

no more potlucks

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Lulu.com:

<http://stores.lulu.com/nomorepotlucks>

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Issue issue.
Issue as in:

To go or come out.

To be born or be descended.

To terminate or result.

To cause to flow out; emit.

To enter into controversy.

To take an opposing point of view; disagree.

A place of egress; an outlet: a lake with no issue to the sea.

A lesion, wound, or ulcer producing such a discharge.

An essential point; crux.

A matter of public concern.

An instance of flowing, passing, or giving out.

A final result or conclusion, as a solution to a problem.

You may have noticed that NMP has migrated to a new platform (yay!), and so the site you are looking at is new and has fewer 'issues' and is no longer really at risk of crashing. We've done our very best to carry over the content from the old site, but we know we have some work left to do. We'll get to that in the next few weeks or months, but if you notice anything seriously out of whack or in urgent need of repair, please do let us know.

*If there are any archiving geniuses out there willing to take on the task of preserving the old site before we delete it, please let us know.

The old site is still up and accessible in case you are already feeling nostalgic... but it won't be there forever, so make your copies or screen grabs

or PDFs before we take it down forever. For now though, enjoy the new issue. It's faaaaaabulous and an excellent kick off to our 4th year!

In this issue: Anthea Black had the opportunity to sit down with A.L. Steiner and A.K. Burns to chat about their film Community Action Center and their month long exhibition at Toronto's Feminist Art Gallery (FAG). The cover of NMP 19 is a collage entitled "Riot" by A.L. Steiner. It is powerful commentary on immigration, ID, and police. Steiner shared some thoughts on these subjects and others in a second brilliant interview for NMP with Anthea Black.

Alex McClelland and AIDS ACTION NOW organized the POSTER/Virus project to honour the December 1st Day With(out) Art 2011. The goal of the poster series is to address the countless new forms of AIDS-phobia, discrimination, and inequality that continue to emerge and exist 30 years into the AIDS epidemic. The poster series includes work by NMP favorites: Mikiki (with Scott Donald), Cecilia Berkovic, Daryl Vocat, Kent Monkman and John Greyson. Allyson Mitchell has provided us with the artist statement that accompanies her poster – FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN. Watch her presentation here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4slKaj4mSJQ

Natalie Kouri-Towe explores the concept of homonationalism by explaining its current trends. She outlines how it is used in Canadian Immigration policies and practices, in gay tourism to Israel, and in decisions made by Toronto pride regarding the inclusion of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid.

NMP regular, Elisha Lim provides us with an illustration of their conversation with beloved Canadian musician Rae Spoon. Together they address publicity and self-promotion, what makes a nice life, and thoughts on being gender retired.

Ching-In Chen appears again in NMP, but this time as the author of beautifully crafted poems...

In the first of a 2012 series of interviews with audio artists for NMP, Owen Chapman provides a transcript of a conversation he had with Nancy Tobin during his summer residency at Oboro new media center.

In her series of zines *The Life and Times of Butch Dykes* Eloisa Aquino tells stories of fantastic women who helped make the world a better place. Their strength resided not only in their extraordinary talent but also in their willingness to challenge and subvert oppressive societal norms. With this contribution she examines the incredible life of Claude Cahun.

Eliza Chandler discusses how "crip communities" can and do create new understandings of disability and community through desire.

WhiteLezProblems uses satire and humour to draw attention to privilege in white queer communities, on Twitter and beyond. For NMP, Adleen Crapo nuances the meaning of "issue" en français.

If you would like to submit to NMP, feel free to pitch us ideas by consulting the "submit page." Note: 2012 is full up, but we will present our 2013 themes any day now, so don't wait too long to get

in touch. Nous recherchons toujours des contributions francophones...

Thank you to Miriam Ginestier and all the Meow Mix performers and attendees for supporting NMP for the third year in a row. We are grateful for this. NMP would like to also thank Barbara Crow, Carol Stabile, Kendra Besanger, Erik Bordeleau, Renata Summo, Matt Soar, Moynan King, and Virginia M. Solomon for their generous donations. If you would also like to donate via paypal, it's never too late, and it's very easy.

Another way to support NMP (and treat yourself) is to purchase a print copy. They're not cheap but they're a stunning 100 pages of rare and amazing blends of Canadian art-academia-activism. The latest print-on-demand issue is out now on Lulu. (NB: Print copies are always of one issue prior to the one we have online currently).

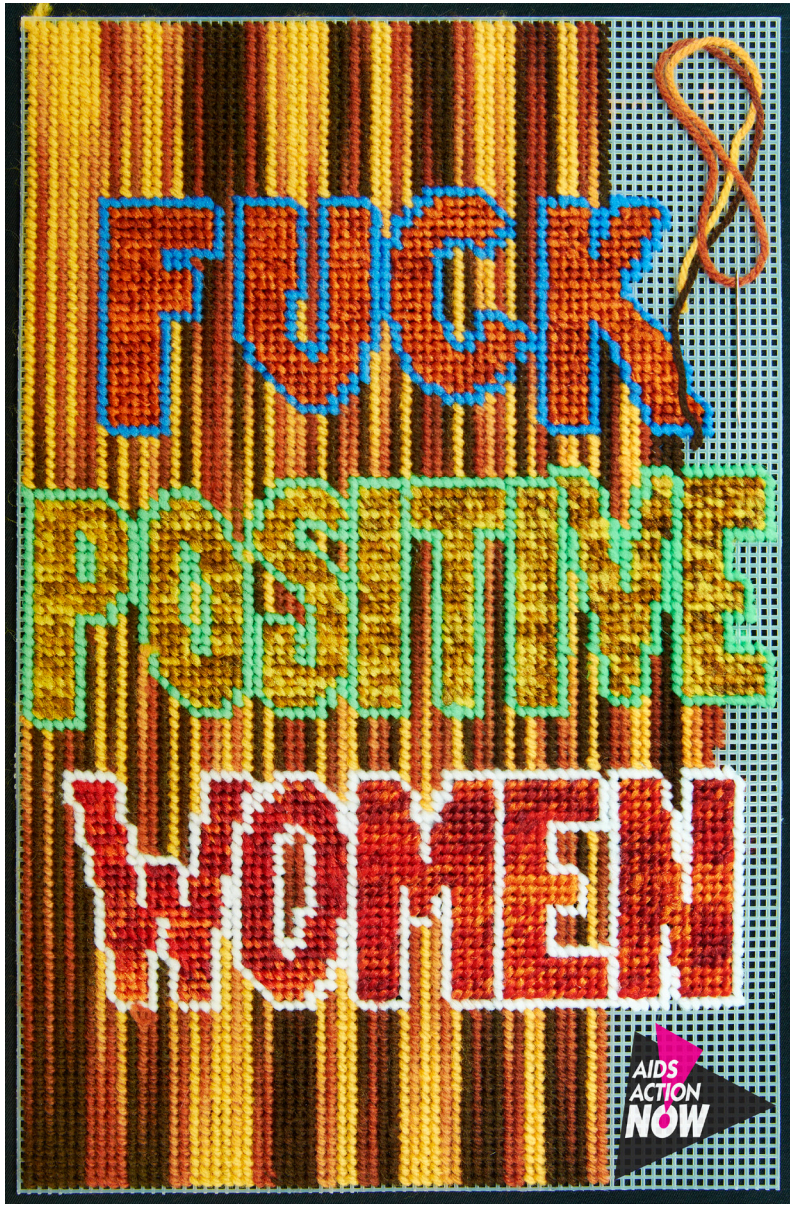
Thank you again to our excellent copy editors for this issue: Tamara Shepherd, Lindsay Shane and Jacinthe Dupuis.

M-C would like to thank the MacPhee/McConnell Family for their patience. Mél also thanks the MacPhee/McConnell Family for lending out M-C to NMP over the holidays...

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a flowing and issue-ridden journal bimonthly.

Your NMP Editors,

Mél Hogan & M-C MacPhee



AIDS
ACTION
NOW

AIDS ACTION NOW: FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN

*Allyson Mitchell,
Jessica Whitbread
& Alex McClelland*

It is 30 years into the AIDS epidemic, and we are still struggling. New forms of AIDS-phobia, discrimination, and inequality continue to emerge, including the increasing criminalization of people living with HIV. In Canada, the climate of fear and austerity are increasing health inequalities for us all. It is clear that now, more than ever, activism and art are needed to reinvigorate the response to HIV and AIDS.

This year, AIDS ACTION NOW worked to create a different kind of dialogue around HIV, in the art world and on the street, in ways that haven't happened for a long time.

In honor of the Day With(out) Art 2011, AIDS ACTION NOW launched a poster series created by local Toronto artists Allyson Mitchell, Kent Monkman, John Greyson, Daryl Vocat, Cecilia Berkovic, and Mikiki with Scott Donald. The posters were developed collectively with community members working to respond to HIV. By merging

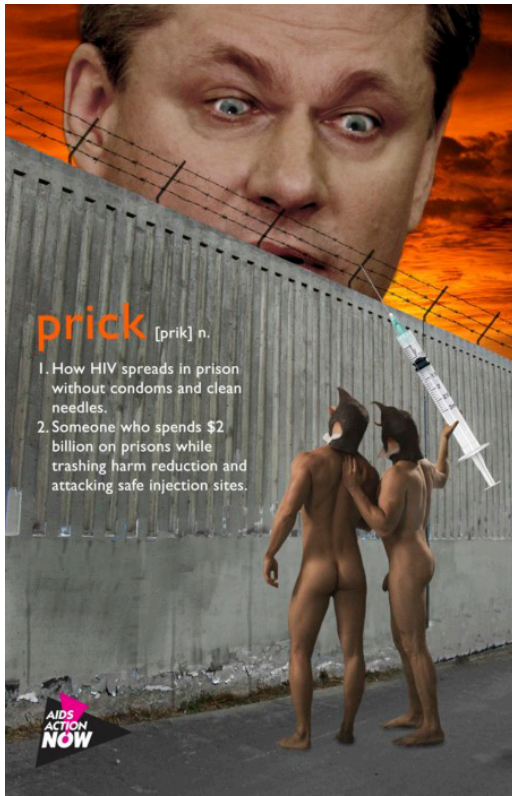
the worlds of art and activism, we are intentionally evoking the history of creative responses to HIV. The posters were plastered across Toronto during the weeks leading up to December 1, 2011. Our aim is to provoke discussion, controversy, and dialogue in a way that traditional activism cannot.

In the following excerpt, Allyson Mitchell discusses her collaborative FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN poster, made with Jessica Whitbread of the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW).

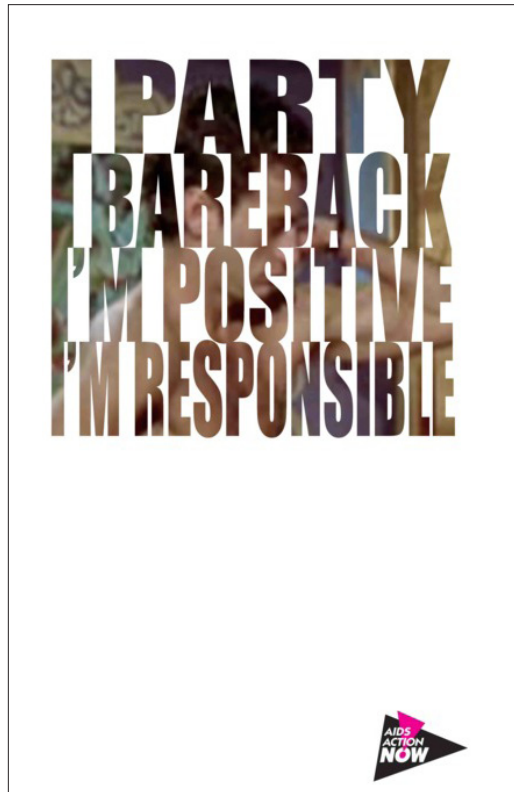
Allyson Mitchell:

When Jessica and I first met to think about this project, we considered the kinds of representations of positive women that were very familiar, with HIV-positive women as mothers, as victims, as not from or living here in this place.

We talked about the sentiment of sex negativity that is put upon positive women and decided that



By John Greyson



By MIKIKI with Scott Donald

we wanted something different. We wanted our poster to ask:

Why aren't women allowed to be subjects of their sexuality rather than objects?

Why aren't HIV-positive women allowed to talk about sex as freely as gay men?

Why can't we express an urgent, horny, powerful, and open message about positive women and sexuality?

When I look around and see the narrow options of chastity, Pussycat Dollery or Toddlers in Tiaras kinds of sexuality for women and girls, it seems like we have nothing to lose. We might as well try for some new kinds of iconography.

So the message of FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN is a directive – a confident and supportive message meant to relocate positive sexual energy around the bodies of HIV-positive women. When I say women, I am of course including trans and gender queer women: ALL self-identified women.

FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN can also be read as a declarative for its double meaning about how HIV-positive women are fucked when it comes to awareness, visibility, options, policy, and support on the large part. Making this kind of a rude point hopefully contributes to some of the ways that HIV-positive women can get un-fucked by healthcare, government policies, and awareness campaigns.

This messaging is part of a community. HIV-positive women were involved with the messaging for this poster. The International Community of

Women Living with HIV (ICW) – an international network of positive women – was presented this slogan and they said, “yes, do it; we give you our permission.”

Jessica and I also worked together on thinking through the design of the poster. It was intentional to make the poster an image of a cross stitch – firmly planting the aesthetic within domestic, feminized, working class, grammy craft. John Greyson encouraged us to reveal the process of the craft so that you see the unfinished plastic canvas and the yarn... maintaining the implications of needles and penetration.

