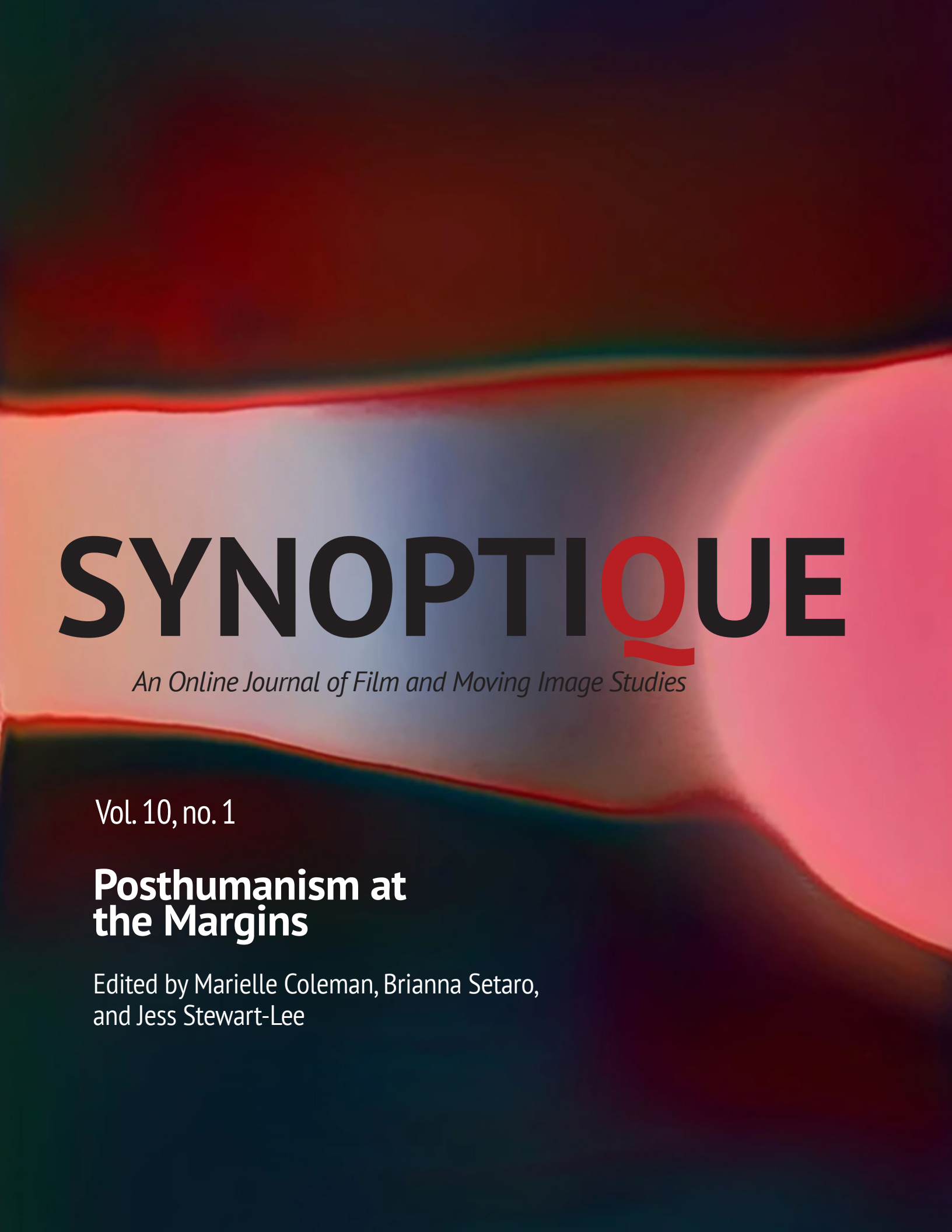

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Posthumanism at the Margins

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Morphing the Dining Room, Bernice Liu, @spimespimespime

