to tackle the subject. Yet, it eventually reinforces the very edifices of power that it claims to want to dismantle by locating itself so firmly within the realm of partnerships and domesticity.

By locating violence and intimacy within personal or sexualised relationships, *The Revolution Starts at Home* allows us to keep unthought and untheorised the surrounding world of the NPIC and grassroots organising within which such intimacy is set.

By, in effect, pretending that violence is restricted to matters like rape and emotional abuse between partners of a sexual sort, or sexualised relations, as between organisers and those who work under them – the word “intimate” here certainly signifies only one kind of intimacy – the book keeps untouched and untheorised the great violence of power and silence that comes about in activist communities.

In other words, the book helps us to continue pretending that the only people who can fuck you up are the people you fuck.

Part III: "She is damaged goods"

I know too well the violence that comes about between and amongst those who are not tied within the sort of intimate relationships considered in *The Revolution Starts at Home*.

In 2005, the gay press reported that two men were hanged for consensual sexual relations on July 19 in the town of Mashad, Iran. The story that they had been punished for being lovers was especially propagated by writer Doug Ireland on his blog.

But such notions were quickly debunked by activists like Scott Long, then of Human Rights Watch (HRW), and critically analyzed by writers and journalists like Bill Andriette and Richard Kim. Nonetheless, in 2006, an assortment of groups backed by leaders of the "global gay community" like Peter Tatchell, who seems to see himself as the Saviour of All Brown and Black Queers, declared that July 19 would be "The International Day of Action against Homophobic Persecution in Iran."

Commemorations were to include worldwide protests, and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) was among the sponsors. Significantly, Al Fateha, then the biggest queer Muslim organization in the U.S., did not endorse the protest. But there was widespread dissent among queers about the politics of the event, and IGLHRC eventually withdrew its support. Instead, with HRW, it organized a community forum that conflicted with a protest outside the Iranian embassy in New York.

The flurry of acronyms hides the fact that the criticism came from individuals like me as well as organizations. In the days that followed, radical queers expressed and mobilized dissent against this event and so-called Leftist gay leaders were willing to use the strategies of the Right that they claimed to abhor. The story revealed that the trouble with the putative fight against homophobic oppression is that it draws upon conflicting impulses of solidarity and imperialism. In the rush towards establishing a transcendent global gay identity, there may not be much difference between the two.

Despite the claims of organisers that they wanted to work in solidarity with Iranian and other oppressed gays everywhere, I initiated a critique of the protest on the queerfist listserv that was taken up by others, and eventually suggested that dissenters contact sponsoring organizations to withdraw their support. We were wary of perpetuating a U.S.-led hostility toward a country that Bush once declared part of an "axis of evil." The idea that the two men were gay lovers, not rapists or murderers, seemed the only basis of mobilizing the gay community's outrage against the hangings.

But, I asked, why base a critique of the wanton use of the death penalty solely on the notion of innocence and the claim that the two were lovers? If they had been rapists and murderers, would that make the punishment more acceptable? In that case, this Day of Action was extremely limited in its understanding of social justice.

Critics also took issue with Doug Ireland's claim that gay Muslims seek a "self-affirming gay identity." They countered that not all gays subscribed to

mainstream American notions of an exact match between sexual identity and practice. From Beirut, Daniel Drennan wrote a nuanced and incisive critique of Ireland's positions. He was especially critical of the posture of rescue that the "West" tends to adopt in relation to the "East" and wrote, "Please give it a rest. We are very tired of the ongoing 'interventions' on our behalf."

Ireland's responses to criticism became increasingly more febrile, and he suggested that I was among the "sectarian apologists for the Islamic Republic of Iran." I am not, and was shocked that someone who claimed leftist politics would use McCarthyesque tactics to smear his opponents.

Finally, Ireland lost credibility with a single e-mail. He forwarded, without comment, a message from Jeff Edwards, a former member of the now-defunct Queer to the Left; we had both been members until I left the group sometime in 2005. The message was a series of ad hominem and included a claim about my sex life. I have written about this earlier, here and here, but this is the first time I have ever reproduced the email in its entirety (I've inserted paragraph breaks to break up the screed):

Dear Doug,

Someone just sent me your great response to Yasmin Nair's latest campaign against LGBT organizing. You have my sympathies. She single-handedly ruined the Chicago activist group Queer to the Left--all she ever wanted to do was attack other gay groups, and never contributed positively to anything we ever did. Eventually she deemed

our work insufficiently radical because we wouldn't attack other gay groups for their lack of radicalism on the death penalty, and because we wouldn't attack groups that support hate crimes legislation (another of her hobbyhorses.)

Eventually those of us in coupled relationships were singled out as oppressors of single people and not sufficiently radical in our lifestyles. This she did as a woman who has only had sex with men--she has never had to face what it means to be a homo. But she has no problem calling herself "queer" and then policing who else gets to use the term. For what it is worth, anyone who knows her isn't reading her rubbish.

Unfortunately, her reality is largely located on the web (since people who make face-to-face contact quickly learn that she is damaged goods, and has nothing but a string of torched personal and organizational relationships behind her), so she'll relish any on-line engagement. It's the only attention she gets.

*In Solidarity,
Jeff Edwards [1]*

Consider, if you will, the several ironies.

Doug Ireland, who continues to set himself up as the white man who will help brown queers from violence, had, and I'm presuming, has no problem trying to silence a woman – a brown woman, who actually studied sexuality and who actually could, on the basis of both academic and lived experience, speak with more authority than him about the complicated nexus between sexuality

and outness – with the exact same mechanisms that have historically been used to silence queer people: the threat that speaking out will result in revelations about our sex lives. In numerous cases in the not-so-distant past, and even now and even in the U.S., queers are kept silent with a threat of exposure: Shut up or I will tell everyone about your sex life. In this case, Ireland’s intention was clear: I have nothing to counter this woman’s politics, and I will therefore now ask you to judge her on matters like her sex life.

This is a scenario that unfolds every day, including in the supposedly entitled Western world, as women know only too well. The language may be different but the import is the same: Hey, buddy, you wanna know about what she’s really like? Let me tell you about the time I saw her in the back-room with this guy. You got a problem with what I have to say, bitch? Shut your mouth, or I’ll tell everyone what a whore you are.

Even more ironically, Ireland, over the course of the conversation, would refer to his admiration for the “brave” women of Aswat, the Palestinian support group for LGBTQ women. In fact, those admittedly brave women have exactly this kind of sexual politics to fear as they negotiate the thorny and difficult worlds where their members are made to face the potential of exactly the kind of attack that Ireland launched on me.[2]

Consider, then, also this great irony: that this vitriol about sexual identity, the death penalty, and hate crimes legislation was put forward by Jeff Edwards, who had been a member of a group named Queer to the Left.

In the years following, I would write responses to this incident, shrugging off the toxicity with humour. In a 2006 article for titled, “The Gay Movement is Over”, I referenced Edwards’ comment that I would never understand what it meant to be a homo, writing, “Yes, perhaps. After all, this whole out-queer-woman-of-color-with-a-noticeably-Muslim-name-in-a-post-9/11-world thing will only take a lifetime to negotiate. The next time I’m pulled aside for a ‘random search,’ I’ll remember my relatively privileged position vis-à-vis white gay men like Ireland, click my heels Dorothy-style and chant ‘I’m no homo’ three times in the hopes of being whisked away to Kansas. Where I will be stared at and denied service because of the color of my skin. Which will never compare to being a homo.” I also wrote that, “Posting an e-mail about my sex life was a weak attempt to discredit and, presumably, shame me. It made him no different from right-wing ideologues who ferret out salacious details about opponents in order to shut them up. Ann Coulter, meet Doug Ireland.”

A few weeks ago, I forwarded the email to T., who was horrified enough to refer to it as a “sexist smear,” and asked, incredulously, “Who actually uses the term ‘damaged goods’?” Others, upon reading the email, have responded similarly with shock and disgust.

Yet, ironically, at the time, even those who claimed to work on queer radical politics and gender and sexuality would try to hedge their bets and support Doug Ireland and Jeff Edwards.

Part III: Aftermath

It's 2006, I'm at a holiday party, and I run into the bigbigbigbig researcher on gender and sexuality in an Islamic culture. She has her back to me, and I walk up and gently tap her on the shoulder. She turns, and instantly turns white.

I had, a few months prior, written to her about my concern about her links to Ireland – he frequently referred to her work, they seemed to be collaborators, and when I heard she was going to speak about activism on Islam and sexuality, and perhaps even with him, I wrote to her saying I felt it incumbent to inform her about Ireland's sexism, and forwarded his email, accompanied by a note, which included these words: "Of interest to you given your work on gender is that the archives below will make clear how even those who claim a left or progressive politics around matters of gender, sexuality, and repression are in fact mired in the worst kinds of sexism and utter disregard for the basic principles of democratic dissent."

I never received a response from her and I decided, when I saw her at this party, that I needed to know, first-hand, what she thought of the politics of the situation. I bring up the issue again, at the party, and ask if she has received the email. At first, she stumbles and insists that she had responded (she never did), and then tries to say something about not wanting to concern herself about "in-fighting" amongst queers. I keep my voice level and remind her that this was not in-fighting but a very real public debate that he tried to shut down, and ask what she thought about supporting the politics of a man who was so blatant about using a

clearly sexist and misogynist method to shut down a woman – while she wrote about repression and violence in the context of gender and sexuality.

She continues to stumble through and I keep looking at her, and wait for her to finish. I can tell what she would really like to say: Doug Ireland writes for all these publications and he reviews my book favourably everywhere, and you, really, I mean, you're a nobody. Why are you even here? Why do I have to put up with this? Doug Ireland is the bigbigbigbigbig name and he will help make me the bigbigbigbigbig expert on sexuality and Islam. Nobody will care about what you think or feel. I wish you would just go away.

But I don't and insist on standing there and letting her finish her stuttering and stammering, while her husband stands by and glowers at me. When she's done, I take the conversation to the sort of mundane topics one talks about at such events: the weather, driving and living in the city, the food. Eventually, I turn and mingle with other guests, say hellos, eat a bit and then set off for the night, making a point to go up to her and say goodnight. She turns and mumbles a goodbye, and I can see the relief on her face. I'm tempted to turn around and say, I just lost all respect for you, but I don't.

In the wake of what happened, I learnt a lot about what people will do to preserve or gain their versions of power, and what even self-confessed "sex positive" radical queers really thought about sexuality.

A then-close friend, let's call him C., suggested I should stop drawing attention to the email's

contents. Baffled, I asked him what he meant by that. Eventually, he confessed that perhaps it's not a good idea because people might doubt my credibility and that he sees a direct connection between queerness and sexual acts. After many more months – we had been good friends, with very similar politics on issues – I finally let him go, unable to justify staying close to someone with such retrograde politics, wondering if I needed to now set up litmus tests for everyone I encountered.

Over the last few years, I've continued to poke fun at the politics of people like Edwards and Ireland. For a while, my profile on The Bilerico Project, where I am a contributor, testified to my love of cock and I was deliberately mocking people's expectations of sexuality on a neat continuum. Over the years, this supposedly fatal admission would become the target of people's venom, as bloggers and writers attempted to discredit my politics on the basis. I eventually took it down, only because I realised it was inciting interest in somewhat creepy people, the sort who see a woman's admission to being a sexual being as an indication that they can and should proceed to treat her as a sex object. I'm fine with being treated as such, but it ought to be in the context of, oh, sex, and I ought to have some say in it. I'm not a celebrity who gets to swan around town in a dark-windowed limousine: I take public transportation and am out and about in the world constantly, and I've realised that I do have to worry about my physical and emotional safety.

About a year ago, a lesbian noted with approval that I had taken out the bit about cock, saying that she thought it had reduced my "credibility." My credibility to do what, I wondered? Organise

around immigration, against a conservative gay agenda, and against war and hate crimes legislation? How was any of that related to what my sex life might or might not look like? I was fascinated – and am still fascinated – by the fact that someone who, I know for a fact, would be revolted by Edwards' email, would also in fact echo what he had, in essence, articulated: that I had no credibility because I "only slept with men."

While the notion of credibility resting on such thin ice as sexual practice is a ridiculous one, it reminds me of why I was so averse to that plenary session in that conference hall in Rosemont, where we were all supposed to declare ourselves the sum total of our experiences and... nothing more? If I were to go entirely by my identity and what I do... well, let's just say this: I am a brown woman with curly hair, I love animals, and I am slightly obsessed with knitting. And, oh, yes: I love cock. Mustn't forget that.

I could go on, but suffice it to say that the experience, in the end, helped more than harmed me. I never instituted a litmus test – Are you now or have you ever been a misogynist who thinks that my sucking cock harms the revolution? – but I did learn how to discern what people's politics were. Over the course of time – and a surprisingly short time – the world of organising that I occupy has shifted dramatically such that neither an Ireland nor an Edwards would be allowed much sway or standing.