In a conversation I had with Jessica around the nervousness expressed by some about the message of our poster and the concern that people may think it was made by haters she said: “If neo-nazis start making their hate literature using plastic cross stitch, then the world may have half a chance to be a better place.”

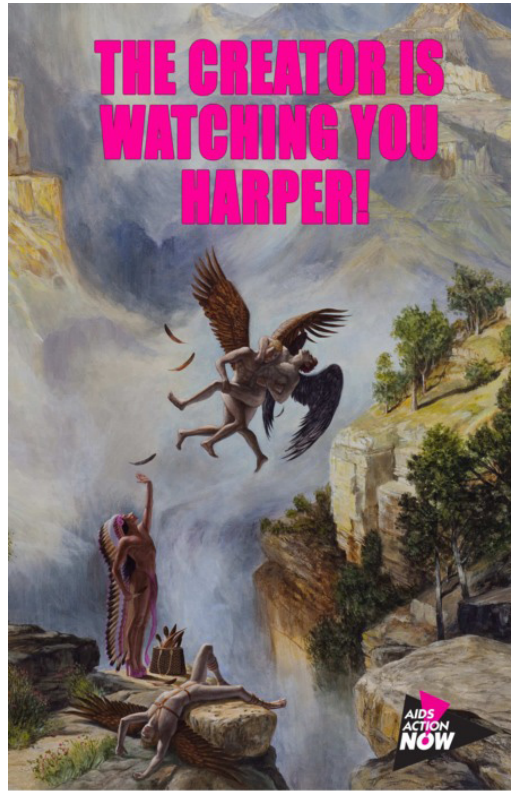
So FUCK POSITIVE WOMEN. As the International Community of Women living with HIV say, “This is the kind of messaging we wanted to have. Messaging that makes a debate, makes a conversation, elicits a response that isn't apathetic or complacent.”

Watch the video of Allyson Mitchell's presentation here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4slKaj4mSJK

To view the other posters check out the POSTER/virus blog here: <http://aan-poster-virus-2011.tumblr.com/>



By Daryl Vocat



By Kent Monkman



By Cecilia Berkovic

Allyson Mitchell is a maximalist artist working predominantly in sculpture, installation and film. Since 1997, Mitchell has been melding feminism and pop culture to play with contemporary ideas about sexuality, autobiography, and the body, largely through the use of reclaimed textile and abandoned craft. Her work has exhibited in galleries and festivals across Canada, the US, Europe and East Asia. She has also performed extensively with Pretty Porky and Pissed Off, a fat performance troupe, as well as publishing both writing and music. She is an assistant Professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University.

Jessica Whitbread. As a woman living with HIV, Jessica's passion lies with her community, leading her to work extensively in the area of HIV at a grassroots level doing advocacy and program development. She is the North American Representative on the International Steering Committee for the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS and works at ACT in Toronto. She is obsessed with "tea parties" and using them as a tool for social change.

Alex McClelland is an advocate, educator, community organizer and researcher. Since his HIV-positive diagnosis in 1998, Alex has been involved in many Canadian and international civil society organizations working toward addressing the social drivers of the HIV epidemic including stigma, discrimination, poverty, and other forms of inequality. Alex strongly believes in the principle of 'nothing about us, without us', which calls for the rights of peoples to be involved in decision-making that affects their lives.



Riding the Wet, Wet Wave: An Interview with A.K. Burns and A.L. Steiner on Community Action Center

Anthea Black

After the late-night screening of Community Action Center at Frameline International LGBT Film Festival in San Francisco, I stood outside the Roxie Theatre with about 30 others from the largely gay-male audience, vigorously discussing the movie. That night, I was completely vindicated. For so many years, I've attended queer film festival screenings that featured gay cock and steamy men's shorts, and like many dykes and trans men, imagined myself into those charged scenes. Seeing A.L. Steiner and A.K. Burns' movie in a theatre packed with gay men reversed that dynamic, and for a rare, thrilling evening, we were on screen.

Immediately, I knew that a screening of Community Action Center and the resulting conversations, debates, and questions about representation, play, art, porn, and collaborative authorship in queer communities needed to happen in Canada. In September, Toronto artists Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue of the Feminist Art Gallery (FAG) teamed up with Pleasure Dome for a spectacularly

fun weekend of programming centred around the work. For the FAG exhibition opening of posters, photos, and ephemera from the filming, performer Kitty Neptune pole-danced in the gallery. After the feature screening, filmmakers A.L. Steiner and A.K. Burns appeared topless for a Q+A with the audience. Conversations, excitement, and fiery political questions continued that night and into the next afternoon during an exhibition walk-through, group discussion, and afternoon tea at the Feminist Art Gallery.

When we got settled in Mitchell and Logue's upstairs guest room, my conversation with Steiner and Burns began with the acknowledgement that we'd all spent a lot of time processing their feature-length art porn together that weekend. We also agreed that feminism – an issue that frequently comes up in relation to Community Action Center – is a constantly evolving continuum. The idea reappears throughout our conversation, where feminism is cast as a gigantic flea market

where everything is free, a dusty old labrys found in a labyrinthine archive, and by Burns, as series of “wet, wet waves” to ride. Of course, as she says, “the continuum of practices, politics, and actions are essential to us being here now.”

Anthea Black: I hope you don’t mind if I re-pose a question from the Q+A last night to begin. Which is that the feminist collaborative ethic of Community Action Center, in addition to fueling a great work, also seems to propose terms for how we can be in the world as queer artists. Our cultural production goes beyond the boundaries of our material practices. How does this work go beyond those boundaries?

A.K. Burns: We would say that the production is the video, the potential installation, the group screening experience, the artist’s talk, and that is a constant process, not a product.

A.L. Steiner: Generally, production has been minimized to this idea of the product itself, as if there is an end point. We both have a problem ending projects, or making things to present in a more typified way, to a market. In that way, [Community Action Center] feels queer, open-ended or questioning of what the limitation of that identity is, being an artist. Space between the process and the product doesn’t end; it is similar to how we’ve talked about feminist history. There isn’t a conclusion, where now it’s this and we have to fight for it to be recognized as a certain thing.

The idea of queer identity is that you’re not fighting to have to be something, you’re fighting to not have to be something. Rights and liberties

and civil rights really rest on the idea of someone deciding that you’re valid enough, and they give you something. Then you’re complete. For me, philosophically, that is a fallacy. That extends into this art practice. Production and capitalism also rests on these ideas. We are afforded these ways of thinking about systems, but then when we question those systems, is it queering them?

We’re participating in this system that says “make this product,” and we want to promote it [as an artist’s object.] Then we’re also showing it in different spaces. And we’re also saying that it’s not over and it’s never going to be over, because we feel really connected with it as a political treatise and proposition for queer bodies.

A.K.: ...even to the extent that it would generate conversation after we’re gone, or the video is gone. I hope, those are the deepest...[A.L.: manifestations] or wishes for any work. But in particular, this work.

A.L.: That it has a resonance beyond us.

A.K.: I also mean that in relation to the Halsted work, LA Plays Itself. You could see something, and be so generative [that you would] make your own proposal from it. That relationship to histories and other practices, is part of the continuum, I can only hope that Community Action Center is generative.

A.L.: Or flexible: because Halsted was recontextualized. He made it for porn consumption as a videotape, but now the Museum of Modern Art owns the film. So we accessed it there, because

we were having a hard time finding it. We couldn't find anyone's VHS tapes to borrow, and the easiest access was through the museum collection. So the piece was recontextualized from commercial, or arthouse porn, to a museum artwork. If our piece has that fluidity it means that it will be a continual process.

Anthea: Deirdre Logue brought up the important question about the necessity of our production to morph into these different spaces. Why is it important that Community Action Center can be a museum work, an installation at the Feminist Art Gallery, and something that you screen in a smaller community centre space?

A.L.: ...and an educational piece at school.

A.K.: Each space offers a different agency and access point.

A.K.: One of the big questions or purposes of the piece is [to bring up] questions like what is pornography and/or what is art? One is that people always want to place it in one category. We've been told it's not art and we've been told that it's not pornography.

A.L.: We have, literally. People say, "well this is great, but it's actually not pornography," and "that was amazing, but it's not art." As if there is not a multiplicity that's queer.

We have a lot of questions. We made it with the question "What even constitutes pornography?" Is it explicit nudity, does there have to be some

level of exploitation involved? Or does there have to be commerce?

A.K.: Who knows? We don't have an answer to that. But the purpose of the piece was to put all those questions into play.

A.L.: In the Cliff Notes zine, another question we were proposing was about the architecture of the homosocial space. The porn theatre is disappearing from queer culture. [A.K.: Very specifically in New York, for us.] Women don't and didn't have those spaces.

A.K.: Well, one, women have never really had those spaces, and two, the whole city has been cleaned up and there is only one porn theatre left in the city. This is a contemporary situation, which is that you go home, and you jerk off in front of the computer and you download porn in this privatized space. One of the important manifestations of Community Action Center is that it is communally viewed.

A.L.: That's part of the title, which is also tongue-in-cheek.

A.K.: Privatization is also changing the relationship to the body, even with the reference to private parts, that term is in question: what is private? There is a kind of body shame that is produced out of that way of consuming pornographic material, and I think we've regressed culturally by getting rid of the porn theatre.

A.L.: Well the term "pornographic" is a way to separate oneself from one's body; that's how it

has been utilized essentially. Because [the term is] about consuming other bodies, and it's been used to censor and limit space, and to segregate. The etymology of the term pornographic comes from prostitution and commercialization, the origins of commercial exchange.

Anthea: One of the things that is so wonderful in the scenes where you see the singing and the intimacy of certain activities that are not usually visually represented in porn, is that they open up the kinds of representations that we think of for queer bodies. Maybe one of the reasons why they are so striking is that they are never part of pornography, the ordinariness of them.

A.K.: Yeah, even a lot of radical porn doesn't include that kind of visual material.

A.L.: Or other parts of the body other than the genitalia. You have to get right to some genitalia, because the money is in the specific tropes of porn and it all leads to that point. A.K. brought that up last night when she was talking about how there is a certain trajectory of how post-porn politics discusses pornography. We're discussing what women and what feminism has gotten caught up in: the patterns of those representations. We can rework them, but actually, how do we just create a new platform? How do we utilize the whole body as an erotic playground? The voice is sensual and emotional, that is how that moment played into the film.

A.K.: One of the many orifices to celebrate!

A.L.: Peter Berlin, when he just walks down the street in San Francisco...

Anthea: ...in his outfit! There is such an eroticism in that, it can't be commoditized. He is proposing a different way of moving through space.

A.L.: Posing and posturing is a sexual act, it's cruising. All that work, happened during what we call the porn liberation romance phase, when it was so interconnected to queer politics, and gay liberation. All of that production is so connected to that agency and that sensuality. It has moments that don't seem to exist right now, even in radical porn.

Anthea: One thing that I've consistently lamented is that there is an amazingly rich history, and there seems to be a historical break. Artists are looking at that time period of gay liberation porn, art, performance art, activism, the whole politic, now, with a contemporary feminist voice in the present moment, and thinking about what it has to offer in the ways that we move forward. Coming out of that lineage, what does feminist revisioning of that history add?

A.K.: We have enough distance from that moment to see what has and hasn't changed. In that time-frame, the propositions that were generated were very specific, and it was a very specific cultural breakdown that was happening. It's a place that gets looked at a lot, and it is personally, between us. That moves forward of course, into the 80s and 90s historically, but because both gay liberation and second wave feminism were really emerging

– not that feminism didn’t exist prior to that – it’s a really generative site of politics that are core to our being now, and it’s hard not to look at that site. We’re already done our first decade of the 2000s, and what has really changed? In particular, for women’s bodies? It’s shocking. I think we both feel a real urgency to revive, rethink, and move those politics forward.

A.L.: ...in a really sensory, stimulating way, in a way that also embodies our aesthetic.

A.K.: ...and recognizes we’re in a contemporary moment.

A.L.: José Muñoz wrote *Cruising Utopia* (2009).

Anthea: He is definitely what I am thinking of with the past-present-future circuit.

A.L.: And [he discusses artists] Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, who we stayed with and had long conversations with, especially Pauline. These ideas come out of Judith Butler’s writings and feminist writings, postmodern, postcolonial writings too. We are reworking and restructuring, but essentially politics and aesthetics are never separated. There is no way to make something that is not political. It’s really impossible. If you don’t recognize the politics, that is one thing, but inherently because of the systems we are working with, your messaging, your visuals, your products, your process, are all politicized.

A.K.: Anything that reaches a public is political.

A.L.: So in *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz is proposing how we discuss politics and aesthetics as a fusing, not as something that you can say, “It’s this, it’s art, it’s porn, it’s trans, it’s straight, it’s queer, it’s feminist, it’s environmental, it’s economic.” The multiplicity is something that both of us are trying to comprehend [A.K.: grapple with], and this piece reflects our notions or our effort to comprehend and fuse something together that is entertaining – because we don’t want to discount that – and aesthetic, and political. We’re just trying to be conscious about what those choices and constructions are. The conversation, back to your question, is why the live presentation plays into it. It’s all of those things without us, of course, in some way or another, but when we’re there, voicing that makes those concerns pertinent, makes them part of the artwork.

Anthea: ...and part of the continuity of engaging.

A.L.: Yes, the continuity. It’s not necessary, it’s just something we’re interested in. Doesn’t mean that someone couldn’t enjoy the politics, aesthetics or entertainment value of the piece itself.