Posthumanism at the Margins

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INTRODUCTION

Posthumanism at the Margins

BRIANNA SETARO AND JESS STEWART-LEE

This special issue of *Synoptique* looks to reassess and rethink the notion of "moving beyond" the "human," identifying the limitations of the posthuman movement in critical academic discourse—what we are moving away from, who is permitted to be seen as posthuman, what a posthuman world may entail—as well as reframing and renegotiating the normative, hierarchical configurations of the "human" that we wish to transcend (Jackson 2015). During the editorial process, we wrestled with how to best visualize the posthumanist movement. We asked ourselves: what kind of image can support and consolidate such an expansive mapping of evolving perspectives, applications, and pathways? Captivated by the enigmatic and fluid nature of their art, we were immediately drawn to Hong Kong-based artist Spime's work, which manipulates temporal and spatial dimensions (https://theartling.com/en/artist/spime/). Featured on this issue's cover page, "Morphing the Dining Room" evokes an aura of transcendence through the interaction and intersection of colors and lines which bleed into one another. Its title, too, speaks to the idea of changing and developing the normative and known. These blurred lines emerge from the margins, collectively moving towards a vast unknown and renegotiating their position in an indeterminate dimension of visions, disruptions, and pathways.

We began this project with the desire to pick apart the expansive nature of the term posthuman, and struggled to produce a contained, working taxonomy. Through works such as Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Amy Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles' *Touchstones for Deterritorializing Socioecological Learning: The Anthropocene, Posthumanism and Common Worlds As Creative Milieux*, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's "Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism," we encountered a number of definitions and permutations ranging from a descriptor for the technological afterlife of the "human" to a critical look at ways of being which move beyond traditional Western frameworks. The engagement with posthumanism which appears in this issue expresses and embodies an equally ubiquitous framework. It is for this reason that we have adopted an alternative structure for this special issue of *Synoptique*. Rather than assembling pieces into discreet, determined categories, we have chosen to embrace a posthuman amorphousness, mapping the posthumanist movement's points of tension through a nonhierarchical configuration of perspectives and approaches that constantly converge in new and exciting ways.

Rooted in this issue's pursuit of centering marginalized perspectives and departures from Western notions of linear time, we open with an exploration of Inuit futurism with Sarah Best's "Time-Diffraction Stories: Inuit *Qaujimajatuqan-*

git and Temporal Sovereignty in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* and *Split Tooth*." Expanding upon the work of posthumanist scholar Karen Barad, Best engages with temporal disruptions as decolonial knowledge production through a critical examination of Inuit films. Meanwhile, Geistė Marija Kinčinaitytė's video essay, *The Pool*, addresses ontological reconfigurations of the "human" through the exploration of affective landscapes as modes of being and encounters with Otherness. With a focus on the arrivant, Kincinaityte's sweeping landscapes and rigorous study of space question our relationship to nature and the land we live on.

Claire Henry's "Queer Posthumanism Through the Wachowskis" furthers this concept of interconnectedness, turning inward toward an examination of the bounds of humanity and personhood and the imposed societal structures which demarcate the self from the Other. Drawing together a multitude of notable posthumanist thinkers and Queer theorists, Henry upends traditional structures of family and individuality through a Queer posthumanist look at *Sense8* and *Cloud Atlas*.

Turning to the digital, Kellie Lu brings a new perspective on AI art through "Sideways Age," a short story co-written with the AI Cocreator. By weaving the question of digital ethics into both the story and the metanarrative of its writing process, Lu questions the nature of authorship and questions who writes our stories when the storyteller is far from human. In light of recent discourse around Artificial Intelligence over authorship and human involvement in AI art and writing, Lu's work is cuttingly relevant in its questions and the issues it raises in our current age.

With such questions of humanity in mind, we turn next to Molly Joyce and Maya Smira's *The End*, which dwells on loss and endings as an ultimate framework through which to explore the (post-)human. With long, gestural shots of entwined limbs lit by the glaring sun, "The End" literally sheds light on disability and posthumanist questions of what we lose when we lose ourselves.