I have, over the past few years, been honoured and proud to be part of an amazing, beautiful, vibrant and rich world of organisers and activists, both paid and unpaid, national, local, and global, who

do astonishing political work to make possible the world we imagine and dream about every day. We may disagree, sometimes ferociously, but I have never, to date, experienced anything with the level of toxicity hurled at me by Ireland and Edwards.

While often a beautiful thing in its brief life, Queer to the Left became, eventually, the exact opposite of what it had set out to be. In 2005, the year I finally left the group, the white, gay men who had taken over insisted we should engage upon a pro-marriage demonstration. I voiced my critique of the marriage movement, as did others, but we conceded to group consensus.

My commitment to the group meant that I would do what was required by consensus and, in a moment of supreme irony, I even stepped in to help those involved design their flyer for the event – I refused to actually attend the “action” – when it became obvious that they had no clue about prop-art (you can read about the event here). I thought the action was, frankly, idiotic and did nothing to advance, you know, a queer left agenda.

But although I was willing, in the interest of group dynamics, to help with a politically suspect action, I was damned if I was going to let us go out there with bad propaganda.

As for our work – Edwards’, Ireland’s, and mine – in organising and writing: our respective records will speak for themselves.

So. Then. Why do I care about something that happened nearly half a dozen years ago? I’ve written about the Ireland-Edwards fracas before, so

why resurrect it now and here? Why should any of this matter?

For starters, there have recently been signs that Edwards might enter the world of organising around the prison industrial complex, a world that I occupy. I have no desire to shut him or anyone else out of a movement if their work should be credible, but I would have tremendous problems with the presence of someone who inflicted such great violence upon me coming into a space where all of us militate against the PIC. And then, of course, there is the sticky little matter of his avowed support for hate crimes legislation and his views on the death penalty.

But, again, why would it matter? Surely, someone with those sorts of politics would never really be interested in the kind of work I do?

Here, I will say that I have, increasingly, felt the need to call out Edwards on his rank hypocrisy more overtly. Ironically, his hypocrisy has shown itself in *Windy City Times*, a newspaper where I am a senior writer and a book reviewer. In 2008, Edwards wrote a guest op-ed titled, “In the tradition of Stonewall: LGBTQ violence prevention.”

He wrote about encountering the word “Fags” scrawled on an HIV/AIDS poster promoting sexual health: “One day I walked onto a train car and noticed that someone had reached up to one of those posters and crossed out ‘Your partner’s secrets’ and replaced it with ‘FAGS,’ so that the poster read, ‘FAGS could affect your future.’ I suddenly felt threatened: What did it mean for someone to do this? What did it mean that someone

could have done this in full view of other passengers? What did it mean that no one had removed this, that no one seemed the least bit affected by it? Was it safe for me to do anything about it right then, or even to allow others to see I was upset?"

I was bemused to read these words from a man who had unhesitatingly inflicted such great sexualised rhetorical violence upon me, even more so when I continued reading: "There is the violence of being called names intended to intimidate and dehumanize. And of course all of this can and does cause physical violence against us, and just knowing that – that 'queerbashing' is always present as a possibility – is another form of violence itself." Well, isn't that just lovely, I thought. Jeff Edwards has no problem with exerting a form of violence against a brown, queer woman to intimidate her but, oh, the horror, the horror, that someone should dare to upset him by writing the word "fags" across a poster.

As a senior writer, I could have easily raised a stink. I could have even asked – and I believe my request would not have been seen as unreasonable – that I be allowed to write a rebuttal to his op-ed, pointing out his blatant hypocrisy. I could have written to The Thousand Waves Spa where he is, of all things, a "violence prevention instructor," and asked what the hell they were and are doing with someone like him, with such clear rage and anger and evidence of sheer misogyny, working for them.

Instead, I let it go. I even let it go when I saw an announcement that he was invited to speak about violence prevention at my old workplace, the University of Illinois at Chicago, where I still have

strong ties to friends and co-workers. I could have shown up and pointed out his actions, but I never bothered. It wasn't so much that the events of the past were far away, but that Edwards seemed so inconsequential as I moved on steadily away from that burst of poison.

But ironically, given my appraisal of the book, *The Revolution Starts at Home* has got me thinking about the kinds of violence we ignore in our radical communities. For a further dose of irony, Edwards, in his op-ed, also wrote about complicating the notion of abuse: "And it wasn't just about 'stranger danger,' but about issues with intimates and acquaintances as well."

What is important to remember about what happened to me is that the initial violence and then the various forms of implicit and explicit silencing that came afterwards never came about in a vicious corporate environment or in a conventionally intimate relationship (Edwards and I had once been friends, but that was much, much before his screed). Instead, as I now realise, what has come about is a deliberate attempt to forget crucial features of both *Queer to the Left* and Jeff Edwards' actions.

In the book *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, Q2L is referenced a few times as an organisation that did important anti-racist work. I like the book a great deal, and my review of the book for *Windy City Times* makes that clear.

But I also sought to provide some much-needed clarity: "I was, along with Joey Mogul [a co-author

of the book], a member of Q2L. Even until her acknowledgments at the end of the book, where she speaks of it in the past tense, it's hard to discern that the group in fact no longer exists. In and for its time, Q2L did excellent work but by the time I left in about [2005], some months before its eventual demise, it was entirely white and mostly male (a colleague wryly noted that my departure meant a sudden depletion in at least three constituencies), and its internal and external politics displayed the kind of racism and homo/heteronormative agenda it had originally sprung up to combat; its last public action was pro-gay marriage."

I went on: "I provide this in part to disclose my prior working relationship with one of the book's authors (Mogul and I still operate in intersecting activist circles), but also to caution against a tendency of the left/progressive organizing world to erase, even if with the gentle nudge of omission of certain facts, the more troubling aspects of our individual and collective histories. The authors are not responsible for long histories of the many groups they mention, but they are responsible for at least accurate portrayals and for pointing out that some groups, while they did vital work, have also died out (similarly, Queer Watch, another network mentioned, no longer exists). In forgetting or erasing our pasts, we run the risk of believing that alternative visions can operate without trouble or rancor or that, indeed, they somehow operate forever. Our fallibility as organizers does not make us any less radical or effective; our awareness of such can only make us stronger."

My interest in returning to the Edwards-Ireland moment is to make sure we remember our

fallibility as organizers and to ensure not simply that Edwards and Ireland – neither of whom has ever acknowledged their violence or apologized for it – can no longer play a role in radical organizing. Indeed, that is quite far from my intent, given my politics around the nature of violence and the prison industrial complex. When I read a news article about a man who raped his daughter and then tried to kill her, my first response was that of horror. But then I worried that he will be jailed for life and that guards will look the other way as other prisoners, driven to some mad form of "justice" in a world where they too are only guaranteed imprisonment forever, will rape him day after day to "teach him a lesson." I write and work against sex offender registries, convinced that these do nothing to mitigate sexual violence and only strengthen the PIC.

All of which is to say: I believe in forgiveness and that people might change, and I don't believe that damnation, banishment, and punishment do a damn thing to make us safer. But I also believe that there needs to be an acknowledgment of damage done. We, in our radical communities, are fond of the concepts of wholeness and healing, almost as much as we believe in this concept of "love." But.

What if we thought of love and violence in more radical ways? What if we considered that deep, wounding violence could actually happen within contexts outside of personal relationships? What if, instead of persuading ourselves that such toxic moments are somehow merely symptomatic of "infighting," as the bigbigbigbig scholar put it, we had to acknowledge that this shit is fucked up and it fucks people up? What if, instead of us

pretending that we radicals are all so adorable and lovely and untouched by the mean, mean politics of the corporate world, we actually acknowledged that many of us are, in fact, hung up on gaining cultural and political capital – even at the cost of refusing to name or even see violence as it spills out into our lives and careers?

What if, instead of ignoring the reality of the shit that goes down and rewriting the history of our organisations to pretend they were always perfect, we simply acknowledged: That was a great moment, and it ended badly, but we learnt a lot from it all and moved on? For fuck's sake, people, wouldn't that make for a much stronger movement? What if we acknowledged that violence is not restricted to broken bones and rape?

In writing at such length about something that, to many, will seem like a mere blip, I am also making an explicit demand to Edwards: that he stop trying to pretend that things are all right between us, in public, despite my having written about this incident twice in the past. For the past few years, I have kept running into him at events and in my neighbourhood (I believe he may live nearby).

Every time, to my bewilderment, he looks around and then pretends that we are friends. I stay silent. At first, I didn't understand it, but now I realise he was relying on exactly what most of us rely on: that the world of manners and propriety and the desire to not make a scene will protect us. Only recently have I begun to understand that what Edwards is doing is, in effect, a tried-and-true tactic employed by abusers of all sorts: to pretend that relations between them and their victims are

really, perfectly fine. It's a form of self and public delusion that, in effect helps to sustain their fiction of normality. More importantly, it helps them to hide the facts of their abuse. Hello, Yasmin. Look, we're quite fine. There has never been anything wrong between us. And if you don't respond to me, you, Yasmin, look like the asshole.

I failed to recognise this for what it is because of the simple fact that I have not seen myself as a victim in all this. I am not a delicate flower – I am not a rose, oh, for some roses in Rosemont – and I don't mean that to insult those who do see themselves as victims (and this is not the time and place to critique the discourse of victimhood which has effectively helped to strengthen the PIC). But I am tired of his tactic, I want no personal interactions with him, and I want him to stop. It seems impossible, so perhaps ensuring that this somehow reaches him will do the trick.

In writing this, I want to preserve the venom of the moment. I want the prison activists and the anti-brutality activists and the anti-death-penalty activists and the bigbigbigbig theorists of gender and sexuality – who might think of bringing in Edwards without any question, and who would erase his and Ireland's actions, and who pretend that such things are inconsequential – to reach out for what they imagine to be the smooth outer shell of two gay white men whose cultural capital will always exceed mine. And as they touch it, I want them to feel their fingers burn and the skin of their fingers to melt from the sheer toxicity of what they are forced to confront.

I want their eyes to burn from the smoke of the acid rising from the shell, just as my own burnt for days from all the crying.

Part IV: Shatter

This part was to be much longer. But for now, all I really have to write is this:

On the day I saw the email sent out by Doug Ireland via Jeff Edwards, I shattered. I called E. the very hour it came in, weeping inconsolably. She was working retail at the time, behind a counter, and had to keep putting me on hold as she dealt with customers. I've often wondered what they must have thought as they went about purchasing their wares, all the while listening to the sounds of wailing on the other end of the phone at the salesperson's ear.

I wish I could tell you how difficult this has been to write (and how much infinite patience my editor has shown me). I wish I could describe to you the grief I held in my heart and in my eyes and in my body as I walked around numbly, in a city whose familiar places and faces had turned into landscapes of torment as every person and thing became now infinitely threatening.

There. Are you happy now? I have told you that I cried, that I felt the sort of grief and aching hollowness reserved for great loss.

Why did I cry? What was I crying about?

There are few phrases I detest more than "The personal is political." I'm bloody sick of it. No, it's

not, I want to scream, every time I hear it: the political is political, period. We don't need to justify our politics or our desire to work around abstractions by constantly locating them in our experiences and our personal lives and on our bodies.

So it is with great reluctance and after many years that I tell you now that I felt an unfathomable pain when I saw that email. I want to be clear: it was not a pain of separation or a sense of pain about friendship, but the pain of betrayal. The betrayal was not a personal one but the shock felt when we, those of us who ought to engage each other with integrity long after the friendships and the solidarity have melted away, choose instead to attempt to wound and spite and destroy.

Every time I show the email to someone, I watch them read it, their eyes widening. Always, towards the middle, there is the wince of pain and shock and then the slight but unmistakable recoil away from the page or the computer, as if the acid were spilling out onto the table and threatening to corrode their very bodies, seeping through the fabric of their clothes.

I don't seek to legitimise myself by inserting a narrative about personal pain. In the world of radical organising, as evidenced in that plenary session, personal trauma is some kind of badge of belonging, as if one can never do reasonable and even excellent work without, somehow having experienced every or at least multiple forms of oppression and trauma.

Contradictions abound, and we are surely the sum total of our pasts and our indiscretions. If I were

to look back honestly, I will find moments where I have hurt or even wounded people. But there is a difference between that kind of hurt and wounding and the sheer political will to smash someone's credibility and to never even acknowledge it. I want it acknowledged, and I want it out there. I've grown tired of radical love and I'm tired of the never-ending bullshit of radical organising where we all pretend to love each other for some just cause, but never want to admit that we seek power. Or never want to admit that, really, seeking power is okay – without it, how do you change things? The trick is to acknowledge that and to move forward with integrity. Not love. But a clear-eyed vision of an abstract commitment to principles, not just the people we like.

I've grown tired of the endless and needless deification of figures. The Troy Davis execution left me as drained as anyone else, but I was, by the end of it, sick and tired of the endless talk of love for him, and of how perfect he was, and how loved, loved, loved. And I didn't care, as I read, too late, of the execution of Lawrence Brewer, the man put to death the same night as Davis for the gruesome murder of James Byrd Jr., that he was apparently a white supremacist. Maybe Troy Davis was an asshole, and maybe Lawrence Brewer was always good to his mother and never let her carry heavy groceries by herself. I don't know and I don't care because when I set out to make the world better place, I didn't think it needed to be less so for the assholes I don't like.