Anthea: Even though we have forums for gathering in a feminist sense, this kind of work feels like our bathhouse culture. Cultural production is one way that a feminist culture could construct a sexual subculture, which hasn’t yet emerged as something that has the same kind of consistency as male bathhouse culture. I’ve always wondered, where is the gap? Why has the queer feminist community not been focused, for whatever reason, on creating a sexual

subculture that exists in space in a consistent manifestation, where we can hang out in?

A.K.: I have these questions too. When we were on Fire Island, there is [a men's only hotel called] the Belvedere,. [A.L.: It looks like a castle from the water.]. Katie [Hubbard] and I were having all these fantasies: How would you manifest that for women and trans people, because we could not go in there, there was all this debate. We were women, we have vaginas attached to us, everyone was going to go limp if we got in there, I don't know what kind of crisis could happen if we got in there; but we could not go.

A.L.: Which made you wanna go!

A.K.: Because of the world we live in, it requires the economy to have the real estate, the maintenance, somehow inherently, for the "vag-packing populations", as I like to say, economy just is not something we have access to: we're terrible capitalists.

Anthea: We haven't wanted to, or haven't been able to prioritize that direction.

A.K.: We could have an attachment to the side of the male bathhouse, and they could fund the women's side. Women could just come and go as we please, and not have the pressure of maintaining the economy. What would the strategy be?

Anthea: Like a barnacle. That would be the best name for a women's bathhouse!

A.L.: The Barnacle Women's Centre. You should open it! The one in the Mission in San Francisco, that amazing space, closed down.

A.K.: This is the thing, we all want a women's bathhouse space to happen. They have happened and existed over time.

A.L.: The bathhouse was a women's space in historical and religious culture, and not just a queer space. The sexualized public space also poses questions about how women consume pornography and the material that we're talking about. Exploitation and relationships to our own bodies are things that I talk about when we find out that women around the world aren't even participating in pleasurable sexual creative activity. However women's lives are structured worldwide, it's hard to generalize, but I feel like it's similar to the debate about the sex wars or porn wars as they are called. It's really complicated, those types of spaces, to maintain, to economize, and to perpetuate aren't necessarily inherently a part of how we're thinking. So is it because we're not thinking that way, or because it's not what we want?

Anthea: Very good question.

A.L.: Just as much as we made this piece and are utilizing this space, and specifically Deirdre and Allyson planned all of these activities, so this made it a much longer conversation than we've had in one place. They thought about it very differently, to keep the conversation going.

I would really like to show it for a month at the Spectacle, a tiny art-house theatre in Williamsburg,

or the Tiki Theatre, the last porn theatre that's in LA: I really want to schedule it to be there for a month, and I want to know, who's going to go? And will it interfere with those spaces?

So I thought about what it would mean to present in the bathhouse and explore those homosocial spaces. The bathhouse is interesting, but I also feel that the idea of the women's bathhouse that is somehow reflective of all of these bodies, that we are dealing with in our lives internally and externally, what the new configuration of that is? The Belvedere [on Fire Island] is the oldest model, and what does that propose to us, besides just entering it? That's an unanswerable question.

Anthea: To think about the issue of representation for a moment, one impulse that audiences seem to have in looking at queer work is to not just see the intrinsic value of the work, but also to see how we are being represented, what the representation looks like, and if we see ourselves in queer work. Which I think is one of the reasons it generates community beyond just art community – I was curious to hear about some of those conversations around representation that have come up around gender, body size, race, and something that came up in the Q+A, that the audience in Toronto was primarily white.

A.K.: They're important questions that we asked ourselves as we were working. It was intentional that there are cis-men in the work. [A.L.: It wasn't an accident.] It was intentional!

A.L.: It was a selfish endeavor, there is a choice to produce or not to produce. There is another piece that we've shown with, called Female Fist by Kajsa Dahlberg, it's just an audio conversation. The lens cap was over the camera because the women did not want to be filmed, but they tried to make an art porn, essentially a similar process, a collective effort of a group of people to make a work, in Copenhagen. It just couldn't happen. It was the story of them lesbian processing to make a porn, and it's literally the discussion and discourse that manifested as the work. It's interesting to watch Community Action Center and Female Fist together, with the black screen.

Anthea: Formally that black screen is really important?

A.L.: So we only see the black screen in this piece and its fascinating, because there is a breakdown, because there can't be consensus that the representations will be adequate enough and that the collective will be okay with whatever is produced. This is part of what feminism is: the failure to agree about how to represent that multiplicity. We cannot have that multiplicity and cannot be all things to all people.

Anthea: In all the incredible work that people have done to deconstruct representations and systems of power, the process of actually making and constructing can be rare, the way you talk about Kajsa Dahlberg's piece is a great example.

A.K.: The problematizing of our condition can lead to a kind of paralysis. The thing we were talking

about in the Q&A, about this history of pornographic material made by women, for women, has tended to be from a reactionary space. In the sense that – [[A.L.: We're thinking of the gaze, we're thinking of who is looking]] – I don't want to be defined by hetero-culture in this way, or, my body is being seen in this way so I have to make the opposite of that. The thing about the gay liberation porn of that period, that was made typically by men, was that they had this really significant autonomy [A.L.: because nobody wants to look]. That is the privilege of being fully rejected by the patriarchy or the larger system...

A.L.: ...It allows for a creative autonomy.

Anthea: This is the exact space that your piece claims.

A.K.: This was a huge agenda for us: can we as women, queers, trans community produce something that is autonomous, creative and not in reaction to, but truly about what we want? And it doesn't matter if you like it or you don't. It was a disregard for the PC. We actually had to throw some shit out the door and say we can't follow those rules, we have to follow rules about our own set of desires, but not without a consciousness.

A.L.: The other part of that is the declaration that Annie Sprinkle still calls for: to make your own work. This call is not to like our work, or not like it. Judgment seems irrelevant to us, it's more about saying "please continue to make, please bring more of this work to galleries, and put it in festivals". We have always looked at work that also demands that.

Of course we all consume, so if we're responsible, active, conscious consumers, we're going to be inspired by something. The call to make the work that you feel represents you is just as important as making sure that you satisfy as many people's needs as possible. This needs to be negotiated in your own space. I think the paralysis that you're talking about is what Kajsa's piece speaks to, and it is also a really important part of dealing with and being conscious of that, of allowing it to be useful. It's a precarious space.

A.K.: Another extension of being present is how we take responsibility for the decisions that we've made. Which are selfish, on some level, but we understand that the work shows things that are digestible and critiqueable and problematic, and repulsive and attractive that are happening.

A.L.: And to claim that they're not would be disingenuous to our project.

Anthea: The ethic of the work proposes a way of being in the world and a way of being responsible for what we make.

A.L.: And that autonomy goes deep into that. Once we were talking about it with collaborators and friends; that is when all this conversation came out. Because we were just working, moving forward in the creative process. [[Anthea: As you do.]] Yes, you know.

This also came up on the personal level with the performers, because there were a lot of conversations that straddled the exact concerns we are talking about. People were concerned about what

this is, throughout, and conversations are still ongoing. This was a collaboration.

A.K.: We are so much more emotionally responsible for this piece than anything legal, if someone came from the group that made this and was upset, the friendship and emotional breakdown and ties are so much more significant than any legal issue.

Anthea: That's an incredible subversion.

.....

Anthea Black is a Canadian artist, art writer and cultural worker. Her work in printmaking, textiles, performance and video is preoccupied with setting a stage for queer collaborative practice and inserting intimate gestures into public spaces. Her recent exhibitions include: *PopSex! Responses to the History of Sexual Science* at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery in Calgary, *Gestures of Resistance* at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, and *QIY: Queer It Yourself – Tools for Survival* at the National Queer Arts Festival in San Francisco. She has written on contemporary art, performance and politics for several publications and her collaborative research with Nicole Burisch is included in new publications *The Craft Reader* (Berg Press) and *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press). She has curated *SINCERITY OVERDRIVE*, *SUPER STRING*, and *Echo+Response: lipsynchs and remixes for critical queer geographies*.

A.L. Steiner utilizes constructions of photography, video, installation, collage, collaboration, performance, writing and curatorial work as seductive tropes channeled through the sensibility of a skeptical queer eco-feminist androgyne. Steiner's projects and collaborations are celebratory efforts in dismantling notions of normativity and the sources of constructed truths. Her interventions, sensory advertisements and highly-regarded affects on happenstance have been featured worldwide, subverting and sabotaging the language commonly used to define queer/feminist/lesbian art. She is a collective member of *Chicks on Speed*, co-curator of *Ridykeulous*, co-founder/organizer of *Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)* and collaborates with numerous visual and performing artists. Steiner is currently visiting core faculty at University of Southern California's Roski Master of Fine Arts Program.

A.K. Burns is an interdisciplinary artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She received a BFA from Rhode Island School of Design 1998 and an MFA from Bard College, Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, in 2010. A.K.'s practice explores interpretation and implications of sexuality, power and language, often taking the form of sculpture, video, drawing or social actions. A.K. has been a frequent contributor and active member of both *LTTR* and *Ridykeulous*. A.K. is a founding member of the artists activist group *W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy)*. Her work can be found in the *The Judith Rothschild Contemporary Drawings Collection* at the MoMA. This fall, A.K. will launch the inaugural issue of *RANDY* in collaboration with Sophie Mörner/Capricious Publishing.



Trending Homonationalism

Natalie Kouri-Towe

Homonationalism has quickly become one of the hottest concepts circulating in queer spheres across North America, Europe, and the Middle East. From queer activist projects such as Pinkwatching Israel,[1] the No Homonationalism campaign in Germany,[2] and the array of queer anti-apartheid groups popping up across North America (e.g. Queers Against Israeli Apartheid in Toronto),[3] to blogs and leading academic publications in queer theory, homonationalism has quickly become one of the most talked about terms in queer cultures. The reason homonationalism has gained so much popularity despite its jargon heavy character is that it references a series of seemingly disparate but related processes, including: neoliberalization and globalization, racism and imperialism, and heteronormativity and homophobia.

Homonationalism functions in complementary ways to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, which describes how the West produces

knowledge and dominates 'the Orient' through academic, cultural and discursive processes. [4] Like Orientalism, homonationalism speaks to the ways Western powers (such as the U.S. and Canada) circulate ideas about other cultures (like Arab and Islamic cultures) in order produce the West as culturally, morally, and politically advanced and superior. However, unlike Orientalism, homonationalism speaks particularly to the way gender and sexual rights discourses become central to contemporary forms of Western hegemony.

Jasbir Puar coined the term homonationalism in 2007 with the publication of her book, *Terrorist Assemblages*[5]. A coupling of Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity[6] and a poststructural critique of nationalism, homonationalism is at once a description of contemporary racial and economic relations in Western sexual rights discourses and an explanation of global narratives around sexual human rights, immigration and democracy. Homonationalism couples the idea of

normative claims from homosexual subjects into state inclusion with mobilizations of liberal and normative sexual minorities as exceptional subjects in the state in opposition to queer deviants. Put more simply, homonationalism is the process where some queers (mostly upper-middle-class and rich gay men and women) gain acceptance and status in Canadian (or American) society through consumerism, economic mobility, and the securing of individual rights, such as gay marriage. By appealing to the rights of the individual (rather than collective rights) and turning to the state for inclusion instead of mobilizing in opposition to the state, we have entered into an era where some queers have gained admission into the dominant social, political, and economic order.

This is not to say that public and private institutions are now spaces of liberation for gender and sexuality. If anything, homophobia, sexism, misogyny, transphobia and other forms of gendered subjugation are often insidious rather than overt, particularly when the language of rights is being used. The inclusion of some sexual minorities into the fold acts as a screen to draw attention away from the continued asymmetrical conditions that structure our current social, political, and economic context. Ironically, the inclusion of normative sexual subjects is contingent on the maintenance of heteronormative standards; so gays can be just like straight people, as long as they don't rock the patriarchal boat. This process also erases how any achieved rights have come through collective struggles on the part of the subjugated, rather than through the benevolence of the nation. Homonationalism offers a critical lens that reveals how this process happens, and what else

it produces, by demonstrating how some queers have been able to gain a conditional inclusion into Canadian culture by making sexual rights complicit with neoliberal demands for free markets, individualism, and Western moral superiority.

How homonationalism works:

- 1) **The Inclusion Argument:** Sexual minorities should call for inclusion in the state through liberal rights of the individual (e.g. gay marriage). The struggle for individual rights replaces the struggle for collective rights, collective resistance, or the transformation of asymmetrical power formations.
- 2) **Good vs. Bad Queers:** The call for inclusion is predicated on making the distinction between good queers and bad queers. These appeals argue that most sexual minorities are no different than members of dominant society, and thus that these queers deserve to be recognized as part of the mainstream. Here, bad queers are offered as the undesirable other to help sell the good queers to Canadian society, since bad queers are dangers to society or drains on state resources. They include racialized queers, people who are HIV-positive, poor and homeless queers, drug users, non-status queer migrants, etc.
- 3) **Reinforcing the Social Order:** Once the right kind of queers are welcomed into the state, these institutions can use the newly admitted 'good queers' as evidence that symmetry has been achieved, effectively dismissing larger concerns over the rights of those who remain marginalized and subjugated. Further, the inclusion of sexual minorities under the terms of individual rights is then

used in propaganda by the state to demonstrate how civilized, modern, liberal, and democratic the West is, particularly in opposition to backward, pre-modern, and non-democratic states (such as in the Middle East) – a tactic rooted in Orientalism.