In structuring this issue, we sought out complimentary concepts or ideas which might clash and, upon impact, create a spark of something new. Thus, we end on Mark Sloane Ebbay's thought piece "Beneath *Barelife*: *Still-Birth*, Slow Cinema, and the Camera" and Rai Terry's *Entering the *Beyond*. Ebbay's piece draws on the films of Lav Diaz to parse the experience of Filipino diaspora and Philippine agency in the face of specifically American colonialism. By proposing a state of still-birth in response to Giorgio Agamben's *bare-life*, Ebbay lingers on Diaz' particular style and politics to develop a theory of contemporary posthuman existence.

Where Ebbay grapples with the struggle for agency in Filipino cinema, Terry explores the thrumming, desirous nature of Black joy in the face of ongoing and historical colonial oppression. By collating a collage of clips depicting the Black ecstatic, Terry begins at the human and takes us beyond into a posthuman that is not beholden to colonial histories or documentation. By drawing on archival footage, Terry questions the role of the archive in cultivating our Western understanding of the human and instead turns to the rapturous Other and its alternative mode of keeping time.

These new approaches to posthumanism are explored further in this issue's book review section. With Thomas Gow's review of *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, we explore Indigenous resurgence as a theory and interdisciplinary approach to the radical decentering of traditional Western paradigms, specifically as it relates to matters of "political economy, gender and sexuality, pedagogy, and aesthetics." Aparajita De expands upon the necessity to decolonize and disrupt Eurocentric critical theories in her review of *The Digital Black Atlantic*, edited by Kelly Baker Josephs and Roopika Risam. As De explains, the essays within this volume foreground conversations on the "intersections of diaspora studies, more specifically black and African diasporas and their connections with digital humanities," (re) mapping the construction of Blackness in the diaspora through negotiations on memory, crossings, relations, and their eventual becomings.

Shania Perera continues this conversation in her review of Moya Bailey's *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. This collection of essays reveals the discursive approaches taken to online digital resistance, highlighting "how black women utilize digital media to amplify their voices amid vitriol from a white, cisgender and heteronormative majority". We end this book review section with a reflection on queer European cinema through Olive Zeynep Kartal's review of editor Leanne Dawson's *Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space*. As Kartal suggests, the essays in this collection engage with various spatial and temporal approaches to queer identity. These alternative approaches, which position queerness as central to their critical frameworks, reveal and offer up "new notions of citizenship and belonging".

By collating this collection of discursive works, we hoped to allude to the various fields of thought within posthumanism and to generate a traversal through the branching possibilities for what the posthuman can be. Rather than defining a singular understanding of this term, we sought to draw on writers and artists whose idea of the posthuman was as varied as their work. We hope that this issue inspires as much thought within its pages for you as it did for us.

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MOVEMENTS

Peer-Reviewed Article

Time-Diffraction Stories:

Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* and Temporal Sovereignty in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* and *Split Tooth*

SARAH BEST

Within the contemporary Western context, progress and development are typically associated with the forward motion of time, the linear movement from past to future. While most settlers take this unilinear temporal framework for granted, its assumed universality becomes problematic when it results in the silencing and erasure of those who do not subscribe to such normative frameworks—those who have other ways of conceptualizing time and memory. In particular, Indigenous communities in North America are often excluded from these linear metanarratives of modern progress, as their maintenance of traditional ways of being and knowing are associated with a static past or bygone eras within the popular imagination. As such, Indigenous peoples within the West have typically been expected to either assimilate into dominant cultural and temporal frameworks, or be left behind by the forward march of progress. However, as many Indigenous peoples know, tradition is itself inherently modern, and the divisions colonial settlers attempt to enforce between past, present and future are not as definitive as one might assume. Likewise, the indeterminate nature of time is also recognized in critical and philosophical posthumanism, relatively new academic fields whose emerging theories of temporality overlap with Indigenous concepts of time in that they are post-dualistic and post-anthropocentric. Along with Indigenous temporalities, posthuman understandings of time undo problematic traditional/modern binaries and undermine the privileged position attributed to human beings in time and space—particularly the privileging of *certain kinds of humans* (white, male, Euro-Western, Christian) on which Enlightenment humanism's notion of rational Man is built.