Can we stop thinking about love and reanimate our commitment to more abstract notions of justice?

Fuck love. Fuck as frequently as you can, fuck as vigorously or as gently as you like, fuck whomever you like, but stop pretending that love – about which most of us know nothing, otherwise why would we gain any pleasure in it? – somehow circumscribes what we do.

When we talk about violence in our communities, let's stop pretending that it only happens amongst those who fuck.

What happened to me taught me not to trust that people will act on their best instincts, and it taught me not to believe that my organising community could be exactly the same as my circle of friends.

That sounds so tragic: As the world is my witness, I will never trust again. And it is, of course, precisely the narrative about the "damaged" woman that Edwards so nastily spun out in his email. But there is something to be said for not trusting that those who believe in the world we believe in will also act by our principles.

And with that, I wish I could tell you about my friends. About V. and E., and E., and R. and J. and J. and M. oh, my beloved M., who has always warned me that my issues "have everything to do with cathexis." I wish I could tell you how these and so many others have patiently mopped me up and helped pull me back into shape.

But I won't, because this is mine to know and exult in.

I don't trust my intentional, loving, strong, radical community to take care of me when the chips are

down; I trust my friends. I will only say this to you: Keep your friends close, and make sure your enemies are damned far away, otherwise the poison will eat at your life.

My greatest wish for you is not that you find the one who will make your life whole, but that you know and recognise the few who will hold you when you shatter.

*Some initials have been changed. My thanks to Karma R. Chávez for her feedback.

Footnotes

[1] I have the original copy of this email. As for the charges that I single-handedly ruining an organisation: I only wish I were that powerful.

[2] I want to be clear: I am by no means comparing what I faced from Doug Ireland and Jeff Edwards with the issues faced by women who encounter very visceral and real violence. But I am stating that the intent behind such attacks is the same.

Yasmin Nair, Writer, Academic, Activist, Commentator.
<http://www.yasminnair.net/>



Listen Online:

<http://nomorepotlucks.org/>

Crisis by Vivek Shraya

All I have to do is let love in.

Illustration by Juliana Neufeld

Art is a Healer: Talking with Vivek Shraya

NMP

NMP: You recently took a step back from making music to write and tour your book, *God Loves Hair*. Can you tell us about the intentions of this tour and how it has impacted your career as a writer?

Vivek Shraya: The book discusses intersecting themes of gender, religion, race and sexuality and so touring was an opportunity to share my stories more broadly while also giving visibility to these issues.

As a new and self-published writer, I occasionally feel unsure about the merit of my work. Touring has really helped build confidence as I have witnessed and have been told of the ways the stories come alive, reach out and connect to others.

NMP: You have said that your book was a personal reflection on your own upbringing and the challenges you faced accepting your queerness and your Indian identity. Can you tell us

a bit about these challenges and what helped you finally accept these parts of yourself?

VS: Growing up in Edmonton, Alberta in the 1980s-90s, I was the only “obviously” queer person in any given space: schools, religious community, social groups. Thankfully there was a large South Asian population there which provided a sense of belonging in other ways. But this didn’t negate the reality of my parents’ experience as immigrants in a very white city, which, by extension, also had a significant impact on me. This layering of being both queer and a person of colour inevitably resulted in perpetual feelings of isolation or as though I was abnormal.

I think acceptance, or rather celebration, of these parts is a lifelong effort, but art has been my greatest healer and not just in the creation or writing. I have been so moved by the ways readers/audience members have opened up to me about their own personal stories. While it is always

heartbreaking to learn other people have endured similar struggles, there is also a comfort recognizing the ways I wasn't alone. Also, living in Toronto where there are other queer people of colour has made a tremendous difference.

NMP: You also recently toured your short film Seeking Single White Male which you have described as the "study of a brown body in (queer) white spaces." Can you talk about the potential of film to communicate these ideas (perhaps differently than text or music)?

VS: I tend to approach art visually and so film has been a natural progression for me. Even with songwriting, there is usually a mental image that I am trying to somehow shift into melody.

There is something about the immediacy of film that also appeals to me. Both my shorts each took over a year to make from conception to release, but once you put something online, it has the opportunity to travel and be consumed anywhere in minutes. My films are also personal but they exist outside of me. I am not directly bound to them in the ways I am to my songs or book, especially when it comes to promotion.

NMP: A lot of your work openly explores your personal life and experiences, are these natural inspirations for your art? In keeping with the theme for this issue of NMP, how does "amour" (love) influence your practice?

VS: I usually come to art as a means to work through the things that challenge me or what I am curious about so my work is intrinsically personal. Also, the

art I connect most to as an audience member are personal narratives.

I am heavily influenced by love in my work. 98% of my songs are about love in one shape or another, whether it's love lost or new love or unrequited love or wasted love. More recent projects, such as the book, have been about finding love for myself or parts of myself that I have rejected.

NMP: Your musical style has shifted significantly over the last few years; you have gone from playing acoustic music to producing electro pop dance songs. What has inspired this change and where else do you hope to take your musical career?

VS: This is mostly as a result of always listening to a wide spectrum of music and also wanting to continually challenge myself by not repeating myself over and over again. That's boring for everyone! After 5 years of working in the dance/pop arena, my natural tendency was to go in that direction again, but when approaching my new EP 1:1, I worked hard to unlearn the familiar, my patterns.

My hope is to have more fun with music. Sometimes when you are so close to something, you forget how in love you are with it and that's when it is crucial to take a step back.

I dream of making a country record and an R&B record.

Dear Vishnu
From God Loves Hair
By Vivek Shraya
Illustration by Juliana Neufeld

They say Your skin is blue because You are infinite like the sky and the ocean of milk You rest on. I wish my skin was blue. Brown is boring, it blends into the dirt or concrete background. So I draw on my hands and arms with a blue ink pen. My teacher says that I can get ink poisoning but this only inspires me to draw more for I have heard that it was drinking poison that turned Lord Shiva's skin dark blue.

I want to be a modern version of You. I would wear a peacock feather in my hair like You, maybe use my mom's curling iron to match Your wavy locks and get my ears pierced. But my four arms would carry a walkman, a book, a candle and an apple. There should be a "Take Your Believer to Work Day" so I can study You in action, ask questions and take notes. I am jealous of Goddess Lakshmi, Your consort, for the eternity she gets to spend by Your side. Does she know how lucky she is? If You smile, she shares it. If You speak, she hears it. It's not fair that only one can be so close.

When my mom prays, she becomes stiff as though one wrong gesture could displease You and result in her losing her job or worse, having to be reborn. I wish she knew the version of You that I know, the one whose adventures and victories I read about in my Amar Chitra Katha comic books. You are The Protector, the one that the demigods rush to in times of crisis. They are instantly soothed by the sight of You, decorated with flowers and gold, and

Your compassionate counsel. Countless evil demons are slayed by Your mighty chakra or bow and arrow, but You always appear calm, never angry, as though even destruction is an act of love. How do You do it? Sometimes there is a fire in me and when it comes out, it's never as pretty.

Maybe it's the blue that keeps You cool. If only I were blue.

Vivek Shraya is a Toronto-based artist and arts educator. Winner of the We Are Listening International Singer/Songwriter Award, Vivek has released albums ranging from acoustic folk-rock to electro synth-pop, driven by tight hooks, powerful vocals, and incisive lyrics. God Loves Hair, his first collection of short stories, was a 2011 Lambda Literary Award finalist and won the Applied Arts Award for Illustration in 2010. Vivek has performed and read at shows and festivals internationally, sharing the stage with Tegan and Sara, Dragonette, and Melissa Ferrick, and appearing at NXNE, CMW, and Word on the Street. His music has also been featured on the TV show Degrassi. Seeking Single White Male, his first short film, is being screened at festivals throughout 2011. A second short, Ache in My Name, is available to watch online. Vivek's sixth record, 1:1, is slated for release this fall.

<http://www.vivekshraya.com/>

The Revolution STARTS AT HOME

CONFRONTING INTIMATE VIOLENCE WITHIN ACTIVIST COMMUNITIES

Edited by Ching-in Chen, Jai Dulani & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

PREFACE BY ANDREA SMITH



Accounting for Change with Ching-In Chen & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

NMP

NMP had the opportunity to speak with Ching-In Chen and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, two editors of the recently published book, *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities*. This anthology draws from personal experiences and community-based strategies to document not only the prevalence of intimate violence within activist communities but also strategies toward community accountability and transformative justice used to support survivors of violence.

After attending the Toronto launch for the book, NMP was fortunate enough to catch up with both Ching-In and Leah to discuss the origins of the book and strategies of community accountability.

NMP: The Revolution Starts at Home started out as a zine and became a book. How does the format of this project shape the way its content gets communicated and shared?

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: I think the fact that we began as a zine project made the book/zine much more participatory, juicy and accessible. The energy of a zine is that you don't have to wait for a publisher's contract or ok—you can just do it, gather materials and control the content and vision of your zine 100%. The biggest problem with zines for me is distribution – making sure the work gets out there. A lot of zine distros are focused around majority white communities and movements. Facebook helps get around that; so did the way that INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence made the zine into a PDF for free download from their website. That was the number one thing that got the zine and its ideas into the hands of thousands of people who we might never have met otherwise.

Ching-In Chen: South End Press had seen the zine and approached us to expand it into an anthology. I think the main difference between the zine and anthology is that we were able to allow space for documentation of the growth in the work along a

wide span of time and experience. We were especially able to include more stories of collective processes in the anthology, which was really exciting!

NMP: What was your relationship to one another (to all three editors) before you started this project?

LPS: Our initial contact wasn't through doing anti-violence work at all – it was through being queer APIA poets. The first time I remember us all being in the same room was at the queer/trans caucus at the 2003 APIA Spoken Word and Poetry Summit in Chicago. I think that's important to remember – that spoken word, performance and creative communities have been a big part of anti-violence work, and aren't separate from it.

CIC: We were friends, and I think that was important in terms of the intense and draining nature of the work, that we had a solid relationship with each other as we began this work together.

NMP: Were you prepared for the amount of editorial and emotional work that this project would demand from each of you?

LPS: Hell no. Personally, at the beginning, I thought we'd make a little zine with stories of activist partner abuse and that would be it. I was kind of prepared for some things – that it wouldn't be just about soliciting essays and editing them, but doing a whole process of safety planning with authors, for instance – which we had to do as part of the editing. It wasn't just as simple as soliciting pieces; we had to do intensive work with writers around thinking through what would make them feel safe enough

to submit work. But I wasn't prepared for how long the process would take, how much the movement(s) involved would grow, change, free-form and get complicated. Adrienne Maree Brown, at the 2010 Allied Media Conference, asked the question, "Are you willing to let the work transform you?" I think that's the place we're at with this work.

CIC: I had no idea! I also thought it would be a small zine project, which actually took a lot longer than we had thought. Even the logistics of us all being able to talk together was challenging, since I don't think we ever all lived in the same city, and we all live very busy and full lives. I'm grateful that many people and groups seem to find the book helpful to their own lives and processes – that's really what we set out to do at the very beginning – but I think I've also learned a lot from listening to the stories that have surfaced about groups engaging in this work.

NMP: Your book is groundbreaking because it openly addresses the prevalence of gender violence in activist communities. Interpersonal violence in these communities is often pushed aside in favour of "more important issues," or is totally underplayed because it risks tarnishing the community's reputation. Addressing this kind of abuse (and the frequency of it) so openly must have been difficult for each of you and for all of the contributors to the book. What steps did you take to provide support for yourselves and to help your contributors feel safe sharing their stories?

CIC: For me, this shifted during the time we worked on this project. Of course, if you're working with a group of people (not yourself), there are going to

be different working styles and ways of approaching work, even if you're friends. It wasn't always easy, but it was also helpful to be able to have a small group to check in with about challenging situations that arose from the work. As editors, we tried to establish relationships with our writers to work through their pieces and to take direction as much as possible so they were in control of their pieces. For instance, one of the contributors asked to remain anonymous and we agreed. For me, one thing that also helped was that I was able, at various times, to step back from the work and feel that my co-editors were able to have my back and that it was okay for me to do that.

NMP: Since releasing the book, what are some of the most important things you have learned: 1) As editors of this collection, and 2) As individuals working with your communities toward transformative justice?

CIC: I didn't realize that so much had been going on and was going on in our communities, so it was really inspiring to learn about the history of this kind of work. Also, there's a real hunger to talk about this, for something beyond what we've been doing so far, so I think there's a growing mass of folks out there who are trying to think beyond what we have, toward what might be possible in the future.

NMP: In the preface to this book, Andrea Smith explains that accountability models working to end structural violence will help to "force us out of a crisis-based reaction mode into a creative space of envisioning new possibilities." What are some of the new possibilities that you have realized through the creation of this book?