The equation is simple: *Racist/Imperialist/Neoliberal State + homonational queers = Racist/Imperialist/Neoliberal State* – responsibility for human rights violations. A few queers gain access to individual rights and acceptance under the state, and in exchange, the state is able to use these queers to conceal the state’s continued enactment of violence and violation of human rights.

To better help understand how homonationalism functions on a daily basis, I’d like to turn to three examples of current trends in homonationalism today. These include the Canadian government’s immigration policies and practices when it comes to queer asylum seekers, the surge in marketing of gay tourism to Israel, and the controversy surrounding the inclusion of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid in the Toronto Pride parade.

Canadian taste in queer asylum seekers

The Culprits: Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in Canada, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada

The Crime: Showcasing queer asylum seekers from Iran while simultaneously increasing deportations and detentions, and decreasing total numbers of refugees admitted into Canada.

The Homonational: Queer asylum seekers in Canada are commonly scrutinized for their gender presentation and sexual practices in judgments over their refugee claims. Asylum seekers are regularly denied status and deported on the basis that they don’t appear to be gay. In 2009, Kenney was quoted in the Toronto Star singling out queer asylum seekers from Iran as ideal claimants, a sentiment he recently echoed in Xtra! (December 19, 2011). The concurrent violation of the basic human rights and dignity of queer and non-queer asylum seekers is masked by Kenney’s pronouncements of support for queer-Iranian refugees. There’s a double move happening here: Kenney offers Iranian queers as evidence that the immigration system in Canada is just and unbiased, while the immigration system continues to be racist, misogynist and homophobic; at the same time, by singling out Iranian asylum seekers, Kenney is also able to make a claim about Canada’s moral superiority in juxtaposition to Iran’s moral deficiency.

Cruising apartheid: pinkwashing & gay tourism in Tel Aviv

The Culprit: Israel’s re-branding campaign

The Crime: Normalizing the Israeli state’s military occupation and apartheid policies (including the construction of the separation wall) by marketing Israel’s cosmopolitan city, Tel Aviv, to international gay tourists.

The Homonational: Queer communities across North America and Europe have seen a rise in advertisements, articles, and other cultural and commercial materials featuring Tel Aviv as an ideal

tourist destination for queers. Tel Aviv is often spotlighted in travel and lifestyle magazines for its gay nightlife and beaches. These kinds of public relations and marketing campaigns aim to generate two things. First, they bring foreign income into Israel, supporting the state's economy through consumerism. Secondly, they normalize the Israeli state by turning a militarized and occupying power into an innocuous vacation destination. Through the images of beaches and gay parties in Tel Aviv, Israel's violations of human rights are hidden from public perception. Further, queer tourists who travel to Israel gain entry into state and national belonging by participating in consumerism as ideal tourists.

Pride Toronto and the making of the modern homonational: who really belongs in the parade?

The Culprits: The corporatization of Toronto Pride and the Israel lobby in Canada

The Crime: Israel lobbyists in Canada threatened Pride Toronto's funding in 2010 and 2011 if the Toronto-based group, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), was permitted to march in the parade. Lobbyists targeted Pride's main funding sources, including TD Bank and the city of Toronto, to try to get Pride's funding revoked.

The Homonational: In 2009, Israel lobbyists first began pressuring Pride Toronto to ban participation of QuAIA in the parade. Over the following three years, Toronto's queer community became split over debates about censorship at Pride and who belongs in the annual Pride parade. Local queers and the larger Toronto public debated whether Pride was a space for politics or a celebration of gay identity. In the courses of these debates, members of the queer community in Toronto began to act as what they imagined to be neutral arbiters in debates about Pride and politics. In doing so, they presumed that it was possible to have a non-political position on debates around the parade and political messaging. These queers thus took the place of the liberal state in judging what types of rights claims are legitimate. In this case, the celebration of sexual rights is argued to present a neutral stance – reflecting the terms of inclusion at the level of the state and dominant social order. In turn, other claims to human rights, even when those claims are articulated in conjunction with sexual rights, such as the claims to rights of queer Palestinians, become threats to the coherent belonging within the state that homonationalist queers rely on. Only queers who already have rights can speak to which rights-based claims are deemed acceptable.

References:

[1] Pinkwatching Israel: <http://www.pinkwatchingisrael.com/>

[2] No Homonationalism: <http://nohomonationalism.blogspot.com/>

[3] Queers Against Israeli Apartheid: <http://queersagainstapartheid.org/>

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[6] Duggan, Lisa. 2002. *The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism*. *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. Eds. Russ Castronovo & Dana D. Nelson. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

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Photo Credit: Alexis Mitchell

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yeah, it's as long as everybody feels like they're "in the club." If you said "hey all of you are racist," and in fact they all are, I mean we all are, it wouldn't have the same effect. But as long as everyone feels like they're in the club, they don't feel threatened. That's the beauty of art. It takes you places you wouldn't go.



Elisha Lim and Rae Spoon: Talking Shop

Elisha Lim: So Rae, I'm thinking to myself, so much of the art that I make is hustle. Just hustling to get it out, to make a name, to push myself.

Rae Spoon: You have to hustle.

EL: How do you do it?

RS: You have to hustle to make a living. Oh god, you're going to make me sound like such a capitalist...

But I think the music model is the best model. You have to tour like a musician. Even if you're making books or drawings. You have to book a tour like I do and play in lots of towns. That's when you sell your stuff.

EL: Huh, that's smart. That's a good tip. How about this-do you make goals for yourself?

Like I want one day to have a drawing in The New Yorker.

RS: No. I just want to be healthy and happy.

EL: Oh. Well how about, do you ever feel like you have to segregate your stuff, like "this is for my gay scene," and then "this is for the mainstream?"

RS: No. If you're making art that's good, it'll go. I used to play banjo for the Boomers. But it wasn't safe as a trans person. So now I play for the younger crowds, and I don't have to hide it. I find that younger hipsters accept it all.

EL: Seriously! Hmmm...that's really interesting to me. You know, like when and how do you find those little inroads where a mainstream crowd actually feels safe enough to support you? Like where I can say "I'm never gonna

draw another white person again” and they applaud wildly?

If I make statements like that in person, usually people get quietly offended and stop coming around. But it’s like you, talking about transphobia to a bunch of hipsters in the audience and they love it. I feel like, in some mainstream spaces, some party venues, some stages, because there’s still a feeling of ‘art’ and ‘safety’, the audience totally goes with me into taboo topics.

RS: Yeah, it’s as long as everybody feels like they’re “in the club.” If you said ‘hey all of you are racist,’ and in fact they all are, I mean we all are, it wouldn’t have the same effect. But as long as everyone feels like they’re in the club, they don’t feel threatened. That’s the beauty of art. It takes you places you wouldn’t go. Sometimes I invite them into the queer world. Sometimes people want to be invited, you know.

EL: I find this really interesting. I think this is kind of my favourite part, the chance to experiment and take risks with activism, in the safety of ‘art’.

Can you give an example of when it worked for you in a really good way?

RS: Yeah. Well, I played Regina this year, and 200 people came out. It was a straight audience, it wasn’t a gay or trans event. But the organizer, she went around to every person working on the show and got them to use my pronoun right. She faced

all the transphobic conversations. She really went to bat for me. She was an extraordinary person.

It’s really just about trying to respect other people. If someone says “I am this or that” I just have to respect it. If someone says “you offended me” I have to respect that too and not be defensive.

Anyways I think you’re getting attention cause your art is good.

EL: Thank you! Thanks.

RS: You just have to find the way to perform it, to tour it around. You need to get a public and a fanbase. Get a publicist. Get someone to promote you in magazines and on the radio. You need to get a presence. There’s nothing wrong with that, just making some money. I mean, I want a nice life.

EL: Hah, yeah. So what’s a nice life?

RS: You know, not thinking about being trans all the time. To have a home. A group of people that use my pronoun right.

EL: That’s tragic.

RS: Hahahahah... a nice life is when people get my pronoun right. Actually, I’ve been looking for a chance to come out as ‘they’ and maybe this is it. I’m going by ‘they’ now. I’m gender retired. I’m no good at gender.

EL: Let’s high-five to ‘they’!

RS: Yeah. Rae Spoon is using 'they'. I mean, it helped me to see your petition against Xtra.

EL: No way! Oh my god that is amazing! It was an amazing petition with 1,500 people signing up to force Xtra to call me 'they.'

But I felt like I let the ball drop. I never got what I asked for.

RS: But that helped me to say, yeah, now it's time. I got permission from you to use 'they' and I could see people supporting it.

EL: Oh my god, that's incredibly heartening....

—

Elisha Lim wrote 100 Butches, a genderbending comic with an introduction by Alison Bechdel and praise from Shary Boyle, Allyson Mitchell and Ivan E. Coyote. Elisha's work has been published in Bitch Magazine, Curve, Diva (UK), LOTL (Australia) and Xtra (Canada), and Elisha's 2011 wall calendar "The Illustrated Gentleman" was voted best lesbian gift on the authoritative queer site afterellen.com. The 100 Butches were the recipient of two major Canadian grants and toured with the legendary Sister Spit caravan through 28 North American cities. In 2011 Elisha has lectured on art and gender at the University of Toronto, Ryerson, Brock and Concordia Universities and debuted as the first solo show of Allyson Mitchell's Feminist Art Gallery. Elisha's latest project is the Sissy wall calendar, and it will be part of group shows in Philadelphia in 2010 and Montréal in 2011. Buy Elisha's calendar at www.etsy.com/listing/82754558/2012-wall-calendar-sissy

Rae Spoon is a transgendered indie/electronic musician from Calgary. They have released/produced five solo full-length albums and were long listed for the Polaris Prize in 2008. Rae has toured Canada extensively and has been to Europe as well as the USA and Australia to play festivals and tour. Established as a performing/recording artist in the international music scene, they have branched out to write multi-media projects and to composing instrumental music for films including the NFB documentary Dead Man directed by Chelsea McMullan (Toronto International Film Festival 2009). They have also developed a presence in the international sound art scene by making sound projects such as 'What are you waiting for?' with Alex Decoupigny. A song-cycle written, recorded and performed in the underground train in Berlin that was commissioned by arts organization: Neue Gesellschaft, Bildende Kunst. Rae is currently working on a book of short stories about growing up in a conservative Pentecostal family in Alberta.

g on the road above,
by the collective.

velocity, comparing
e for a person hold-
Israeli passport.

Palestinian resi-
drag a body across.
e distance. Israeli:

Palestinian: five
half. The black lines
explain the difference
mass roads, high-
tunnels, elevated
military checkpoints,
dance, permission,
the fan whirring,
sleeping house, what

The Women Tell Their Stories, and other poems

Ching-In Chen

kundiman, blue-wire postcard

Detroit-bound, US Social Forum-bound, Phoenix airport, waiting to board an overnight.

My mother calls to bring news of the dying. Passing through the gateway of dawn, half-breaths.

"Fifty Different Tulips," says Kim-An Lieberman's book peeking out of my black bag. A red-orange bird made from mulberry-lace paper in Thailand is flying. I'm discarding the blue sun. A girl next to me, communion with her cell, says, I don't even know where I'm going.

My family constellation, a scatter of telephone wire. Pressed ears.

The Women Tell Their Stories

after Juan Felipe Herrera

here, gliding
the aisles, melted
skulls waiting for grief.

*I am learning the history of this city where fierce love rises from what others do not see.
Survivors easy to spot.*

My father listening for my grandmother's breaths, she waits for stillness, my mother elsewhere.

29 years ago, man christened by baseball bat.

His mother now in the ground beside him.

Poems on the cold stone. Prayers laid down. Others, the faucets of their lives.

*Martyrs in the vacant slots between us. We dial these names when we need
grief circling in the air.*

Vincent Chin, dead.

Lily Chin, dead.

And then my father. To write a eulogy about a woman I do not recognize, made up of rubble.

No justice, no peace.

salvaged confessional: a zuihitsu

2 doors from mountain, Riverside, CA. June 20, 2010 – letter.

*

He tells me, ask how to write a city vanished. That's a different project altogether, she says, peering through her sharp glasses.

*

Never easy, political poems. A week of empty words drying against the sun. After the performance, they find me — clotted, obtuse, compressed into boxes.

*

No memory banks. Taking my voice, he says, all I see is a placard on 4th street (made this up) that reads "_____". Peer into the fashion store and beyond there is a shoe-shop.

*

Spread on the wood table, a map by the collective Multiplicity, comparing the time for a person holding an Israeli passport and a Palestinian resident to drag a body across the same distance. Israeli: 1 hour. Palestinian: five and a half. The black lines of text explain the difference — bypass roads // highways // tunnels // elevated link // military checkpoints // avoidance // permission // I feel the fan whirring above, sleeping house, what lives.

*

I've lost the original thread. This poem I could easily leave, dusty cadaver.

confessional of a silhouette: a zuihitsu

after Betye Saar's "Predictions" and "In My Solitude"

Dead at 38, John Delloro. Labor leader, resistant heart, I never knew him. The microphone woman cries confession at the periphery of mourning. "He promised he would take care of himself. For his wife, his children. But he couldn't stop. Organizing was in his blood."

*

The ladder grows from a scattered pack of cards. What is risk. His heart in exchange for theirs.

*

Another dead man, this one shot in the back. Ghost hovering in a displaced, deliberating city. The photos won't hush up. Mumia Abu-Jamal from Death Row says, "Oscar Grant is you and you are all him. Because you know, in the pit of your stomach, that it could have been you."

*

In the wall behind, a moon equally attracted to a miniature star and a rolled dice. Ignore the woman of shadow facing the wall who can't climb the ladder.