CIC: Hearing stories of folks being proactive about building the kinds of communities they want to have, being thoughtful and clear about what kinds of guidelines they want to set up ahead of time, and incorporating community accountability into that thinking.

NMP: According to your website, the launch of this book has sparked the creation of transformative justice reading groups and community accountability groups across North America. What advice do you have for people starting similar groups?

LPS: Take a look at Philly Stands Up's "Start Up Your Stand Up" zine – it's a great guide for people who want to start a transformative justice group in their community, and gets into lots of really practical things about structure, sustainability and the like. Get really clear about your goals and capacity. Make collective care a priority. Think about doing something small but doable – a reading group, an art-making project, collecting stories, practicing safety labs – instead of jumping into trying to deal with every situation in your city or community.

CIC: Another great resource is the Toronto Learning-to-Action Community Accountability/Transformative Justice (CA/TJ) Reading Group.

NMP: In the book, you have highlighted the fact that the community accountability model is not new, and that communities of colour, native communities and other marginalized communities have been organizing against all forms of violence independently of the state for years. How can new groups working toward this end

ensure that they are respecting the roots of this model of self-determination?

LPS: It's really important that white groups do not erase both the fact that all the recent CA/TJ efforts that are working were created by feminists of color and Indigenous feminists. And it's really important that activists of color who aren't Indigenous don't erase Indigenous feminist anti-violence work – which it's really easy for POC to do. I want to take accountability for the fact that one failure of RSAH was that we, as non-Indigenous POC, didn't succeed in working with Native feminists to get their amazing work documented in the book. Boarding School Healing Project, Community Holistic Circle Healing and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, to name just a few projects, are doing incredible, groundbreaking work. It makes me think about what gets viewed as CA/TJ and what becomes invisible.

NMP: In the book you included documentation of activist organizations working towards community accountability and transformative justice. Have you found there to be many differences between US and Canadian based models of organizing towards these goals?

LPS: I feel like because, in Canada, the state is "softer" – you can still sometimes get \$300,000 a year from the Ministry of Health for your feminist therapy referral center, though that is obviously changing with the Ford and Harper governments' attacks on smaller, more radical nonprofits – there's less critique within anti-violence groups of the ways that the funding and nonprofit industrial complex change how we do our work. There's more of a

feeling that, hey, if you can get major funding from the ministries or Laidlaw, get it. I understand this – people need and deserve to get paid for the work we do – but I also feel like sometimes the fight to maintain the funding makes us more cautious about exploring what non-nonprofit organizing or non-state solutions could be.

In the US, state and foundation funding is harder to get and easier to get taken away (i.e., the way that INCITE lost its major funder when that funder discovered that the organization supported Palestinian sovereignty). I feel like this has pushed collectives and non-funded groups towards more creative, unfunded solutions, and I think this is why I know more CA/TJ groups in the US. But I also think it's true that there are many groups doing what is called CA/TJ elsewhere – it just doesn't get counted. For example, my friend Juliet November pointed out that bad date sheets created by sex workers are totally CA. So is the organizing taking place in many First Nations communities – from work by groups like Community Holistic Circle Healing in Hollow Water to the clan mother system on Six Nations.

NMP: At your Toronto launch you (Leah) emphasized that community accountability is not community policing. Can you explain the difference between these two approaches? Or, more specifically, how can activists ensure that community policing is not a byproduct of the accountability process? And, in such difficult situations, how can the process stay focused on actual accountability and on prioritizing each other's safety?

LPS: One thing that I've seen happen a lot in communities is that there is a big, public incident – someone comes out and discloses that someone in the community sexually assaulted them, or that their partner has been abusive – and, especially in communities that don't have tons of experience dealing with stuff like this (which is almost everybody) some people minimize or deny what's going on ('they're such a nice person,' 'things are complicated,' 'was it really rape/abuse?'), and some people want to punish the abuser. They want to set them on fire; they want to kick them out of town.

For a lot of people – including myself, 'cause I've definitely done this – this reaction happens for a lot of really good reasons. We are sick of abusers being tolerated in our communities; we want to definitely make sure that people are safe, that abusers don't get to keep moving around with no consequences. And often, the incident makes us remember every single time someone (including ourselves) has been raped or abused and nothing happened, and we're just like, fuck it, no more mister nice guy. That's community policing to me – this idea that we can identify the bad people and kick their asses and then things are fine. I get it. And sometimes we do have to tell people they are not welcome in certain spaces for a while and that there are consequences for their behavior. But I think there's a middle ground that people need to figure out how to explore first – between the poles of denying anything's happening and beating up the people doing harm.

NMP: In the preface, Andrea Smith explains that gender violence is not something that we can start to worry about "after the revolution"

because it is a primary strategy for white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism. She says that we must develop strategies that address state violence and interpersonal violence simultaneously. In the face of the current political context where another man of colour was recently put to death by the State of Georgia, where protestors around the world are being arrested, beaten and killed by the police and the military, can you talk about the importance of linking gender and state violence and why and how these forms of violence need to be brought down simultaneously?

CIC: If we look at the state violence that the United States, for instance, has perpetrated in places like Afghanistan, where one of the narratives was that women were being "liberated" as a reason for going to war, there's a very clear link between how state violence is justified through gender and racial stereotyping. I think that this is particularly important when we think about how the state has co-opted radical work happening in our communities through the 501c3 nonprofit system, so that radical politics was separated from direct services by offering organizations funding for services. However, many of those organizations which became nonprofits became dependent on that state funding with strings attached, which often means that the services are band-aids, but aren't addressing the root of the problem.

NMP: This book envisions new possibilities for community accountability and justice without relying on police or the state. It offers examples and suggestions for methods of building solid communities that prioritize responsibility and

care of one another. Do you think these methods and models could be applied outside of activist communities?

LPS: Sure. I mean, I think the book is about abuse in activist communities, and it's also about non-state ways of dealing with abuse, harm and violence, period. We wanted to look at how abuse is dealt with, or not, in politically left/activist communities, because there are specific dynamics. But we also wanted to fuck with the idea that activist communities are totally different than any small community in how we struggle to believe that people we know and love can harm. The fact that anyone can choose to harm, and anyone can be harmed, and that we can develop skills to intervene in harm, are at the centre of the book.

NMP: In the foreword, Andrea Smith explains that in activist communities we often “replicate the same systems we claim to be dismantling.” She says that we need to create communities of accountability that “pre-figure the societies we seek to build.” And that we need to ensure that in this process we are “dismantling our current system, not just creating another program or movement but creating a revolution.” From your experiences with this book, what tactics do you think we need to embrace to ensure that we are moving forward with a full-blown revolution in mind and not just working towards better service provision?

LPS: I think we need to resist the idea that CA/TJ is another program that mainstream social services can get funding for as the hot new thing. We need to think really seriously before we try and integrate

any of this into the existing state – I understand people wanting to provide something better to mass incarceration, now, but the potential of things becoming utter co-opted bullshit is too high. We need to resist the idea that CA/TJ is something that only a few people who are experts know how to do, but instead understand that intervening in harm is something we all can learn and practice.

NMP: Your book is a call for radical social transformation, one that – given the book’s success – activist communities across North America are ready for and eager to work on. Do you plan a follow up to this book that will build on the momentum it has created?

LPS: Uh, if you mean are we gonna edit another book, maybe in a while! I think the conversations and organizing that hopefully will come out of their book are its own follow up. I'm hoping we can keep growing and building this movement. There's been talk for a while of trying to build a North America-wide CA/TJ network, and I'm also excited by the potential expansion of the STOP project's ongoing collection of oral and video storytelling of people intervening in violence without the state.

NMP: In this book you have recorded and used people’s stories and experiences as an organizing tool and as a way to keep a record of a story “that is still being told.” Have you thought about making these experiences more readily available through the web? Or through other means?

CIC: Yes, we have thought about collecting more stories and putting them on our Tumblr and also

connecting folks to each other who are doing this work. But what that will fully look like has yet to take shape.

NMP: In conclusion, Leah, you said at your Toronto launch that the consequences of fucking up are enormous but that, alongside prioritizing survivors' safety, we also need to figure out how to support perpetrators of violence. Can you talk a little bit about the challenges of doing these two things at once? And (how) does this link to this theme of NMP, "amour" (love)?

LPS: Oh, it's super easy (sarcasm). No – I mean, basically the challenges are to really develop the emotional and political skills to never forget or minimize the survivor's experiences and needs, and also not throw away someone who has perpetrated harm. It's fucking hard. Recently, a friend of mine had a brief relationship with someone who was lovely in many ways, but also turned out to be involved in a situation of harm with another lover of theirs. My friend talked about how all her theoretical understandings that perpetrators of harm have acted badly but are not inherently bad people were really challenged. She just wanted to run as far and fast away from this person as possible.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs has this really beautiful quote I've been meditating a lot on lately. She says, "Self-care includes holding each other accountable because we are interconnected. Loving ourselves includes learning how not to harm each other. Loving ourselves includes disrupting violent patterns in our homes and in our community-building spaces." This is what it comes down to for me. As hard as it is, we really do need each other, and there isn't

any place to throw any of us away. I believe in this so much – that we can practice learning how not to hurt ourselves, our communities, or each other. And that it is a practice. We aren't raised to know how to heal hurt, or do anything other than throw each other away. But I believe in our powers to figure out how to do new things.

Pushcart Prize nominee Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a queer disabled Sri Lankan writer, teacher and cultural worker. The author of Love Cake and Consensual Genocide and co-editor of The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities (South End, 2011), her work has appeared in the anthologies Persistence: Still Butch and Femme, Yes Means Yes, Visible: A Femmethology, Homelands, Colonize This, We Don't Need Another Wave, Bitchfest, Without a Net, Dangerous Families, Brazen Femme, Femme and A Girl's Guide to Taking Over The World. She co-founded Mangos With Chili, the national queer and trans people of color performance organization, is a lead artist with Sins Invalid and teaches with June Jordan's Poetry for the People. In 2010 she was named one of the Feminist Press' "40 Feminists Under 40 Who Are Shaping the Future." <http://www.brownstargirl.org>

Ching-In Chen is the author of The Heart's Traffic (Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press, 2009). A Kundiman and Lambda Fellow, she is part of the Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundations and Macondo writing communities. A community organizer, she has worked in the Asian American communities of San Francisco, Oakland, Riverside and Boston. Ching-In is also the co-editor of The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities (South End Press, 2011) and Here Is a Pen: an Anthology of West Coast Kundiman Poets (Achiote Press, 2009). She is currently in the PhD program in Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee where she is involved in union organizing and direct action. <http://www.chinginchen.com>



Looking for Love in all the Right Places: Deirdre Logue

Tracy Tidgwell

Deirdre Logue is an all around creative creature. She always has been. Her long-term love affair with the arts was in full effect by her early art school days at NSCAD, nearly thirty years ago, and she's been integrating life and art ever since. With a brand new series of interconnected single- and multi-channel film and video works on the horizon, Logue takes a further look into the unpredictable moments of everyday life. As always, she explores the emotional, physical, and psychological impact of contemporary experience with humour and resilience and is interested in the potential in all of this both within the frame and without.

Causing a Commotion

Maybe best known for her multi-channel, experimental film and video work, Deirdre Logue's dedication to cultural creation, Canadian art, artists, and artist-run centres flows, as the song of spirit goes, deep and wide. Indeed, her internationally acclaimed film and video installations are

impressive enough, but she's also been cultivating an interdisciplinary, multi-media approach to creativity and artistic community that continues to bring together living, art making, and artist communities in countless ways.

Logue began making art in the early 1980s as a teenager in Edmonton, and after high school, did visual arts studies at Grant MacEwan College before heading east to NSCAD for a BA in fine art. It was 1984, at Halifax's legendary rep cinema, The Wormwood Dog & Monkey, that Logue first engaged in supporting an artistic community with her own work – a project Logue has been committed to in various capacities now for nearly three decades. By 1989 Logue had completed an MFA in Visual Arts with a major in sculpture (yes, sculpture) at Kent State University. "Sculpture," she said, "afforded a hands on, direct relationship to making things," which inspired her to be ever interested in exploring materiality, the meaning of objects, and creating things.

In the early 1990s, she spent a few years working as a performer with the luminous Rita McKeough in McKeough's renowned feminist, theatrical, multimedia production, *In bocca al lupo* – In the mouth of the wolf. This operatic performance piece confronted and reshaped gender and class violence affecting women through performative experiments with space, language, the body, and voice – feminist questions and approaches that continue to interest Logue today. Worth noting is that McKeough's title, *bocca al lupo* – In the mouth of the wolf is a literal translation from Italian to English, but the phrase is also a common Italian proverbial wish for "good luck" with any difficult task at hand. Whether literally or figuratively *In the mouth of the wolf*, the work of both McKeough and Logue touches on the idea that luck has simultaneously something and nothing to do with living a safe and happy life in the contemporary world. Good luck may offer a good life some of the time, but fortuna swings both ways and Logue tends to explore the more emotionally risky edges of life's continuum.