*

It leads nowhere. Certainly not to the next window. A silhouette off the center, turned away from the gaze, reading perhaps. Whatever it is — a something unintelligible to the naked eye. One mean lightbulb looking down on a mountain of rusted souvenirs. Perhaps, she is resting in power.

Ching-In Chen is the author of [The Heart's Traffic](#) (Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press) and co-editor of [The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities](#) (South End Press). She is a Kundiman and Lambda Fellow, part of the Macondo and Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation writing communities, and has been a participant in the Theatrical Jazz Institute. She has worked in the San Francisco, Oakland, Riverside and Boston Asian American communities. Ching-In currently lives in Milwaukee and is involved in union organizing and direct action. www.chinginchen.com

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"Whether that's audio art or sound art, honestly I would say I couldn't care less": A conversation with Nancy Tobin

Owen Chapman

*I interviewed Nancy Tobin in the context of a residency on audio art that I conducted at the Oboro new media center (oboro.net) during the summer of 2011. The residency was focused on writing a short essay on the subject of audio art, after having consulted the archives of work produced through Oboro. Tobin was immediately suggested to me as an artist that I should speak with. In the end, her perspective became integral to the paper I wrote (see the Jan. 2012 edition of *Esse*), especially in her assertions about how labels like "audio art" or "sound art" are part of the currency of grant applications, rather than integral to artistic practices. Questions such as "does this fit into the category of audio/sound art?" are kind of beside the point when it comes to making decisions about directions to follow when creating work.*

But basing an artistic practice on the medium of sound is a choice that warrants discussion. In addressing us through our sense of hearing, audio artists elicit empathetic, embodied responses

to what they reveal. When witnessing an audio artwork, we feel, in some small way, what it would be like to cause and/or perceive the sounds we are hearing in other situations, both fictional and real. These are mnemonic, physical, psychological, social, cultural (etc.) responses. We are performed, in some senses, by what we hear in these instances.

*The interview transcribed below spanned the course of a short visit to her home studio and an outdoor meal at the Atwater Market on September 2, 2011. Our conversation started with a discussion of her 2009 piece *Delay Toys*, produced in part during a residency at Oboro. This is the first in a series of interviews to be published in *NMP* throughout 2012, stemming from the conversations I collected and transcribed in the course of my research at Oboro.*

Nancy Tobin: Delay Toys is really a project about childhood and audio art. I think I started this project in 2005 and finished it in 2009—and the first step was to meet people in places that were important to them, had some kind of resonance for them because of a moment in their childhood. It could be a church, a schoolyard, or a parent's house. So I would come and visit the person in this space that they had chosen and I would have these two suitcases... I have another suitcase like this, this is one of them, this has mostly the percussive elements, and I had another suitcase that had—

Owen Chapman: Reminds me of my house.

NT: [laughter] Yeah, another suitcase that had more melodic stuff in it, so people wouldn't know. I would just arrive with these suitcases and I would say, "Okay you don't have to do anything, you can do whatever you want, you don't have to make anything musical, but I'm going to start recording as soon as you open the suitcases." So that way I accumulated a lot of raw material, and then I used all that—and only that—to make Delay Toys. So I just wanted you to see the...

[sounds, playing with instrument]

They're kind of old toys that I collected over the years in places like the Salvation Army and stuff.

OC: Did people talk while they were interacting with the material?

NT: It was a while ago that I recorded, it was almost 6 years ago. They weren't necessarily saying

anything, but there were exclamations or laughs or stuff like that in those recordings. Nobody described what they were doing.

OC: So the relationship with the place was never made a part of the recording process?

NT: Well, it was part of it, because the recording occurred in the place, so we would get the feeling of the room. In the final work, I didn't use reverb. There's no treatment, but you get a sense of space because one place—with Martin Tétreault—was a church, another place—with Nathalie Derome—was the basement of her parent's house, with Shonid Watkins it was her bathroom, with her bathtub, so all those places had a certain character and acoustic quality.

OC: So the same toys would sound different in the different places. This one's intriguing too it reminds me of a turntable.

T: It was really interesting to observe how everyone would just bring me to a different place and do totally different things with the exact same kit of toys. So I had that raw material collected from participants, and then I took the two suitcases and I improvised in the Oboro studio. That is where Stéphane Claude did all the recording, and then it was sort of like the opposite: controlled environment, controlled acoustics, and microphones...

OC: Very clean.

NT: And Martin Tétreault came, and we did duos together and stuff.

OC: When you're describing a piece, at least in the literature that I've seen, you often refer to the exact specific models of microphones that you're using. Is there a reason for that, which goes beyond just wanting to be accurate for the future? Are there particular mics that you really like because of their sonic signature?

NT: My background in sound is not music. It's technical sound—sound reinforcement, sound design for shows—so my accumulated knowledge, all the solid theory I have, is more technical. When I specify a piece of equipment, for me it's important because it kind of determines a certain texture, a certain feeling even. The way you perceive it is personal, but in a general way the approach is totally different if you're using, let's say, an SM57 or if you're using a TLM170. You could use those two mics to record exactly the same thing, but of course the quality won't be the same. You might want to use a mic that has a lower quality, but in this application it is the best thing to choose because you know that you want this type of texture or sound. I'm not a button person. For me, it starts right at the mic. That's where it has to come from. For instance the CD Overture, that was very, very small brass chimes. Like you listen to them in mid-air, just tapping on them, and there's no sound. You have to press against a piece of wood, and even if you do that you hardly hear it. It's a bit like a pitchfork; you know how you have to bring that closer to your ear? It's the same thing. So doing those recordings, the mic was—I was very close to the microphone, the brass chimes were very close also, and it was all contained in this one-foot-by-one-foot environment, so of course when I was recording, you would hear my presence. So my

breathing, my tummy doing all these noises, and some of them in the work are still there, gurgles, tummy gurgles and breathing.

OC: I'd like to get your opinion on why you call yourself a sound artist or audio artist. What do these terms mean to you? How does Delay Toys fit into these concepts?

NT: Delay Toys is basically recordings that were manipulated in a way that, for me, is composing. From that process a work appeared or came about, and that work is something that people can listen to on their own in their own personal environments, hopefully it'll be on a CD or some other format. So whether that's audio art or sound art, honestly I would say I couldn't care less.

OC: Is it music?

NT: Well, if music can only come about by using the musical language, then Delay Toys is not music. But John Cage was saying for a long, long time—ever since at least the 50s—that every sound is musical. So I don't know... Like sometimes to describe my own work, I really do not have—I did some "solfège," I did some music theory, but these are certainly not the tools I use when I work. I do say "compose" because for me to make a work—a sound work or an audio work—is to compose. You have to bring elements together, just by your sensitivity and even how you feel in that moment.

OC: I agree with you that these questions of genre or category—is this in or is this out—are really not that interesting. And yet I'm trying to tease out some of these concepts because

I think that, by putting them into conversation with one another, then they do become interesting.

So, you know, if one person says, “well I see what I do as being compositional but not musical, and by music I mean ‘a b c’” and somebody else says, “oh no I see myself as a musician first and foremost and yet this is not through using processes of musical notation...,” then we start to have a dialogue between different points of view and then something—the truth doesn’t emerge—but an interesting conversation emerges.

NT: Which is more about the process of creating work than anything else, I guess.

OC: Yeah. And recognizing too that people will conceptualize what they do in different ways but on a practical level there may be similarities that are worth mentioning. So I don’t think that there’s any way I can define audio art or sound art, that’s not the ambition. But trying to bring together... Like For me, Delay Toys as a piece of work would fall under my conception of audio art because of its conceptual orientation. It’s not conceptual art necessarily, but it started with a series of choices around [sound-making] objects. You have a relationship to those toys, and in the decision to work in particular places that were suggested to you by your participants—all of this starts to shape the work even before you start recording. So I’m thinking that this is one of the potential strands that audio art can be. It’s a process, which involves—

NT: Defining boundaries.

OC: Yeah defining boundaries.

NT: You know, as an artist, I don’t necessarily think about how my work is defined. It’s just my natural impulse, and I just do it and don’t think about whether I’m a musician, an audio or sound whatever... those are preoccupations more of a curator or of a—

OC: An academic.

NT: Or an academic. As you say, it’s very interesting for the discussions that they may bring about but when you’re in the activity, like in the action of making the work. You’re not preoccupied with how the work can be defined, you’re just making the work. You don’t have to think about the work. But one interesting thing is that the way we can finance our work, asking for grants and submitting a grant proposal, often does impose a certain reflection that may be more theoretical than actually doing the work, and I find that interesting. You’re not really defining whether your work is audio or sound, but you are trying to explain the work to a jury so that they can have an understanding of it before it is done. You have to sort of know exactly what you’re going to do before you actually do it. I find that interesting as a process, and I’m thankful that if we do have to define precisely what a work may be when we’re proposing it for a grant, once that work is done, even if we did not necessarily do exactly what was described in the proposal, it’s not a problem. And I think that’s very important.

OC: I have a couple of other specific questions that I'm trying to ask everybody. One of them is about performance. I'm curious to hear how you react to that term being applied to what you do, like, where you see it fit or if it doesn't at all or those kinds of questions.

NT: For Delay Toys what I did, I had all the raw material that was accumulated and I had started listening, editing, doing first try-outs of the material, and I applied for a residency at Oboro and I got it. That meant that I had this very privileged area to create the work. So I had equipment that I would not necessarily have on my own, I had a space. The environment is incredible, the people are incredible, it's a great place to develop a work, there's no doubt. So I felt very lucky to be able to change my usual environment, surroundings, go into a new place and really focus specifically on one work. And it was good for Delay Toys because there was a lot of—like, I did work a lot, and by “work,” I mean sitting down and actually editing, but there was also a lot of figuring... Trying to grasp what it is to go back into a certain childhood feeling. So I was trying to invent games that I would play to give me another perspective on what I was trying to create. Like, instead of forcing myself to stay at the desk when it was not working, I would just lay down on the floor where there was this big gigantic plant in the studio, and I would just stare at the plant, and not feel guilty about that. Because that was the project, it has to be playful. It must not be forced or imposed or rigorous. Not rigorous at all. Open, light, playful...

OC: Would you say that the idea of being in a residency opens up that freedom?

NT: Totally. I don't think I would have been able to do that in my usual studio. It would have been impossible. So thanks to Oboro, this situation, I was able to really go far in this—trying to reinvent certain ways of working. And what Oboro also does every year, which is very interesting for the audio and sound community, is to organize all these workshops: people coming to talk about ambient sound, people that come like Christina Kubisch to talk about magnetic fields and her work on that. And that's a great initiative that Oboro has [developed] through Stephane Claude, who is very rigorous and a very special guy in audio. I think Montreal is very lucky to have Oboro. I think the induction workshop [with Christina Kubisch] was very special because of the people that were there. There was Stephane Claude, Steve Bates, Tara Rogers, like all these, in my opinion, very interesting artists. So for sure it made a very special atmosphere. And also to be able to discover Montreal through Christina's magnetic amplifiers.

OC: Have you continued to work with what you learned in that workshop?

NT: I've certainly continued to develop pieces with magnetic fields. That's really my area of research that I've been working on since a year after starting Delay Toys.

OC: Can you tell me more about that?

NT: I just did a performance piece at Foundry Darling that was based on that [Expire]. I worked with inductors, which are basically electronic components of a circuit that contain a very small coil. I worked with those, and I used them to pick

up magnetic fields in my environment, which were amplified and went to a speaker system. But I also manipulated sound using magnets. I was able to play the magnetic field. So I'm very interested in that sound source, for sure.

OC: It was a kind of naïve question on my part.

NT: But it brings us to "performance." I studied in theatre. My official "formation serieuse, c'est le theatre," and I took a lot of courses in acting, not because I wanted to become an actress, but because at the time that was the profile that you needed to be able to take other courses, like in communication. I wanted to take sound courses. I was very interested in vocal classes, so I've always been interested in the performative aspect of [art] work, for sure. But in theatre I was never interested by the female roles that were traditionally offered... that was completely from the beginning not interesting to me. And now more and more, my work is about uniting sound or audio art with performance, but in a way that is almost theatrical.

So thinking about a costume, a set... like, for Expire there was a scenography: the design of the space, the costume, the set. So all these aspects are coherent in relation to the basic concepts of the piece. I'm not a character in the work, but my presence is there in a certain way and it's not for nothing, it's thought out. I'm not just there in a t-shirt and a pair of jeans, like you would do for a performance in a bar. There's kind of a theatrical touch. And one other thing that's important for me when we touch upon the idea of performance with audio, it's very important for me now to touch people. To find a way to make it so the work will be sensitive and not technical or hard to figure out or intelligent or bright. For me that's not the main focus. The main focus is to figure out how will this piece touch me and how will this piece touch people.

OC: Emotionally, like... move them or make them feel something.

NT: Yeah, exactly.

Owen Chapman is an audio artist whose work involves sampling, video projection, contact microphones and old electronic instruments. He is co-director of the Montreal Mobile Media Lab, located in the Communication Studies department at Concordia University, where he is also an Assistant Professor in Sound Production and Scholarship.

Nancy Tobin is an audio artist based in the St-Henri neighbourhood of Montreal. Her sound designs for dance and theatre productions have been part of the Festival TransAmériques, the World Stage Festival, the Festival d'Avignon and the Edinburgh International Festival. Tobin has, in her twenty years of experience, developed a specialization in vocal amplification for theater and is known for her distinct style using unusual loudspeakers to transform the aural qualities of her compositions. In performance and sound improvisation, Tobin collaborates regularly with turntable sound artist Martin Tétreault (duo TÉTO, the TURNTABLE QUARTET and the SUPERHEART performance). Her solo work includes commissions for the group ARTIFICIEL (Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal), and curator Eric Mattson (Mutek Festival and other special events). Her current performance instrumentation consists of electromagnetic transducers, vintage tone generators, and small speakers. In 2007, she formed BêTEs NoCTurnes an open collective improvising live on the idea of sounds of nature at night.