Logue is our witness, and in an uncanny reversal, we are hers. Her film and video works reflect a sensibility that connects us to ourselves through our bodies and our emotions. She shows us familiar moments of alone time – occasions consumed with worry, indignity, fear, sadness, and all kinds of tarnished feelings and expressions. And while Logue performs her versions of personal anguish and duress, she also reveals the tenacity, humour, sensuousness, and playfulness of living. On the screen Logue is alive, seductive, and unfinished – possessed by life.

Holding Fast and Moving

So far, Logue's collection of experimental film and video works include *Enlightened Nonsense* (1997-2000), a series of ten, hand-processed short films. Screened in sequence, they examine the mind and body through themes such as desire, shame, and fear. *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes* (2003-2006) is a "set of 12 short works to be experienced simultaneously on six 19-inch flat screen, wall mounted 4x3 televisions." *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes* delves into the process of living and the idea of going on with everyday life, and it "records accomplishments without impact, small feats of moderate strength and moments of mild impudence. [These films] are reflections on aging, breaking down and reparation... and describe our need for intimacy and our fear of exposure." *Rough Count* (2006-ongoing) is a video project in process that pictures Logue earnestly counting out, piece by piece, thousands of bits of confetti.

Her new series of interconnected shorts explores different levels of uncertainty and stress in a given environment. *Healthy Place*, *9:11*, *Breakfast/Floss Forward*, *Path*, and *Pond* are just a few of the titles in this new collection. With this project, Logue makes a slight movement away from her characteristic composite-style of interconnected installations toward a subtler consistency. She intends for this new series to be installed in the same gallery setting, but except for *Path* and *Pond*, which are installed and screened together, these films do not rely upon sequence or simultaneity. Contrasting the collections of *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes* and *Enlightened Nonsense*, these works sustain a visual and conceptual relationship

to one another through style, theme, and proximity, rather than sequential logic. The works of this series, says Logue, “don’t match, but they do go together.”

In her characteristic performance-for-the-camera-style, Logue most often features herself, or rather her body and sometimes her voice, as subject in a kind of performative self-portraiture. Located somewhere between the extremes of comfort and agony, her characters are always faced with some kind of personal process of anxiety or distress. As part of her life-long artistic project of emotional honesty, her images are undeniably challenging emotionally, physically, and philosophically for Logue personally as both artist and performer, but also for the observer. For once you’ve seen a Deirdre Logue film, you too experience firsthand the immediacy of her low threshold for pain. You’re right there with her because you know that feeling – you feel it too. Every bit of discomfort, worry, shame, displacement, fear, and twisted humour causes the notorious Logue-esque emotional itch. And as you continue to watch, you too become so itchy that you find yourself needing to scratch, twitch, squirm, tremble, shudder or laugh – nervously. Your stomach flips. Your eye tics. Your foot taps. Logue expresses this itch so that it can be scratched. You know this feeling. These kinds of gut reactions and underbelly feelings about the human condition are exactly what Logue’s films stir up. So, as we watch her cinematic self-portraits that on the surface may seem focused on her personal neuroses, we inevitably get the sense that these scenes are about every one of us, and they are.

Logue plays with so-called clear-cut divides between personal and collective experience and mingles private and public spaces and issues. Her work bridges these gaps fundamentally through her interdisciplinary approaches to experimental media art making and cultural production in general. Besides filmmaking, she’s worked both personally and collectively in performance, writing, drawing, and music making, as well as taking on residencies, sitting on boards, curating, collecting, teaching, mentoring, organizing, fundraising, and taking on directorships. She brings together her own creative practice with those of other artists in the community, and she works to connect artists with the cultural and economic support they deserve and need through her commitment to art, artists, and artist-run centres. Logue has been the Development Director at Vtape since 2006, and before that, served as the executive director with both the Canadian Film Makers Distribution Centre for nearly six years and the Images Festival of Independent Film and Video for over five. In the mid 1990s, she was a founding member at Windsor, Ontario’s film and video collective, House of Toast, and was the artistic director at Windsor’s Media City Film and Video Festival for nearly three years. She’s been working with Philip Hoffman and others at the legendary Film Farm, aka, the Independent Imaging Retreat, since 1997. This list goes on and on, and by the way, barely begins to skim the surface of the true depths and details of her long time service to Canadian art and artists mingled with her own art practice.

Her art-making process too blends divisions that often define boundaries between the artist, her medium and the spectator. While her filmmaking

“ Her film and video works reflect a sensibility that connects us to ourselves through our bodies and our emotions. She shows us familiar moments of alone time – occasions consumed with worry, indignity, fear, sadness, and all kinds of tarnished feelings and expressions.

is largely a solitary process – for the most part she records and edits her work on her own, if she edits at all, since much of her performance is filmed in one take – she is fully aware of the interconnections between herself, the camera, the finished work, and the viewer. She films intimate moments in domestic spaces only to expose them over and over again to the viewer who becomes as implicated in the intensity of experience and sensation as Logue herself. Spatially, we’ve seen Logue in her bedroom, in the dark, in her tent, in nature, with her cat, as well as in footage from her past. She draws together the partitions of inside and outside, personal and collective, private and public.

And then there are the Centre for Fucking the Patriarchy and the Feminist Art Gallery. The Centre for Fucking the Patriarchy and the Feminist Art Gallery are two new interwoven visionary projects collaboratively produced by Logue and her girlfriend, Allyson Mitchell, who is herself a celebrated interdisciplinary artist and culture maker as well as an assistant professor of women’s studies at York University: “Deirdre Logue and Allyson Mitchell, are the Centre for Fucking the Patriarchy – a response, a process, a site, a protest, an outcry, an exhibition, a performance, an economy, a conceptual framework, a place and an opportunity. We host we fund we advocate we support we claim. The Feminist Art Gallery (FAG) is our geographical footprint located in Toronto, Canada.” And in a full-on public/private mashup, this footprint happens to be located in their backyard. As the Centre for Fucking the Patriarchy, Logue and Mitchell have been gathering feminists, artists, activists, and all sorts of FAG matrons at

their home since 2010 by hosting planning meetings and other cultural and fundraising events. The FAG gallery, a newfangled, smallish garage which features three exhibitions each year as well as various events, talks, screenings, and gatherings, officially opened its doors in May 2011 and has already presented three incredible exhibits.

The FAG’s mission is “to grow sustainable feminist art” and as a privately funded public space that relies on a “web of matronage” for financial support to pay artists and to contribute to FAG events, they have the freedom to program and show all sorts of art by artists who would otherwise not get great exposure and attention. Logue sees FAG as “a healing gesture” – a long overdue movement towards “artistic freedom that provides space for feminist and queer cultural production and its visibility.” Logue is a visionary. She has the incredible ability to mix up time and space, inside and outside and create something beautiful, accessible, relevant, and necessary today. Indeed, Logue knows no usual limits. She continually reaches for the stars, scoops them up, shakes them up and showers the art world with their reflective shimmer of brilliance.

Heartthrob

Logue’s love of art is palpable. It’s strong and unmistakable. But I ask myself – I ask Logue too – is there love in her films? When I watch her work, I feel. I feel the effort, the fear, the humiliation, the lack of safety, the desire, despair and desperation. I feel the rough textures of being human. I relate to her bothered vulnerability, her need for process and her expression of all of this. I feel love

for living. And I love Logue for giving this to her audience; for showing us the physical and psychological endurance life sometimes requires and the burden and injury we bear because of it. I love her perverted sense of humour and the ways in which she makes us look at how marked we may be by the personal and political complications of life. I love this kind of dramatic emotional honesty. For Logue the stuff of her films is ordinary; it's what we live through everyday: "it's nothing spectacular," she tells me. Yet when I watch her films I experience something seriously far-sighted and sensational.

I watch in sickening awe, laughing, wondering, as she sits in her tent early one morning and uses both hands to stuff her mouth with an enormous wad of pink cotton candy in the double perspective, two-channel, Breakfast Floss Forward. I dread the inevitable arrival of a fish feeding frenzy as her foot dangles in the water with bread wound around her toes like the fish food it becomes in Pond. I feel apprehensive and a little lost as she rushes through an open field, desperate, searching and panting in Path. I chuckle knowingly as I respond to an online mental health quizzes/diagnoses with almost exactly the same answers as she does in her three-channel installation, Healthy Place. My breath switches back and forth from shallow gulps of air to deep attempts at calm with

hers. I feel somewhat relieved of residual anxiety and body-memory when I finally see her digital clock at 9:34 instead of at the haunting 9:11 in the eleven-channel installation, 9:11. I have a special kind of affection for Logue's films. I feel them and they seem to feel me too. Her films make me feel a whole lot of complicated things – including love. The love in Logue's art is in her care of the self. Playing out disturbing moments and simply being with intense and confusing emotions and experiences, she shows love for living a life in this intense and confusing world. She feels and does: repeat. Life goes on.

"Maybe my work is about relationships..." she says when I ask her about the love in her art, "relationships to the self and about reconciling the problems of self-love and acceptance." I think Logue's films ask for our connection and compassion as she explores the scratchiness of being emotionally honest. She shows us someone who deserves love and tenderness and in doing this, she gives us the opportunity to love and tend to ourselves. Interested yet not fully swayed by my interpretation of love in her work she asks me, "are deep feeling and love synonymous?" I think about how both deep feeling and love touch upon something nurturing, therapeutic, and resilient in us all.

Tracy Tidgwell is hopefully devoted to feminist art and activism. A photographer, performer and writer, she continues to explore culture through creativity, community, feminisms, feelings, and bodies.

Deirdre Logue's film, video and installation work focuses on self-presentational discourse, the body as material, confessional autobiography and the passage of 'real' time. Recent solo exhibitions of her work have taken place at Oakville Galleries, the Images Festival – where she won both Best Installation and Best of the Festival – the Berlin International Film Festival, Beyond/In Western New York, Art Star in Ottawa and at articule in Montreal. She was a founding member of Media City in Windsor, the Executive Director of the Images Festival, the Executive Director of the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre, is currently the Development Director at Vtape and lives in Toronto, Ontario. <http://www.deirdrelogue.com/>

If you didn't get to hear Deirdre Logue in conversation with psychiatrist Dr. Susan Abbey at the Art Gallery of Ontario's symposium, The Art of Healing: Artists and Medical Practitioners in Duet, on October 21, look here:

Cabin Fever, a curated group show exploring the psyche of boredom at Neutral Ground in Regina from October 29 – December 9, 2011.

Open Space in Victoria is hosting Deirdre in a residency, exhibition and catalogue. Upcoming 2012.

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No One is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt

Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin

On the occasion of the inaugural Research in Culture Program at the Banff Centre for the Arts, “On the Commons; or, Believing-Feeling-Acting Together” in May 2011, we sat down with guest faculty Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt to ask them about their use of love as a political concept. They each use the idiom of love to disrupt political discourse, as a means of thinking through non-sovereign social and subjective formations. Love, for both these thinkers, is transformative, a site for a collective becoming-different, that can help to inform alternate social imaginaries. But their notions about how this happens diverge. In his lecture at Banff, through a close reading of Marx, Michael Hardt proposed that substituting love for money or property as the means for organizing the social can open up new social and political projects. More generally he begins from the position of love as ontologically constitutive, or love as a generative force. Lauren Berlant’s description of love has attended to the ways in which love disorganizes our

lives, opening us to move beyond ourselves. And so, for Berlant, the concepts of love and optimism foreground the sort of difficulties and investments involved in creating social change, understood as the construction of an attachment to a world that we don’t know yet, but that we hope will provide the possibility for flourishing. Throughout the interview Berlant and Hardt try on each other’s positions, organizing relationality through models of incoherence and multiplicity. In this, they speak to, reflect, inform and inspire activist projects of social change from queer communities to neo-anarchist organizers. It was breathtaking to watch these two brilliant thinkers engage in conversation with one another given the scenic view of the mountains that was framed in the window behind them. As they rallied back and forth, shifting, clarifying and providing counterpoint to each other, their exchange was a testament to intellectual generosity and the possibilities of dialogue and collective endeavors. What follows is an excerpt from that discussion.

Heather Davis: What is it about love that makes it a compelling or politically interesting concept?

Michael Hardt: One healthy thing love does, which is probably not even the core of it, but at least one healthy thing it does, is it breaks through a variety of conceptions about reason, passion, and the role of affect in politics. There are a number of other ways of doing this, but considering love as central to politics confounds the notion of interest as driving politics. Love makes central the role of affect within the political sphere.

Another thing that interests me is how love designates a transformative, collective power of politics – transformative, collective and also sustained. If it were just a matter of the construction of social bonds and attachments, or rupture and transformation, it would be insufficient. For me it would have to be a necessarily collective, transformative power in duration.