Switching Power: An Interview with A.L. Steiner

Anthea Black

Anthea Black: Your photographs are part of a practice that also includes large installations, activism with Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.) and many collaborations with other artists. Let's start by talking about working in a holistic way.

A.L. Steiner: Everything is part of a practice, which is always in conversation, expanding: nothing is categorical. That's what's interesting about being queer, you're constantly in a state of questioning to begin with, and that's not separate from what you might be producing and making.

AB: People who are speaking from outside of a queer position often ask me why my work is so intertwined with what I am doing in life. I feel like it is such an obvious question, how could it not be?

ALS: Where is it supposed to be? That is what is so interesting with questions regarding production.

The ideas that a person is separate from their work have been largely post-industrial revolution, but it's coming together again.

W.A.G.E. has had a big part in articulating what work is. We're trying to understand intellectual labour. André Gorz said, "work isn't something that you either have or don't have, it is what you are doing." It's not a possessive form of being. How could it not be intertwined?

Ideas of work come from the idea that it is a sacrifice, something that you do to enjoy other parts of life. That is becoming more vague as people are essentially connected with each other and their work 24 hours a day.

AB: When you are making images that are so full of pleasure, how do you answer questions that pose work against pleasure?



on the pole at your Feminist Art Gallery opening paired with an image of artist Onya Hogan Finlay lounging on a tree—it opens up new ways of seeing.

ALS: I like your analysis of collage, and I agree with you. It came from a very feminist critical practice. Beginning with Hannah Hoch, regarding advertising imagery, even Man Ray shows how men question patriarchy themselves, whether they called it feminism or not.

Photography can be so limited as far as the hand goes, it's always had that inferiority complex, that it's just a mechanical process. Making, or how one makes, has a lot to do with seeing. The history of photography has been invested in questions of seeing and now visual culture studies is questioning what we're seeing and delineating sensory inputs. What I find challenging about photography is analyzing the seeing part, not the making.

ALS: There is a series of talks by Roland Barthes regarding the neutral or the binary—which is of course part of my inner dialogue—to focus on pleasure means that my art practice is not separated from my life practice. Feminism is really useful because, rather than a historical movement, it is more about the idea of lived practices. I am not a scholar, but I am living feminism. Pleasure can't extract itself from life, it's about finding the meaning of pleasure, sometimes it is displeasure.

AB: There is a candid representation, when taken together with collage, as a feminist process, that suggests a pleasure and inventiveness in the process making. When two images are beside each other—like Kitty Neptune dancing

Points of activating seeing happen with pairing, cutting, collage, the whole philosophy of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin and their cutups, taking things apart, which leads directly into postmodern theory. These ideas of presentation are, in a contemporary way, part of re-presentation, being flexible and queer, not capable of being predisposed. There is not a fixed way that things are. Your practice can constantly say: "this is not the way things are, you can look at this picture and it will never mean one thing, I won't let it mean this one thing." That is much more important to me than taking a good picture. It's not a specialized field, at this point, we can all take a good picture. It's absurd to frame photography as a way of making good pictures.



AB: Are people who have attachments to the history of photography scandalized by the stance that it's absurd to emphasize taking a good picture?

ALS: I would switch that around and say I find it scandalous that photography pretends that it's a very conservative art form. It's true that it's unique and about skill and each individual's imprint in the medium is unique. But to ignore everything that photography supposedly isn't is the same as the way that people understand normativity, and especially hetero-normativity. To say something is natural and "the way it is," well actually that

framework only looks at part of the picture, and photography doesn't look outside of that frame enough.

AB: Taking the position of re-centering that dialogue and the practice of photography is very noticeable in the images that you make of women and queers. You're constructing a whole world of images, particularly in the way you install the photographs as a collage on the wall.

A lot of the reviews of your work and of Community Action Center seem to be

premised on a dialogue that pre-conditions people towards reacting with surprise. When actually, this is our whole world and maybe that audience that is surprised has just never “been there”. They’re looking from outside and are speaking from a place that maintains the idea of inside and outside. Those flips that you make—formally, conceptually—and your resistance to that binary, is an exciting inversion.

ALS: They just don’t see it. You don’t really know how subversive you’re being. I call it the “Mapplethorpe effect.” Just to point out the

shock value of something, doesn’t mean that the person who made it is trying to shock. The public, or as Lorraine O’Grady calls it, “the consuming audience,” is shocked and that comes from naivety, blindness, unquestioning.

AB: That something needs to be legitimized by the masses, means that certain content will always be subjugated within that hierarchy of what has worth. That’s also shocking, when something that people don’t think has worth, is right there, taking up space.



ALS: Shame has a huge part in a learning process. Embarrassment, shame, and ignorance are how we learn, when you are confronted by something that we don't know or understand. At the same time, I am trying to fuse this with the familiar. A lot of my imagery is considered as pop, that it's recognizable. With colour, landscape, the desert, a loaf of bread. But if it's juxtaposed with my body, then it isn't just a loaf of bread. It has multiplicity. Embarrassment and shame present those modes of multiplicity: when you don't feel comfortable, you feel your body, emotions, sensations that are not easy. In the realm of what you are talking about, it is important to be surprised and shocked. Sometimes that has terrible results. People are pre-conditioned towards having warning signs, but that is what is really terrifying about our culture.

The collage Riot, which I think of as a sketch, came out of experiences of showing art. An incident that happened with the collaborative work C.L.U.E. (color location ultimate experience), was not about shock value at all. When it was shown in Arizona, we didn't want to show it without a statement about the xenophobic and fascist immigration laws that have been passed in that state. At the beginning of the video loop is a statement regarding the Arizona's State Bill 1070, which allows the state police to check anyone's ID, [and has been critiqued for racial profiling]. After a contentious dialogue with the museum, we realized that even something like that statement is crossing a perceived line of engagement within the museum.

This incident in Arizona was important to us because, we had filmed in the desert. But if we had

been detained because we didn't have proper ID [to be in the state] the outcome for us would be a lot different than someone who is of a racial minority-or majority.

So Riot is about a lot of things, hopefully what people retain from it is relevant right now. It is a landscape fused with an image from a police deployment of 1000 officers at an Occupy L.A. march in solidarity with workers and unions. I always am concerned about creating images that are topical, not only for entertainment.

AB: Many queer cultural workers are having similar dialogues about the freedoms that we have, which are not available to everyone: the freedom to make work and representations, and move unhindered through certain spaces, like borders.

ALS: W.A.G.E. is also speaking is about economic privilege. Who is in a position to create representation? The privileges that we receive as an arts practitioner, are not broadly understood or articulated. The outside world also sees this in a generalized way that recognizes the play, but not the work, because what we do is not easily recognizable in a white collar or blue-collar work environment.

I've talked to Wu Tsang a lot about these ideas of privilege. This is reflected in the way that artists are treated: We're overly valued when we're asked to come into a [neighborhood] and economically revive a depressed area, and then completely denied economic value within the tax code, [which doesn't recognize] the market value of our work. That condition of precarity is a condition of the

way that we work, and also a part of Occupy as a new international dialogue. The artist has a space of understanding it in a way that a lot of people haven't, till now.

C.L.U.E. was a self-initiated project. It came out of the desire to make the work, which we filmed and worked on for about a year. It's important to note that my projects are not predicated on a schedule or exhibition production relationship, they come out of an innate desire

AB: I was at the HOMEWORK conference on collaboration infrastructures recently, and I said there that since Occupy it's no longer taboo to talk about money. This is something that artists have always dialogued about, whether explicitly or layered into how we produce and participate in culture. Our precarity means that we haven't had the privilege of not talking about it. The Canadian arts infrastructure has included CARFAC since the 1970s, and W.A.G.E is also tackling these concerns in a very timely way.

ALS: It's complicated by the fact that every artist is working in a different way within the economy. A long-term idea of sustainability requires a constitution, insight into the future, and prophesizing. The Canadian system and the development of CARFAC means that people are dedicated to this insight: taking precarity and extending into a way of understanding the future.

If you're thinking about photography not as an art form, but a way of receiving information and way of understanding the world around you, it looks like a

really different art form. Similar to economic structures: If you look at the economy as a capitalist part, you're not looking parts that are structured as micro-economies. A belief in human fragility, that comes out of a more progressive mindset, means that art practice is not always about making work, it's about developing strategies.

AB: It's about re-centring an art practice as an open-ended continuing process that keeps moving. You mentioned this in the interview with A.K. Burns, it's also about being queer and taking parts of culture to re-form them into something more hospitable. Making something fit into your world, rather than trying to fit into someone else's world.

ALS: That's what's interesting about site specificity. To write, make something, show a film somewhere, each place has a completely different relationship. As an artist, you're coming with all of your assumptions and privileges and experiences. The amazing thing is that when people engage with the work, you learn what it means, and how it [becomes defined in relation] to a particular place.

AB: You've called yourself an eco-feminist, and how you're speaking of the idea of place, really speaks to an ecology. Not only in relation to the earth, but thinking of your practice as part of a bigger picture.

ALS: Susan Sontag wrote about an "ecology of images," where she called for a careful accounting of what is happening with image making. The proliferation of billions of images is the opposite of this, and the art world essentially rarefies images



as a product. But she emphasized choice and understanding rather than taking for granted the idea of looking. The condition we're in is to detach from the systems that we're part of—there's been a very successful campaign for a couple centuries to make people do just that.

[There is] an emphasis on dominion; what we have power over, rather than thinking about engagement with power relationships. Whether they are power over the natural world, interpersonal power, socio-economic power.

AB: Some appropriated text appears in your Positive Reinforcement installation that says "Switching Power."

ALS: That image is actually a power station, in Long Island. It says Switching Power, which has this incredibly irony, as an architectural structure. When I do installation, these powerful messages of architecture are a platform. To define and analyze those power relationships is always central to any movement, ism, or revolution. Understanding what is happening around you is a queer place.



Justin Bond's new book, *Tango*, just released with the Feminist Press, is a short story regarding his earlier teen years. Justin tries to delineate what it meant to have Attention Deficit Disorder. Justin's view, especially for queer kids, is that it's not a deficiency in being able to pay attention, because you have to be aware and questioning so much more.

AB: Yes, late capitalism produces that impulse and condemns it at the same time.

ALS: Exactly, it's created the condition. Similarly, I was once asked by a reporter if I was an angry feminist.

AB: Ha, ha! I love that question!

ALS: Of course I am an angry feminist! And then I said, if you're not angry you're a crazy person. If you're unaware, maybe ignorance is bliss, but I don't know what it's like to feel comfortable in this system that we're creating. It comes back to the first question that you asked. The juxtaposition of pleasure and discomfort, or resistance, or being in a state of anxiety are really interesting to me, because you can't look at my installations and think that they're only one thing. Whether ecstatic, pleasurable, or angry, there is so much that I am dealing with in the space, the mood, the show, the curator, that factor into how a piece comes together. I use the pictures to mine my subconscious state.

AB: Being minutely aware. Does making work make it easier to be in the world, or more

comfortable to be in this broader art economy and political system?

ALS: I've always been fascinated by the academic category of art therapy, because I've never officially taught or taken anything in that structure, but what part of art isn't therapy?

AB: Additionally, what part of art making isn't utopic, or hopeful? Making and projecting an idea into the world can both be interpreted in that way.

ALS: People also ask, "are you a feminist?" Well, what would define someone who is not a feminist? There is a whole netherworld of questioning without answers, and art can help confront it. My work helps me confront that absurdity and irony. Especially, *Ridykeulous*, the project that I do with Nicole Eisenman, is the most direct form of questioning that hypocrisy, not only within the outside culture, but also within myself. We're able to be as wrong as everyone around us.

AB: One of those hilariously "wrong" moments happened when you wore the naked boobs shirt for the Community Action Center Q&A in Toronto. That shirt didn't come from dyke culture, but you brought it back in and it became critical.

ALS: I was having a discussion about that shirt at a *Ridykeulous* opening, trying to decide if that shirt in fact was nudity. It's a representation of nudity, but when is a representation too much? In that way, the body is my most useful tool because there are paradoxes and hypocrisies for everyone. Carolee

Schneeman, Martha Rosler, and others have articulated this in various ways: the body is the most prescient tool. The ways that I am using the body is to understand those power dynamics. You are told not to do certain things, but being told and then doing them are two different experiences.

AB: The image of a woman with her legs spread is often recast in your work, similar to wearing the shirt with the image of the boobs on the front. It flips it into a different relationship – where the gaze is coming from and who it is being projected for.

ALS: We are always looking at images in relation to our own bodies. This is about how you turn a body into an inanimate object, especially within photography, that has meaning beyond the photographer. It conditions how the audience thinks about the body, and the pussy. If you re-present something like Courbet's *Origin of the World*, where he was revering the figure, you also have to think about the body stands in for the artist's own body. It wasn't as if he was painting someone else, for me, he wanted to embody that body. I think about the self-embodiment rather than the objectification.

In a text I wrote for the Jack Smith exhibition, I was asking for all bodies to be thought of as penetrable. That is the real dynamic of queer analysis and agency.

AB: Of course, this is how all sensory information comes into our body: through smells, sounds, touching, it all enters us somewhere, however minute.

ALS: Yes, penetration is crucial to looking and understanding all looking, all power dynamics and normative structures. From [theorists] Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Laura Mulvey, Fredrick Jameson, in relation to capitalism—all of these things—the core, in essence, comes down to entering the body.

AB: Thankfully, questions of embodiment are becoming so much more important in current theory. That is formally addressed in your work as collage as an intervention into photography, but also as a gesture of feminist world building, to address the viewer's own embodiment as they approach the work. To close, what happens when the body becomes really small in relation to a vista of collaged, overlapping photographs of other (queer) bodies on the wall?

ALS: The viewer's physicality is important in relation to viewing: I don't want a sensation of overwhelmed, I want there to be a sensation of infinity. That this isn't finished, it's never ending. This is just ending because the wall ends. That wall has nothing to do with the story ending.

Anthea Black is a Canadian artist, art writer and cultural worker. Her work in printmaking, textiles, performance and video is preoccupied with setting a stage for queer collaborative practice and inserting intimate gestures into public spaces. Her recent exhibitions include: *PopSex! Responses to the History of Sexual Science* at the Illingworth Kerr Gallery in Calgary, *Gestures of Resistance* at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, and *QIY: Queer It Yourself – Tools for Survival* at the National Queer Arts Festival in San Francisco. She has written on contemporary art, performance and politics for several publications and her collaborative research with Nicole Burisch is included in new publications *The Craft Reader* (Berg Press) and *Extra/ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press). She has curated *SINCERITY OVERDRIVE*, *SUPER STRING*, and *Echo+Response: lipsynchs and remixes for critical queer geographies*.

A.L. Steiner utilizes constructions of photography, video, installation, collage, collaboration, performance, writing and curatorial work as seductive tropes channeled through the sensibility of a skeptical queer eco-feminist androgynous. Steiner's projects and collaborations are celebratory efforts in dismantling notions of normativity and the sources of constructed truths. Her interventions, sensory advertisements and highly-regarded affects on happenstance have been featured worldwide, subverting and sabotaging the language commonly used to define queer/feminist/lesbian art. She is a collective member of *Chicks on Speed*, co-curator of *Ridykeulous*, co-founder/organizer of *Working Artists* and the *Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)* and collaborates with numerous visual and performing artists. Steiner is currently visiting core faculty at University of Southern California's Roski Master of Fine Arts Program.

Claude Cahun

Eloisa Aquino

Eloisa Aquino was born gay in São Paulo, Brazil. There, she was already making zines and working as a journalist on the side. She then moved to Canada to pursue a master's in media studies at Concordia University, writing and thinking about the food of immigrants. Currently living in her adopted city of Montreal, she works as a translator and runs the micropress B&D Press.

*The series of zines *The Life and Times of Butch Dykes* tells the stories of fantastic women who helped make the world a better place. Their strength resided not only in their extraordinary talent but also in their willingness to challenge and subvert oppressive societal norms. The word "butch" itself has a rich history. Once used to vilify, it has now been embraced as descriptor of masculinity for all genders – and as such it is used also as a compliment. But "butch" is still a controversial term that could potentially lead to awkward conversation.*

From the Series *The Life and Times of Butch Dykes*

CLAUDE CAHUN

ACTS OF REBELLION CAN COME
OFF AS AESTHETIC CHOICES
BUT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT
THEY ARE SIMPLY
STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL.



PHOTOGRAPHER, PERFORMER
AND WRITER **CLAUDE CAHUN**
WAS BORN LUCY SCHWOB
IN FRANCE TO A LITERARY
FAMILY. TORMENTED BY
HER MOTHER'S POOR
MENTAL HEALTH, CAHUN
WAS RAISED BY HER GRAND-
MOTHER AND DEVOTED
HERSELF TO ART AND
BOOKS.



LESBIANISM AND INCEST

THE TEENAGE CAHUN
MET MARCEL MOORE (NÉE
SUZANNE MALHERBE) AT
SCHOOL AND FELL IN LOVE.
THEIR LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP
AND ARTISTIC COLLABORATION
WAS COMPLICATED BY
THE FACT THAT CLAUDE'S DAD
MARRIED MARCEL'S MOM:
THEY BECAME INVOLVED
IN WHAT WAS PERCEIVED
AS A DOUBLE TABOO.

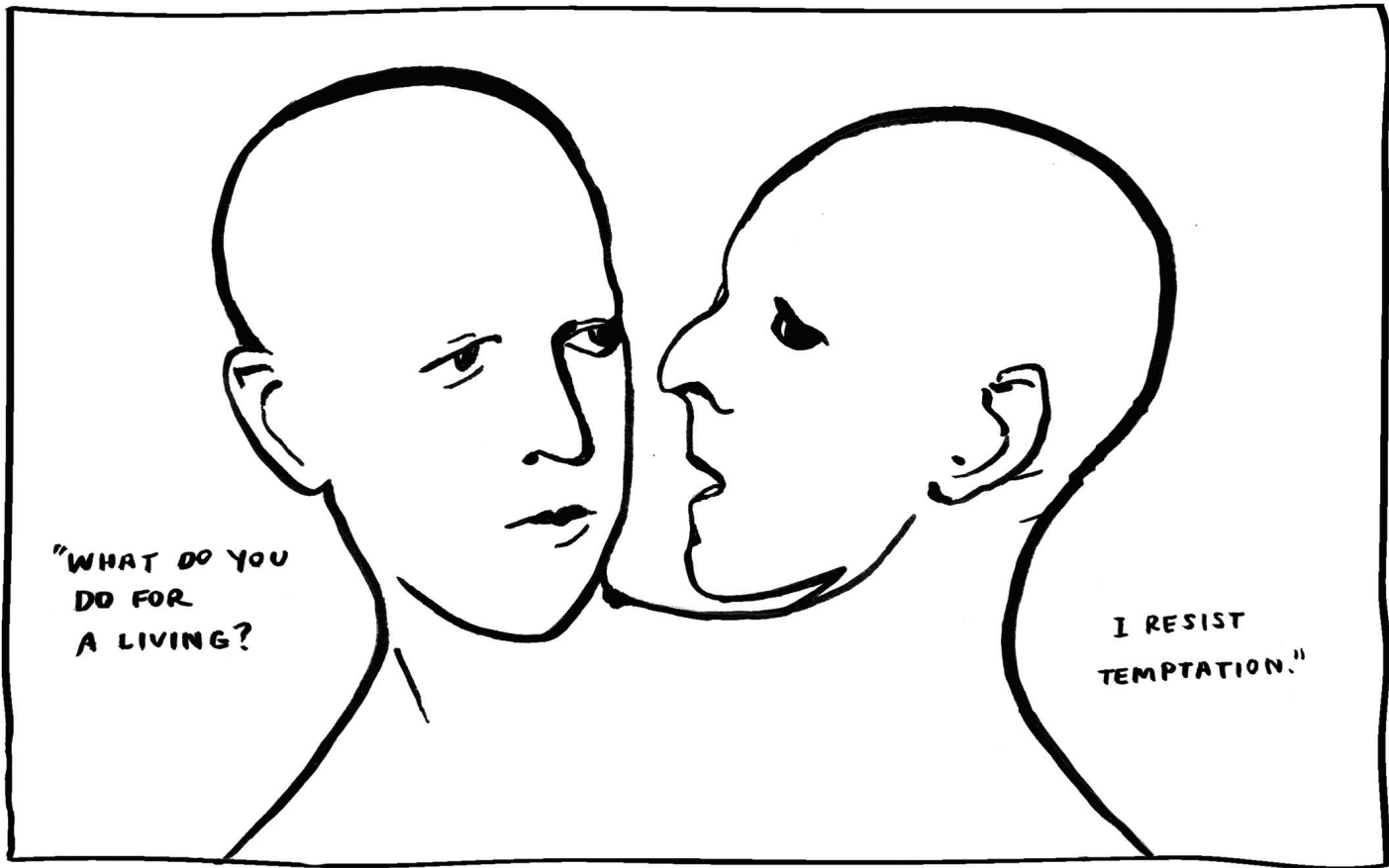
THIS IS MARCEL TAKING
THE PHOTO →



IT WAS FASHIONABLE FOR
WOMEN TO DRESS MASCULINE
IN THE LIBERAL 20s AND 30s.
CATHY SEEMED DRIVEN
NOT BY TREND BUT RATHER
BY A STRONG DESIRE TO
EXPRESS HER NON-CONFORMISM
THROUGH SEXUAL AMBIGUITY,
GENDER CONFUSION AND
IDENTITY FLUIDITY.



"BENEATH THIS MASK,
ANOTHER MASK, I'LL NEVER
FINISH LIFTING OFF
ALL THESE FACES."



"WHAT DO YOU
DO FOR
A LIVING?"

I RESIST
TEMPTATION."



THE ENIGMATIC PHOTOGRAPHER
AND FRIEND OF SURREALISTS
MOVED TO *The Farm*,
with *No Name* ON
JERSEY ISLAND. THERE,
ONE OF HER FAVORITE
ACTIVITIES WAS TO BE LED
BLINDFOLDED BY HER CAT,
WITH A LEASH, TO WHEREVER
HE WOULD TAKE HER.

**CLAUDE AND MARCEL
DISTRIBUTED ANTI-NAZI
PROPAGANDA DURING THE
WAR AND WERE ARRESTED
BY THE GESTAPO. THEY WERE
SENTENCED TO DEATH BUT
ESCAPED EXECUTION. THEY
REMAINED IN PRISON UNTIL
LIBERATION - THE EXPERIENCE
TRAUMATIZED THEM FOR LIFE.**





"I IS
ANOTHER
—AND ALWAYS
MULTIPLE."

Crippling Community: New Meanings of Disability and Community

Eliza Chandler

As a noticeably disabled “walkie” who frequently traverses the streets of my city, Toronto, I have a strong sense that ableist logic dominates and circulates (Clare, 2007, p. 127). This sense comes from the ever-present possibility, or indeed actuality, of being stared at, avoided, or commented upon when I am in every crevasse of public culture. This sense also comes from my knowledge that all noticeably disabled people I know share similar experiences. My sense that ableism floods dominant culture is further secured every time I notice stairs to a building without an accompanying ramp or elevator, with every heavy door I struggle to open, and every time I hear words like “crazy” or “lame” lazily appear in our everyday parlance. As someone working in the discipline of disability studies, I have a strong sense that disability is discursively produced through ableist logic under the “regime of truth,” wherein discrimination against disabled people makes sense; it is collectively tolerated and collectively responded to, if at all, with apathy (Foucault, 1980).

As a disabled person who embodies disability with a mixture of pride and shame (Chandler, 2010), who experiences disability as communally binding, culturally important, and even a desired way of living, I wish to tell stories that are not only of this flavour—stories flecked with discrimination, violence, and fear, stories in which disability is culturally produced as nothing more or less than a problem in need of solution—though there are many. Rather, I am concerned with how disability can be understood differently, specifically, how disability can be taken up as communally binding and desirable, and how communities bound together by disability—crip communities—can “crip” community. I use “crip community” to refer to any time that community is enacted through mutual motivation or desire to dwell with disability, a desire which is antagonistic to the normative desire to cure or kill disability. In order to think about how crip community can “crip”[1] community, I use crip as a verb. To crip is to open up desire for what disability disrupts (Fritsch, forthcoming).

As I have said, my research takes interest in how disability is done differently, communally. However, I recognize that crip communities do not, cannot transcend ableism. As ableist logic is pervasive, we cannot transcend the normative terrain in which ableism circulates. Crip communities, rather, occur within normative culture, “unworking” and reworking our understandings of community and disability in their enactments (Nancy as cited in Walcott, 2003). Therefore, in order to think about the possibilities (and also limits) for embodying crip identities and recognizing crip communities, I must first explore how we normatively understand disability and the normative cultural terrain wherein crip communities are enacted. I say this in tune with Stuart Hall, who urges that thinking about culture is absolutely central for crafting out political identities. For culture, he says, “constitutes the terrain for producing identity, for producing social subjects” (1997, p. 291).

Thinking with Katherine McKittrick, who uses “geography” to refer to “space, place and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations” (2006, p. x), I attend to the normative places and spaces we find ourselves in, or, as Hall puts it, to the terrain. In my dissertation research, I follow McKittrick’s use of geography in order to think through the “normative geography” of disabled people and people of the African diaspora; a geography which is most often one of containment, containing disabled and racialized bodies, as well as our cultural understandings of those bodies (2006, p. x).[2] People of the African diaspora and disabled people are “analogous” for the way that we both relate to our national “home” from the “contradictory social position

of belonging and not” (Wittgenstein, as cited in Bannet, 1997, p. 655; Walcott, 2008). From this position of not belonging, diaspora and disabled people enact communities of alterity in which their identities can mean, and they can belong, differently. Diaspora and disabled people are also analogous in that the geography in which they do belong within the nation-state is often one of containment. These geographic containers—historical sites, such as slave ships, plantations, and asylums, as well as contemporary sites, such as institutions, prisons, government housing, ghettoized neighbourhoods, and the Canadian North, all of which contain racialized, disabled, and racialized disabled people—work to ensure that all other spaces are geographies of normativity—places without slaves, without “the insane”: geographies of safety. More than this, and again following McKittrick, such normative geographies are “infused with ways of knowing” or interpreting the humanity of those who are geographically contained in such spaces (2006, p. x); this “knowing” is enforced as such cultural containers become naturalized as the rightful place of belonging for disabled and racialized people within the nation-state.