When I get confused about love, or other things in the world, thinking about Spinozian definitions often helps me because of their clarity. Spinoza defines love as the increase of our joy, that is, the increase of our power to act and think, with the recognition of an external cause. You can see why Spinoza says self-love is a nonsense term, since it involves no external cause. Love is thus necessarily collective and expansive in the sense that it increases our power and hence our joy. Here's one way of thinking about the transformative character of love: we always lose ourselves in love, but we lose ourselves in love in the way that has a duration, and is not simply rupture. To use a limited

metaphor, if you think about love as muscles, they require a kind of training and increase with use. Love as a social muscle has to involve a kind of askesis, a kind of training in order to increase its power, but this has to be done in cooperation with many.

Lauren Berlant: Another way to think about your metaphor, Michael, is that in order to make a muscle you have to rip your tendons.

I often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different. And so it's like change without trauma, but it's not change without instability. It's change without guarantees, without knowing what the other side of it is, because it's entering into relationality.

The thing I like about love as a concept for the possibility of the social, is that love always means non-sovereignty. Love is always about violating your own attachment to your intentionality, without being anti-intentional. I like that love is greedy. You want incommensurate things and you want them now. And the now part is important.

The question of duration is also important in this regard because there are many places that one holds duration. One holds duration in one's head, and one holds duration in relation. As a formal relation, love could have continuity, whereas, as an experiential relation it could have discontinuities.

When you plan social change, you have to imagine the world that you could promise, the world that could be seductive, the world you could induce

people to want to leap into. But leaps are awkward, they're not actually that beautiful. When you land you're probably going to fall, or hurt your ankle or hit someone. When you're asking for social change, you want to be able to say there will be some kind of cushion when we take the leap. What love does as a seduction for this is, and has done historically for political theory, is to try to imagine some continuity in the affective level. One that isn't experienced at the historical, social or everyday level, but that still provides a kind of referential anchor, affectively and as a political project.

Michael Hardt: Let me start with the non-sovereign thing. I like that. If one were to think a political project that would be based on or include love as a central motivation, you say notions of sovereignty would be ruptured. That's very interesting and powerful. I assume we are talking about a variety of scales here simultaneously, where both the self and the social are not sovereign in love.

When we engage in love we abandon at least a certain type of sovereignty. In what ways would sovereignty not be adequate in explaining a social formation that was grounded in love? If we were to think of the sovereign as the one who decides, in the social relation of love there is no one who decides. Which does not mean that there are no decisions but, rather, that there would be a non-one who decides. That seems like a challenging and interesting question: what is a non-sovereign social formation? How is decision-making then arrived at? These are the kinds of things that require modes of organization; that require, if not institutions, customs, or habits, at least certain means of organizing the decision-making process. In a

politics of love, one of the interests for me is a non-sovereign politics, or a non-sovereign social formation. By thinking love as political, as somehow centrally involved in a political project, it forces us to think through that non-sovereignty, both conceptually, but also practically, organizationally.

Heather Davis: I'm really intrigued by the ways you both speak of how love is a project of non-sovereignty in terms of both the social and the self. If you're trying to conceive of each of those layers with a certain consistency, then what is the difference between those formations and sovereignty?

Michael Hardt: I'll start with some basic things. I think within the tradition of political theory it's not at all clear what a non-sovereign politics could be. It's hard to make such grand generalizations. But the tradition of political theory we inherit is fundamentally related to the role and decision making of the one, whether that one be the king, the party, the liberal individual, all of these. Here, decision-making can only be performed by the one, and so I think this is what Toni Negri and I have felt is interestingly challenging about the concept of multitude itself. How can a multiplicity decide? The organization of decision-making is central for me, for thinking politics or political theory. I guess I would apply this to the level of the individual too. How can an individual as multiplicity, and hence as non-sovereign, decide and not be just an incoherent helpless heap? What I think is required for that, now back again at the level of political theory, is understanding how collective structures, or structures of multiplicity, can enable social decision-making. We also have a

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Survival looks like a triumph, and that's a terrible thing. I want Flourishing.

long tradition of the possibility of the democracy proper – the rule of the many – but it’s a minor tradition, or sometimes a subterranean tradition. That seems to be one way of characterizing what’s at stake, or challenging in this.

Lauren Berlant: I think sovereignty is a bad concept for almost anything. It’s an aspirational concept and, as often happens, aspirational concepts get treated as normative concepts, and then get traded and circulated as realism. And I think that’s what happened with sovereignty. So, in “Slow Death” I say we should throw sovereignty out. But people are so invested in it [so] maybe we can’t because you can’t just decide ghosts don’t exist. You have to find a way to change something from within.

There’s another way of going at this that also has to do with a different relation to incoherence. Part of the reason I think that queer theory and love theory are related to each other as political idioms, is that queer theory presumes the affective incoherence of the subject with respect to the objects that anchor it or to which they’re attached. One thing that is very powerful for me to try and think about is how we could have a political pedagogy that deals with incoherence. Where the taking up of a position won’t be so that an individual can be coherent, intentional, agentive, and encounter themselves through their object, but that there would be a way that situational clarity can be produced without negating the incoherence of the subject. Training in one’s own incoherence, training in the ways in which one’s complexity and contradiction can never be resolved by the political, is a really important part of a political theory

of non-sovereignty. But we still have to find a place for adjudication, or working out, or working for, or working over, which requires a pedagogy of attention, of paying attention to the different ways in which we engender different kinds of claims on the world, in our attachments or ways of moving or desires for habituation or aspirations . . .

I always have a phrase that I’ve decided is a placeholder phrase, as phrases often are in my life, which for a long time is a satisfying phrase, and then I realize I haven’t actually had that thought yet. For example, in a crisis culture we’re so excited about gaming the difference between zero and one that flourishing somehow gets bracketed. Survival looks like a triumph, and that’s a terrible thing. I want flourishing. But what do I mean by flourishing anyway? What are all of the synonyms I know for flourishing? There aren’t that many. Isn’t that interesting? The phrase you use is an increase in joy. But an increase of joy might not feel like increase. It might feel like relief, it might feel like I can be a mass of incoherent things and not be defeated by that.

Paige Sarlin: Why turn to this mode of imagining now? Why the idiom of love?

Michael Hardt: For me, with regard to the discourses of today, there seemed to me to be an excessive focus on sovereignty, on the state of exception, even as antagonists, I mean. Those discourses close immediately and unavoidably the vulnerable position of wanting more. The discussions about the enormity of the sovereign that we face, the near impossibility of confronting that power that’s both inside and outside the law,

that puts us in the position of bare life, all of that obviates the problem of the vulnerability of wanting, of expressing the desire for the world to be different, almost by saying "of course it can't be", by saying "of course you're powerless so it doesn't matter what you want." In that way, talking about love seems a useful challenge to what I perceive as a dominant mode of political theorizing and political discourse today. It also connects up with a series of things emerging today and kinds of political movements or the kinds of theorizing going on in political movements that seems to grasp that well. So the concept of love helps name an undercurrent that seems worth fostering in contrast to what I see as a dominant mode of theorizing.

Lauren Berlant: The discourse of political love has always, or long been, associated with religious idioms of thinking the social. Partly what we're doing is trying to bring it back into the place of political action, where political action and new social relations happen in time with different types of practices. I think Michael is right that there's already energy for that in neo-anarchists. And if you have a practice-based model of thinking in relation to other kinds of political work, it's also saying that it's not spirit over there and doing the material work of reorganizing life over here, but trying to find a synthetic language for both. In that way, it's jarring in a good sense, it's not just a mode of reflection but actually it's a mode for action and also a description of what it would take for people to take the risk of new relationality.

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Paige Sarlin is a writer, filmmaker, and activist. The love she feels for her Leninist dog, Krupskaya, knows no bounds; it is grounded in the familiarity borne of shared space, time, and activity. The two of them are busy organizing to fight injustice and working to build lasting structures and connections for the larger struggle to re-make society. At present, she is finishing a dissertation on the history of the interview entitled "Interview-work: A Genealogy of a Cultural Form;" and she is developing a book project about the various vulnerabilities associated with and accumulated by being-in-common. This project is based on her experiences in various social movements and as a participant in 16 Beaver group.

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Grey All The Way

Barbara Crow, Ana Rita Morais & Allyson Mitchell

Allyson Mitchell: Help yourself to some cheese and crackers, hummus, veggies.

Barbara Crow: This is great. Cheers.

Allyson: Yes, cheers.

(Ana) Rita Morais: Cheers.

Barbara: You had to have grey hair for today.

Rita: I did, yeah. Well, I managed to avoid it altogether, so we're good.

Allyson: What do you mean manage to avoid it? Managed to avoid meaning you wanted to dye your hair and you resisted doing it?

Rita: Well, I get haircuts from somebody who does them as seminar haircuts. So he'll teach a class and I'll get my hair cut and there will be people there. The last time I was there he wanted to do a jet-black

series but I was like oh, I can't commit to that, especially not right now.

Allyson: Did you tell him why?

Rita: Oh, yeah, I told him we were working on an interview about grey hair. He had actually let his hair go grey and he wanted to be interviewed as well. He was definitely interested in this article.

Barbara: The guy who cuts my hair is really interested in this article too. He also has grey hair. The last time I got my hair cut I picked up all the cuttings of my hair, I was walking by a woman who said "Oh, you have beautiful hair. If my hair was like that, I wouldn't dye my hair." But I said, "You don't know if you don't try." And the other hair stylist said " Hey! I want to stay in business. Don't give her any ideas". And then John, the guy who cuts my hair, said that he really struggles when women want to keep dying their hair or "they want to keep in pursuit of youth," is what

he said, but it's time they stopped dying their hair because dying is wrecking their hair.

Rita: One of my aunts is a hairdresser, and my mom and sister both dye their hair. My mom is at the point where it's every three weeks. To have grey hair for my mom is absolutely not acceptable, which is kind of humorous that I'm at this point where I just don't care about my own grey hair. There is a difference in everything about her. It's interesting to see that I've come from a place where they don't want people to know that they have grey hair. I started getting grey hair when I was 19. My sister is 30 and is starting to get grey hair only now, but my mom, by the time she was 20 she already had grey hair. If she didn't dye her hair she would have pretty much a full head of grey hair. So I think it affected my mom and I both really young, my dad was a lot later to it. My dad doesn't have that much grey hair in between dying his hair.

Barbara: Allyson, when did you stop? Did you ever dye your hair?

Allyson: Oh yeah. I dyed my hair a lot starting in the mid-'90s but I was dying for fashion. I bleached my hair, put Manic Panic in my hair.

Barbara: What's that?

Allyson: Ah, bright coloured ...

Rita: Insane colours!

Allyson: ... dye stuff. I had magenta pink for a while.

Rita: I did a Manic Panic phase in grade nine and ten. It was all the rage.

Allyson: It was awesome.

Barbara: Oh my god. I would have never done anything like that.

Allyson: I tried a few different colour things and then I started dying regularly. I went with a black and then I got stuck with that from about 1996 on because my roots would grow back in. February 2011 is the last time I dyed my hair.

Barbara: And why did you stop?

Allyson: Many different reasons. I had tried the year before to stop dying. I went to a salon and they did highlights as an "in-between" thing but it didn't work. I panicked and felt insecure so I just went back to the black. Over the last few years, I've been struggling with a lot of issues around health and sensitivity to chemicals [1]. I've paid tons of money to see a naturopath, take all kinds of supplements, changed my diet, so it didn't make sense to still put chemicals on my head. After dying my hair I would have a weird headache for two days. So it just seemed wrong. I have also had a lot of support from folks in my community who said, "grey hair is sexy!"

Barbara: Do any of your friends have grey hair?

Allyson: Yep.

Barbara: Your age?

Allyson: Yeah. Yeah, they do. Not full heads of grey hair but I definitely have friends with different variations of the salt and pepper, and I'm 43.

Barbara: Rita, did you get headaches when you dyed your hair?

Rita: I did actually. I switched because my partner told me that there was a specific hair dye she used that she didn't find very tough on your hair and didn't give her headaches because she complained about that as well. So the last one I used was called Ice Cream by Inebrya.

Barbara: Really?

Allyson: You're not dying your hair now?

Rita: No, the last time I dyed my hair was in December of this year, and then I got a really short haircut in February, sort of like a tank girl haircut. And my hair is pretty much at its natural - but I have one tiny patch. It's got a red hue of something still bleeding through, but other than that, my hair is natural.

Allyson: Why did you stop dying it?

Rita: I just didn't really care about the grey and sort of liked the way my hair looked not dyed. I'm not sure what I would do or how it would look if I had all over grey. Right now it's just concentrated in the front. It's something that people notice and say, "oh, it's different." I guess it doesn't bother me at all. Ironically it's a fresh look. It's very different than what everybody else around me has.

Barbara: So you both dyed your own hair?

Allyson: I dyed my own hair.

Rita: I dyed my own hair.

Allyson: What about you? What's your dying history, Barbara?

Barbara: I put highlights in my hair in early thirties. At this time, I wanted to have a child and I didn't want to have chemicals in my body. I was 35 when I got pregnant and I just didn't want to have the chemical experience trying to get pregnant.

Allyson: And what age were you when you stopped dying?