McKittrick’s entanglement of humanness and geography begs us to attend to how racialized and disabled people’s placement in such geographic containers is dependent upon a particular understanding of their humanness, namely the denial of it. That disability is culturally understood as the denial of humanity is also discursively evident and discursively perpetuated. Person-first language (“people with disabilities”) is used by the Canadian government to refer to “us,” and bureaucratically

perpetuated as the nomenclature of political correctness. "People with disabilities" is a phrase that is meant to distinguish itself from, as Tanya Titchkosky writes, the "relentless parade of insults" historically associated with the language of disability (2000, p. 128). Following Titchkosky, we can see that disability is understood as a condition that prevents, or at least significantly jeopardizes, one's recognition as human and, therefore, we must remove "disability" as far away from "people" as possible. "Disability" and "people" become separated by a "with"; we are people despite our disabilities. Person-first language, then, makes people.

Ableism, to be sure, is pervasive. And although stories of how ableism is felt and how it persists are not necessarily the ones I want to tell, I believe that these are the stories with which we must begin. Again, I follow Hall (1997) when he says that we cannot think about how identities are constituted without thinking about how social subjects are represented. We know that disability is represented in a myriad of ways and by a myriad of social functions as a problem in need of a solution. And I can tell you as a disabled person who is communally connected to other disabled people, that disability is not experienced as a problem, by everyone, all of the time. To recognize that my experience of disability does not match its representation is, first of all, likely not surprising, but also not reason for me to disengage with how my embodiment is represented. As Hall says, "culture lays the terrain in which identities are formed" (1997, p. 291). And, given that ableism informs our cultural sensibility, the pronouncement or arrival of disability identities and the enactment of crip

communities with disability as their binding tie, is not yet recognized as sensible (Titchkosky, 2002).

Disability identities and crip communities are formed despite of or maybe because of disability's pervasive cultural understanding as a condition to be cured or killed.[3] In the beginning of this article, I cited my experience on the streets as one of the ways that I strongly sense or, I would even hazard, that I "know" that ableism circulates. My experience is also one of the ways that I sense/"know" that disability is done differently, communally. I experience crip community in different ways, in different places, and with different people. But for this article, as I do in my research, I wish to focus on how crip community is formed through unstructured enactments. I attend to the emergence and experience of community through enactments for I believe that such attention explicates how crip community "crips" community. This is to say that rather than being tied to a structure, institution, or common identity, crip communities are structured by and through communal enactments. In other words, they happen anytime people come together through the common desire to dwell with disability. In this way, crip community can be enacted anytime, in any place, with anyone, disabled or not.[4]

In the preface to his book, *Community*, Zygmunt Bauman writes, "Out there, on the streets, all sorts of dangers lie in ambush; we have to be alert when we go out, watch whom we are talking to and who talks to us, be on the look-out every minute" (2000, pp. 1-2). In the space of the streets, enactments of disability as violence lie in ambush. The geographies of the street may feel insecure,

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And I can tell you as a disabled person who is communally connected to other disabled people, that disability is not experienced as a problem, by everyone, all of the time.

unsteady, hostile, and even unfamiliar. In these inhospitable spaces, I may feel unwelcomed, undesired, uncommon. I expect these enactments of disability as violence, but I don't know when or where or how they will occur, and, in this sense, they "lie in ambush." Because being on "alert," that is, expecting the enactment of the normative meaning of disability, feels so familiar, when disability is enacted otherwise, when I feel that people are drawn to me by a desire to dwell with disability, it feels different. In these communal enactments, I feel safe; I feel comfortable; I feel desired; I feel secure, I feel differently from how I commonly feel when I am in the normative terrain, whether or not I am being ambushed or anticipating being ambushed by a normative enactment of disability.

Recall my earlier description of the verb "to crip": to open up desire for what disability disrupts. Crip communities disrupt the assumption that we can "know," unquestionably, who our communal members are, and therefore, who they are not. We assume that communities are bound by members who share the same or similar identities. However, the unpredictable and ever-shifting character of disability requires us to consider its identity as also instable. As Hall asserts, "one thing identity does not signal is a 'stable core' of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change" (1996, p. 1). In crip community, one member may experience their disability as progressing or as a "becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), an ever-shifting embodiment that allows them to relate to their community and their communal others in different, never stable ways. Another may not currently be disabled, or currently be disabled in a particular way, and

become disabled, or become disabled differently, either with time or through an accident. Another may have a disability that comes to them one day or moment, and leaves the next, ever-returning and ever-leaving. Still, another may be disabled and not be easily identifiable as such. And in community motivated by a desire for disability, disability can be an "inter-subjective experience" that is, enacted between two members, one disabled the other not, owned by no one, cradled by both (Weiss, 2008, p. 4). Disability teaches us that just as embodiments shift, so, too, do our communal experiences and relations.

Ableist logic circulates, it is pervasive within the normative terrain, and traversing this terrain through an embodiment that is so often recognized as a problem in need of solution can be uncomfortable, even dangerous. However, as poet Dionne Brand tells us, "different geographic stories can be told," and through them, we can achieve a different "sense of space" (Brand quoted in McKittrick, 2006, p. xxvii). I propose that crip communities, as we make them, are spaces in which we can create and perpetuate new stories of disability and new ways for disability to matter. More than this, attending to the ways that crip communities "crip" community, and to be open to that which disability disrupts, can unwork and rework how we 'know' community and how we understand communal structures beyond and against iterations of them as assuredly knowable, predictable, identifiable, or constant. Instead, we can imagine community as fleeting, boundless, and productive. Crip communities, unstable as they are, can open us up to new ways of understanding what it is to be crip and what it is to be in community.

End Notes:

[1] My use of the word “crip” extends from disability studies scholar Robert McRuer’s articulation of “crip theory,” which, for him, allows for the creation of a new world in which crip and queer identities are central (2006).

[2] I regret that I don’t have the space now to go into this intricate intersection. But briefly, following Wittgenstein, I think about how these geographies are analogous. Wittgenstein writes, “Analogy is not just an image, an extended simile, or the juxtaposition of objects of comparison” (1997, p. 655). Rather, in a Wittgensteinian sense, “analogy” imagines both the objects and the terms of the comparison to be unstable, in constant flux (1997, p. 655). Given that, and as I hope to demonstrate later, crip identities as well as what McRuer (2011) has recently termed “cripistemologies” (used to refer to the ways we know, talk about knowing, and do disabled ontologies/disability in people), are unstable. Given that I imagine disability and diaspora identities and communities to be in constant flux, as is my developing work comparing disability and diaspora identities and communities, I think “analogy,” in this sense, is quite fitting.

[3] This article focuses on how disability communities are formed in the midst of a culture in which disability is not desired. For writing on how diaspora communities are similarly formed in subaltern spaces, providing sites of belongingness for racialized people in the midst of a culture in which immigrants are not desired, please see: Mercer, K. (1994). *Welcome to the jungle: New positions in Black cultural studies*. London: Routledge; and Walcott, R. (2003). *Black like who? Writing black Canada*. Toronto, Insomniac Press.

[4] In my attention to communal enactments I mean to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. This is how I experience community (as one who desires and therefore probably seeks out or interprets in favour of this experience), not how I expect everyone does or should.

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I can't decide which dyke march to go to. #whitelezproblems #canqueer #lgbt #dykemarch

Which jean cut offs look best with this black t-shirt? #whitelezproblems #decisionsdecisions #lgbt #canqueer

My girlfriend and i keep mixing up our divas. #whitelezproblem #lgbt #canqueer #ew

My crewneck is covered in cat hair. #whitelezproblems #canqueer #lgbt

Softball sunburns. #whitelezproblems #lgbt #canqueer

The Real L Word aired over 12 hours ago and I can't find it online. #whitelezproblems #effchaiken #lgbt

I hate the fall. Nothing is as comfortable as Birkenstocks. #whitelezproblems #brrr #sensiblesandals

I wish my hands were longer. I wish I had more hand. #whitelezproblems #rubdowns #canqueer

Racially insensitive costumes always ruin my Halloween. #whitelezproblems #sensitive #lgbt #CanQueer

You should never question my innate ability to fit ikea boxes perfectly in my car. #whitelezproblems #börg

Is this fanny pack butch enough? #whitelezproblems #summerissues #lgbt #canqueer

Pride lines. #whiteLlezproblems

Which side of my head should I shave? #whitelezproblems #PrideCut #decisions #lgbt #canqueer

I hope this looks effortless. #whitelezproblems #lgbt #canqueer

All the cute girls on fixies are straight. #whitelezproblems #lgbt #canqueer #bike

99 problems

@WhiteLezProblems

#whitelezproblems was inspired by other similar blogs and Twitter accounts such as #whitegirlproblems and #firstworldproblems. These sites focus on the problems of privilege by pointing to the triviality of them. While both of these sites are specific to the difficulties of living in the developed world, #whitelezproblems more narrowly articulates the “problems” of privileged queers.

I chose to focus specifically on the problems of white queer women because, well, that’s who I am and what I know. The content of #whitelezproblems are generally thoughts or complaints I’ve had or even vocalized and quickly felt guilty about. However, I noticed many of them were more than just First World problems, but instead were specific to my community in many ways. Most of the Twitter followers are also queers because, as with other similar sites, the humour comes from being in on the joke.

I took a satirical approach to #whitelezproblems because I think it makes the point more obvious. As a member of a community, one tends to understand the stereotypes and signifiers of membership. I am making this assumption about those who follow #whitelezproblems. I find this method also creates a dialogue with the community about themselves. Too often, as members of a marginalized group, we perceive ourselves as experiencing oppression constantly and equally to everyone within our community. I want #whitelezproblems to point to the intersecting nature of oppression and to encourage queers like myself to acknowledge our privileges.

WhiteLezProblems is inspired by other similar blogs, but more narrowly articulates the “problems” of privileged queers.



« Issue de secours : à vous les militants »

Adleen Crapo

J'ai longtemps réfléchi au sujet de cette rédaction et à ce que je pourrais apporter au numéro de No More Potlucks intitulé « Issue. » Issue, en anglais, est un mot chargé de signification. Il aurait été chose simple de commenter « issue » en anglais, de trouver des moyens pour faire parler ce terme. Pourtant, « issue » n'est pas moins complexe en français. Le but de cet essai est de faire précisément ça, d'arriver à une lecture, un commentaire bilingue sur le terme « issu/e », avec le désir (peut-être naïf) de comprendre son sens utopique, un sens à la fois chimérique et plein d'espoir. Je m'adresse surtout aux militants francophones ou bilingues vivant dans un contexte anglophone.

On entend souvent parler d' « issues », que ce soit les angoisses, les complexes psychologiques des gens, ou bien les problèmes d'actualité les plus urgents. Je me sens de plus en plus hors de ce contexte pop-psychologique où l'on n'hésite rarement à évoquer ses “issues” dans les discussions personnelles les plus banales. Comme c'est

fatigant, entendre le monde parler de ses « issues »! Dans un contexte anglophone, il est parfois facile d'oublier que pour les francophones, il y a toujours la possibilité de se pencher sur les multiples et positives significations d'un mot qui couvre deux contextes. Commenter « issu/e » du point de vue bilingue nous permettra de retrouver le sens utopique d'un mot devenu banal en anglais.

En tant qu'historienne, je ne peux voir un mot sans penser à ses racines, et par la suite à la relation entre son sens historique et sa signification actuelle. En tant que personne bilingue, je ne peux voir un mot à l'origine partagée sans penser à son deuxième sens, c'est-à-dire sa signification dans l'autre langue officielle. Le mot « issue » n'est pas une exception. Sans trop me pencher sur la définition trouvée dans le dictionnaire, je voudrais parler de comment les premiers lexiques de la langue française évoquent les possibilités utopiques qui sont présentes lorsqu'on parle d'un « issu/e ».

« Issu », du moyen français « issir », possède un double sens (ou même deux sens contrariés) en français, ce qui rend le terme particulièrement passionnant. Il indique à la fois une origine : « [v] enu, descendu d'une personne, ou d'une race » et des directions, indications, et conseils pour l'avenir : « lieu par où l'on sort ». Par conséquent, « issu/e » nous donnent une indication d'où nous sommes venu/e/s, en nous indiquant où nous pouvons aller dans nos projets. Il a également le sens de « [m]oyen, expédient pour sortir d'une affaire ». Il est notre « sortie de secours », nous offrant une possibilité d'évasion dans les pires cas. Mais bien qu'il ait ce sens quand même pessimiste, ce mot évoque quand même la possibilité d'un « succès, fin, événement ». Il faut avouer que ce dernier sens a disparu il y a bien longtemps. Pourtant, on ne peut ignorer que cette signification continue de former nos impressions de son potentiel. Une « issue », c'est aussi la fin espérée de nos efforts actuels, de nos efforts de militant. Chaque mouvement et chaque personne a ses propres « issues », cela est une évidence. Mais chaque personne, chaque militant a aussi la possibilité d'une « issue », non seulement de secours, mais aussi de « succès ». Quand on est militant/e, les moments de succès, où l'on aboutit à cette fin que nous avons tant désirée et pour laquelle nous avons lutté, sont rares. Il faut donc garder le souvenir de ce qui est possible, en s'en tenant aux sens multiples d' « issue ».

Il est facile de nous retrouver dans notre contexte normal, privés du désir d'agir par la banalité du quotidien. L'acte de commenter (ou de recommander) un mot comme « issue », devenu tellement ordinaire en anglais, nous permet de transformer

notre contexte anglophone en contexte utopique, même si cela ne dure que quelques instants. Cette transformation du quotidien, à son tour, nous permettra de renouveler notre engagement, de nous changer d'idées.

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no more potlucks