Barbara: 34.

Allyson: Only two years. You're pretty pure then!

Barbara: I'm pretty pure, yeah. I think when I was a teenager, I had highlights put in my hair, and I remembered thinking how barbaric it was, putting this cap on and pulling all your hair through, because I had long hair. I just thought wow, this is really painful. I can't believe women do this to their hair.

Allyson: You know, we did some research to be able to come together and talk about this, and we read some of the popular and scientific articles as well as some social science research. There were two things that really struck me from the readings. First of all, the fact that people have really only been dying their hair to the extent that people dye their hair now, for about forty years. They say that for genetics to change it takes two full generations. And so we've only just experienced, now, two full generations of

people using chemical hair dye. The effect can be a change in the composition of the human body. The second thing that really struck me was thinking about it as a workplace hazard for people who work in salons. I was talking about how I decided to stop dying my hair as a personal choice about not wanting those chemicals on me or in me or around me, but people who work in salons are exposed to it all day long.

Rita: Yeah. It's interesting when you go into a nail salon, a lot of the workers have masks on.

Allyson: And those dust masks do not keep the vapors from ...

Rita: No, absolutely not.

Barbara: We didn't really see a lot of articles on workplace hazards for hair stylists. There haven't been a lot of sociological studies of hair stylists either. So, I mean, that's still a huge gap. Why are we not studying that?

Allyson: Yeah.

Rita: I don't, by any means, think that's the situation has improved. I mean, sure, there's products now that are environmentally friendly, but these aren't the hair dyes that salons are using because salons get sponsorship by using prominent hair dye brands like Goldwell and Wella.

Allyson: There are only two or three companies right?

Rita: Exactly. And that's the plug. If someone wants to get their hair done a particular colour they can look up a brand and see which salons carry that brand. I think it's very much a brand name thing and to actually go after what the effects are, you would really have to target brands and look at what their chemical makeup is. So it would have to be someone that can make sense of that.

Barbara: My hair started going grey after I had Eli. And I remember when it started happening. I was going "Oh my God, what's happening to my hair?" I thought I would be one of those people that it would happen to later. Both my partner and I have grey hair and our son is very aware of us being older parents because it's an obvious signifier of age. Many of the kids in his school have parents that dye their hair.

Allyson: But are they the same age as you?

Barbara: We are older. I would say there's a small group of parents who are older. I remember when I was 15, my mom is 22 years older than I am. Can you believe that? I had – have a very young mother. I was friends with a woman and her mom came in and had grey hair and I thought, "is that your grandmother?" I grew up in a neighbourhood where all the parents were young. My mom said that if you didn't reproduce in the first year you were married, people thought there was something wrong with you. I remember meeting my friend's mom, going "Wow, your mom is really old!" I'm her age now!

Rita: Yeah.

Allyson: (laugh) Yeah. I think it's unusual now to see people with grey hair who are under the age of about 70.

Rita: I agree that you either don't see it or if you see it, it's very rare. And it is still very much, something that signifies age. I don't think that that's actually the case, but it's what you see.

Allyson: It has come to signify age because of the social construction of what youth is and what age is because of people dying their hair.

Barbara: And there's such a high premium still placed on youth. Everything that's new is invoked in youth and normatives around being young and full of potential and promise and possibilities. That makes it really difficult to be outside of the youth narrative...

Allyson: ...and also be sexual. To be sexual means to be young.

Barbara: Well, and it's such a signifier for women. I mean, it's interesting because men are always re-productive where with women, there's a time limit. Men, in the heterosexual norm, have this role of being continually reproductive where women with grey hair are no longer reproductive. It's a signifier that you are on the other side of that.

Rita: Well, that being said, what about the inverse of that? I have a part-time job at a bank and we're right across the street from a senior citizen's home. And every Friday when I work, we get the regular people that come in, and I'm talking about people in their late 80s, whose hair is jet-black. What happens there where hair isn't a signifier of youth because you know...

Allyson: Because the face reveals or the neck reveals.

Barbara: But grey hair is about saying I'm aging. So dying it is about resisting aging. If you don't dye it, you are old. Even though we know looking at people that they are older than their hair colour...

Allyson: Well, that's the thing, you know when you see a toupee. You know when you see hair implants. You know when you see, after a certain age, maybe 60-ish, the discrepancy between the hair colour and the age, because the face and neck, unless they've been augmented or altered, reveal a different reality.

Barbara: Men look great when they age but we don't have any stories of women looking beautiful or wonderful when they get older.

Allyson: You mean from popular culture?

Barbara: From popular culture.

Allyson: Because we have it from life experience.

Barbara: We do. We have it from life experience. How many of us have stories or know of wonderful grandmothers or aunts who have been really important in our lives?

Allyson: Elders.

Barbara: It's such a signifier for women. One of the points that Allyson made that's made me reflect on all of this is the non-heteronormative act or potential of letting grey hair be seen. It is very difficult to be in a culture where all of my friends dye their hair and they see me not conforming to norms of age. It

exposes them [to the fact] that they're dying their hair.

Rita: Right. It makes me laugh when people say, "Why don't you dye your hair anymore?" In my demographic we've been dying our hair since grade nine, so about 13 years. My mom has also been dying her hair since the early 80s.

Barbara: My mom dyed her hair, that's one of the reasons why I don't dye my hair. I helped her and I did the line with the ammonia on her head and I swore I would never, ever, ever do that. I didn't want to be in that place where I had to maintain it.

Allyson: My mom dyes her hair and she's 65. I was hanging out with her last week and we were chatting and I told her I was doing this article. We talked about how people say really similar things to people who have decided to let their hair go grey, like, "You have nice grey hair, I don't." Well, she said to me, "You have your grandmother's nice salt and pepper hair whereas mine's mousy." She has been dying her hair 20 years if not 30 years, and her hair is dark brown.

Rita: My mom has got chocolate brown hair and she has been dying her hair for 31 years- she is 51. Yeah, she's been dying her hair forever. I'm not talking once or twice a year. We're talking every three weeks or every month.

Barbara: When my mom had money, she paid someone to dye her hair. When she didn't have money, I did it. Once she got an allergic reaction to the hair dye and got really sick so she went and had her hair stripped. She has the most incredible head of white hair that you wouldn't believe. She cuts it in a bob.

She looks fantastic. And as soon as she saw it, she went, "Oh my God, why didn't I do this before? Why did it take me so long to get to this?"

Allyson: This might be a good place to talk about why people dye their hair.

Rita: I think in terms of my age group, that people just don't like their natural colour coming in and when they notice one or two grey hairs - they become paranoid. When I was in high school, bleach blonde was the thing and now people are dying their hair darker. It sort of makes grey hair easier to spot so I'm not sure if that just becomes a sick cycle of continuously dying to avoid that. I think that the biggest reason why people dye is to mask aging. I don't know if men or women dye more, but I think that when you see a man with grey hair there is a sexiness.

Allyson: But what about the anomaly of the cougar? Of course you only get to be a cougar if you are conventionally good looking and have a, quote/ unquote, good body, and then you can maybe have grey hair and be sexy, and that's called a cougar.

Barbara: I think for women a lot of hair dying is about sexuality. It gets back to what I was saying before where men are always reproductive, but when women have grey hair it is a sign that we are no longer reproductive.

Allyson: That's an interesting biological take on it. Something I want to add to that is thinking about cultural implications. Not to say that reproduction isn't cultural, but there are other cultural judgments about "doing" femininity right. For example the link

to Christianity and hair dying, grey haired women being associated with “the witch”, villanizing the woman who was in control of her own faculties.

Barbara: Well, at some level when you do have grey hair you are signifying that you don't need men anymore. Men always need women in the pursuit of reproduction so it opens up different kinds of possibilities around sexuality. But it's not, a potential of “Wow, what kind of sexuality can this person have with this grey hair.” We don't think, “wow, look, she's really sexy, she's got grey hair, I can't wait to get into bed with her.”

Allyson: Well, I don't know. Some people I know do.

Barbara: Yeah?

Allyson: Yeah, lots of women I know find other women with grey hair really sexy. To flip that a little bit, when I first started thinking about not dying my hair, I got really obsessed with looking around me for people my age who had grey hair. It seemed to me that the only other women I saw who were in their early 40s who had grey hair, um, were queer. And not necessarily queer in relation to sexuality but queer in relation to politics as a kind of resistance to beauty norms, or they are feminists, environmentalists, related to folks who ally themselves with marginalized people in terms of race and ability and class and borders. People who don't want to play the game and want to mark themselves as not playing the game.

Rita: Resistance.

Allyson: So it's a resistance. It's not just about someone making a personal choice. It is much larger ...

Rita: Barbara, I would never, in a million years, guess that your hair was natural.

Barbara: We don't know what grey hair looks like coming in because we don't see women letting their hair grow in. I've been graying since I was 35. Every year it gets more and more white or whatever it is. Lots of people say to me “oh, you're lucky it came in like this.” What do they mean “I'm lucky”? We really don't know what it looks like on women. I think it requires a certain kind of confidence and politics to not participate.

Allyson: People are saying “you look young for somebody who has grey hair” is the kind of weird territory that I'm really interested in. I let my hair grow grey as a type of anti-assimilationist strategy. Grey hair on a younger face and body shows a different relationship to time. Thinking about time in this way is the thin edge of the wedge of what's happening in queer theory right now. A lot of people are writing about temporality, queer temporality, Jack Halberstam, Jose Munoz, [and] Elizabeth Freeman in particular, and I was thinking about what these folks say about heteronormative time. That is, time dictated by the clocks of heteronormativity around accepted aging practices or life markers, like going to school, getting married, having children. Because of the connection between feminized beauty to power and youth, we have this contingent of people trying to look the same age bracket by eliminating their grey hair. If people look the same from the age of 30-70 by dying their hair then revealing the gradual process of aging by showing grey

hair growing in is actually making visible a different relationship to time – a queer temporality.

Barbara: Yes, I think that's a really useful insight. I think that's what makes younger people with grey hair stand out because they're challenging the norms around aging, around the high valuation of youth. Grey hair is an absolute statement that you're not participating in the norms of youth.

Allyson: But, that's the trick. My argument is that you kind of are because if queer time is about a politics of refusal, right, refusing to grow up and enter the heteronormative adulthoods that are implied by the concepts of progress or maturity, if maturity means that you continue to dye your hair and not look old, then there's actually this kind of weird, queer wavering or wiggly space for people who maintain their youth by maintaining their grey hair.

Rita: So it's like a spin on resistance, is what you're saying.

Allyson: I'm just thinking it through. It might be convoluted but there's a riddle here that is a trick around time. If you're refusing to adhere to the norms and one of those refusals is to actually "show" aging it's refusing by showing the progress of time in a very different way than time is thought of according to the heteronormative clock.

Barbara: ...grey hair reveals time.

Rita: I think it goes back to what you were saying, Barbara, in terms of that negotiated space where your peers don't want you to not dye your hair

because it reveals a lot about them that they're actually trying to hide.

Barbara: It is the reveal. I am revealing. When somebody guesses my age they know that this is what 51 year olds look like. This is the kind of grey hair they should have.

Allyson: And what you are revealing is a kind of failure. It is a failure for you to perform femininity and/or age and/or body and/or ability in the way that you're supposed to. To pull it back again to these ideas from queer theory, think about virtuosity and being able to perform racialized, gendered, classed identities and subjectivities well. The failure to do those well can be seen as queer. Failure is, to bring it back to Judith Butler's ideas of performativity, the fissures and the slippages..... grey roots peaking out of that dyed veneer. Failure reveals the performance of age as a performance. So grey hair is a failure to do heteronormative time correctly.

Rita: Yeah.

Barbara: Absolutely.

Allyson: And isn't that a crazy riddle that revealing a process of aging is a failure? That seems very exciting to me. There's great potential to mess up the norm by showing grey hairs.

Barbara: So what are the conditions that allow some women to not dye their hair and others to continue to prescribe to it?

Rita: Notions of passing, are you passing as someone that's below your age? I think you might be in an

age category where one person has a lot of grey hair and they look much older than the group, but having that person in your life makes you feel younger and so you dye your hair because you feel like “oh, if this is someone advanced and I’m still behind that, I’m okay with where I am.” I think a lot of what you’re talking about is that failure and those notions of passing. How well do I pass, what age do I pass for? I hear a lot of people say that all the time when people ask what year were you born or how old are you? They answer, “Well, how old do I look?”

Allyson: That’s what makes it weird is that having grey hair in your 40s or 50s in this place, in this time, in this location, makes age harder to read. I don’t think grey hair makes age easier to read because, as Barbara was saying, we don’t have anything to read it against.

Barbara: Yeah. What would it look like if women didn’t dye their hair, man? I would love to see what hair really looks like. I would love to see it on Jennifer Aniston or Courtney Cox for example.

Allyson: Well, on that note, one concern about this discussion is I don’t want to come off as being judgmental or sounding judgmental about people who dye their hair.

Barbara: Absolutely not. I think that there are tremendous things that you do for decoration. Makeup, the way we dress, is all about saying something about who we are. I think decoration is really important. I think what is troubling to me is when it becomes an imperative ...

Allyson: Right.

Barbara: ... and then you don’t have a way out. And when you do challenge it there are costs. I’m not saying that it’s a burden to have grey hair or whatever, but to occupy that place - there are certain things that I’ve given up. I’ve given up a certain ambiguity around people guessing how old I am. I’m semi-invested in having people think I look good for my age.

Allyson: But we disagreed with you about that. We disagreed that people can know your age because of your hair.

Rita: It reminded me that I had a friend in elementary school and similarly, both of her parents didn’t dye their hair. And they probably were not that much older than my parents but to me, who saw my parents with dyed hair... her parents seemed like a glimpse far, far into the future of what I’d expect my parents to look like in twenty years.

Barbara: Right. But I guess what I’m telling you is that I am aware that by participating in this I was consciously aware that I was not going to be able to play youth. I knew consciously that I was going to occupy this other kind of place around femininity. And I was okay with it. And if more women did it, I think we would have a wider range available to women when they get older about how they can represent themselves.

Rita: I think the question that goes with that is what would have to happen for women to do that? What needs to change for more women to be onboard with that?

Barbara: Well, I think the queering thing is really important ...

Rita: And as much as we don't want to dwell on that either, it's definitely a pop culture thing.

Barbara: Where are the images of older women in our culture?

Allyson: There aren't very many. We see a white haired granny or a long grey-haired "witch" and there was a little blip last spring where grey hair was on the runway, but it was young women dying their hair grey - Kate Moss, Kelly Osborne, Pixie Geldof. And that 13 year old woman, what's her name who has that fashion blog ...? Tavi! They all dyed their hair grey, but it was copying something that was being done on the runway and they were all "fashion" people, so it was okay within those parameters. But it was still a kind of resistance, even if it's used as a ploy to create a sensational or shocking image. There's a comment and a discourse that's created by that being shocking ...

Barbara: I also think there are issues here about how you want to engage in this stuff. The larger environmental issues, making demands in the market and the economy around ...

Rita: So there's still, I guess, a resistance but in another form, obviously. It seems like that's the main thing, resistance in different forms. Not necessarily negating the other group and saying, you should be doing this.

Allyson: To be a "good" feminist ...

Rita: Exactly.

Allyson: ... a good environmentalist ...

Rita: Yeah.

Allyson: ... a good queer, whatever.

Barbara: That always gets my back up.

Allyson: Yeah, nobody wants to be that guy.

Rita: No.

Barbara: But I do think, though, around the grey hair, I was aware of the conscious participation in aging, but there weren't a lot of ways to represent that I was going to go somewhere that I wouldn't necessarily be rewarded for it. And here are the ways you hear about it; "oh, if mine looked like that, I would let mine grow like that"; um, "oh, yours is coming in really nicely"; "I'm glad she's doing but I wouldn't do it". You just let everybody know how old you are.

Rita: What about getting Botox to mask age?

Barbara: I think anything we do in pursuit of youth - the kind of body regimes have been introduced to sustain a certain kind of youthful appearance. Being toned is all about how to defeat the aging body. It's not about how to accept it. It's not about how to enjoy it. I also think the other thing about grey hair for women is, in my context, around not being sexual, is that somehow it signifies that I'm not interested in that kind of stuff and I think "well, I am."

Rita: The assumptions.

Barbara: Yeah.

Rita: Yeah ... It's scary.

Barbara: I think decorating is important and I often think about Kathryn Morgan's article on cosmetic surgery. She argues that cosmetic surgery is the norm. She says, it has the potential to make us all kinds of things but what do we all want to look like in cosmetic surgery? Particular nose, particular eyes, it's a particular kind of femininity, masculinity and often whiteness.

Deirdre (Logue): Hello, everyone.

Allyson: Hi.

Barbara: Do you dye your hair?

Deirdre: Oh God, no. Never have. What I want to know is are you guys going to address the "matching the drapes" issue?

Rita: We did not talk about it.

Allyson: (laugh) We did not talk about the curtains matching the drapes.

Barbara: Where is that situation?

Deirdre: It's this situation. This grey hair situation here. (points at her crotch)

Barbara: Oh!

Deirdre: I'm sorry to bring it up.

Allyson: But do women who dye their hair to cover the grey also dye their pubes?

Rita: I'd say no.

Deirdre: Well, the reason I ask is because I think that women in sexual scenarios would be concerned about there being a co-ordination ...

Barbara: No, because we're not sexual when we have grey hair.

Allyson: And I would argue that a lot of women who dye their hair also rip their pubes. I would think that the pubes are ripped.

Barbara: Really?

Rita: No, wait! That's a huge assumption.

Allyson: I know.

Rita: No, no, no, no!

Allyson: This isn't going in the article. That's not going in the article.

Rita: Are you cool with that? Are you cool with making an assumption?

Allyson: No, I'm not. That's why I'm saying it's not going in the article. This is the more the relaxed after-conversation.

Barbara: Oh, no ...

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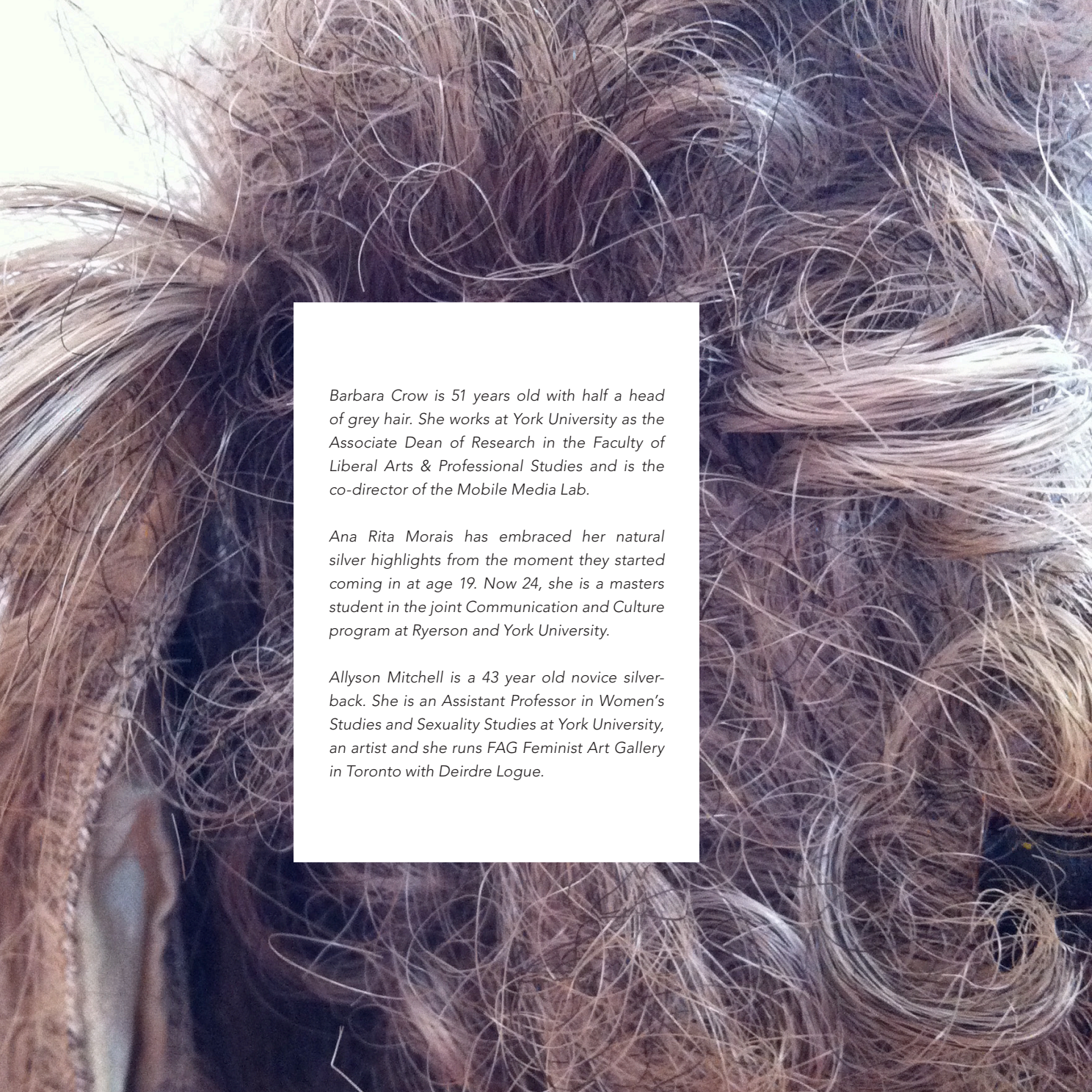
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A[r]MOUR

Andrea Zeffiro

These photographs depict movement, indeed, in a conventional sense of the word, that is, as a body in-motion. At a philosophical level however, these images project a sentient motion, a body in-emotion. It is a body emerging into expression. Of becoming made. Of becoming unmade. This is a body at a threshold of meaning. Pleasure/Pain. There is pleasure to be found in-pain. The pleasure of solace, the pleasure of a secret world filled with fantasies of wholeness. To be in-pain is to be dislocated from a sense of self. That-which-is-me-but-not-me. One is haunted by the specter of a former self, by the fragments of a former life. To be in-pain is often an illusion. The body becomes a trickster: responding when not spoken to, ignoring directives, and maintaining an exterior semblance of wholeness. To be in-pain or full-of-pain – the fullness of pain and its experience – is consuming. And yet, it is human sentience, what Elaine Scarry (1985) describes as the felt-fact of aliveness [1]. A body in-pain, that is, as a body in-emotion, is to feel with a passion that devours.

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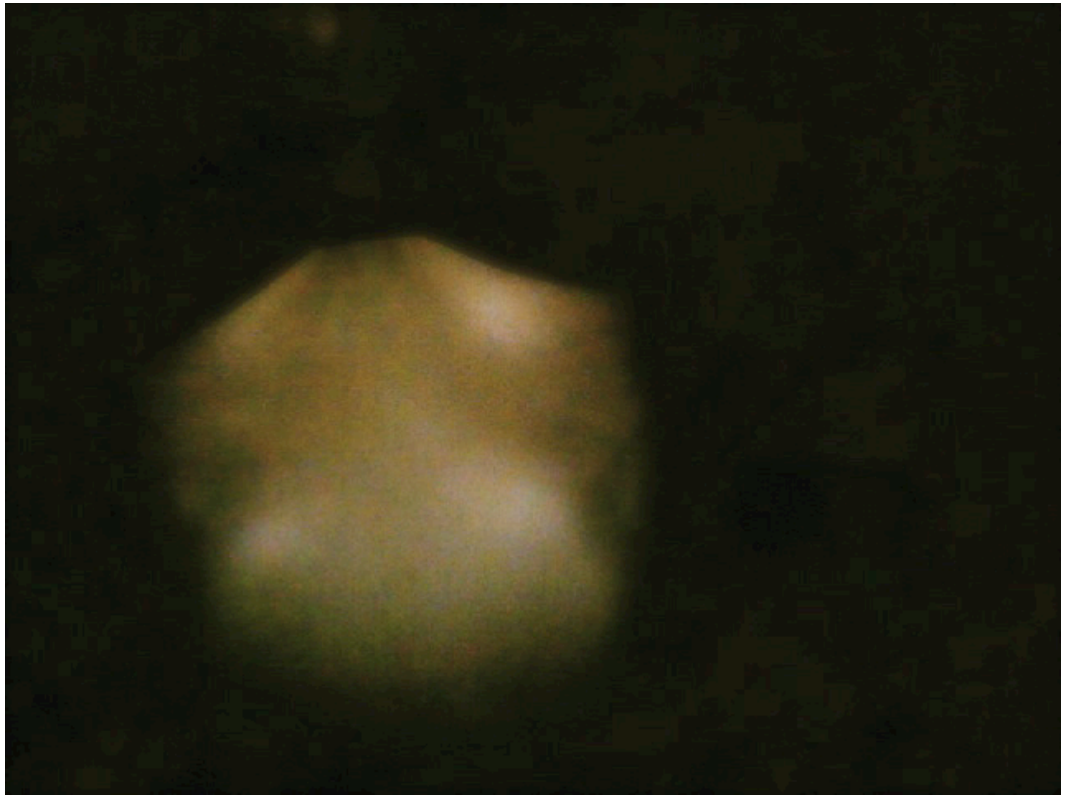
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amour

noun

- *a love affair or lover, especially one that is secret*

armour

Pronunciation:

[mass noun]

- *1 the metal coverings formerly worn to protect the body in battle*
- *2 (also armour plate) tough metal layer covering a military vehicle or ship to defend it from attack.*
- *military vehicles collectively*
- *3 the protective layer or shell of some animals and plants.*
- *4 a person's emotional, social, or other defences*

verb

[with object]

- *provide (someone) with emotional, social, or other defences*