In this article, I engage specifically with two Inuit texts that challenge the universality of settler progress by exploring different ways of being in and moving through time: Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc.'s *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006), which is the final film in the *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* trilogy, and Tanya Tagaq's written work *Split Tooth* (2018). Centring on themes of shamanism and animistic cosmologies, these texts foreground Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*, or Inuit traditional knowledge, as a means of learning to live (and die) in a world composed of diverse human and more-than-human agencies. Drawing from scholarship in Indigenous studies as well as posthumanism and its related field of new materialism, this article examines how both of these texts can be considered to be what the posthumanist scholar Karen Barad (2017b) calls "time-diffraction stories," as they upset colonial settler understandings of space and time in their deconstruc-

tion of some of the hierarchical oppositions on which Western modernity rests, including the queering of binaries like traditional/modern, human/nonhuman, linear/non-linear, absence/presence and material/spiritual. Insofar as the temporal is linked with the material, the spatial, and the spiritual within Indigenous ontologies, the challenge *Journals* and *Split Tooth* pose to settler temporal domination is also a challenge to the colonial mastery of Inuit bodies, lands, and spirits. Temporal sovereignty is fundamentally intertwined with bodily and spatial sovereignty, and the embodied remembering that Isuma and Tagaq foster in their texts allows for the colonial past to be re-enacted and re-written in the present, so that cultural healing and resurgence may occur through a *continuity with* rather than a *severing from* the past. By encouraging dialogue between *Qaujimajatuqangit* and posthumanist theories of temporality, material agency and embodiment, I attempt to show how *Journals* and *Split Tooth* assert an Inuit temporal sovereignty that ultimately counters and moves beyond settler heteropatriarchal structures and the ongoing colonial violence they enact.

Posthumanism and Indigenous Knowledges

Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* is defined by Inuit literature studies scholar Keavy Martin as "what the Inuit have known for a very long time" and "the Inuit way of doing things: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit Society" (Martin 2012, 3). This traditional knowledge includes interconnected relationships with the land and its many human and nonhuman inhabitants, deeply rooted connections with ancestors and other spiritual beings, and ethical attitudes based on principles of humility, community, and reciprocity. Other-than-human beings such as animals, spirits, and features of the landscape are considered to be persons in their own right, who act in accordance with their own will and agency. As harsh Arctic conditions mean that the Inuit traditionally relied on animals in order to survive, treating them with respect is of utmost importance—a respect made evident in Isuma's *Journals* through the various taboos the community strives to uphold. Moreover, the fundamental interconnectedness of humans and other-than-humans is further emphasized in Tagaq's *Split Tooth*, especially through the Inuit concept of *sila*. *Sila* is generally taken to mean wind, sky, or weather, but also refers to one's breath or soul, indicating how life is intimately tied to the environment (Martin 2012; Merkur 1983). Although never named explicitly in Tagaq's work, this concept is woven throughout the text in the often-reoccurring phrase "Ice in Lung," which captures the profound, embodied relationship between human beings and the icy tundra on which they live. Humans breathe in the more-than-human environment, just as it too breathes them in and out.

The way in which Inuit wisdom is both embodied and embedded in the earth can be understood through Yellowknives Dene thinker Glen Coulthard's (2014) concept of "grounded normativity"—ethical frameworks that are created through place-based practices and associated knowledges. Building on Coulthard's theory, Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson explains that grounded normativity is a "process-centered" mode of living, where Indigenous ways of life come from deep-

ly rooted connections to place, where "place includes land and waters, plants and animals, and the spirit world—a peopled cosmos of influencing powers" (2017, 22). Within the Inuit context, the frozen tundra of the Arctic and the multiplicity of relations contained within it are foundational to *Qaujimajatuqangit*.

As some scholars have pointed out (Anderson 2020; Rosiek, Snyder & Pratt 2020; Sundberg 2014), there is an overlap between Indigenous knowledges and posthumanist theory, which is also interested in inhuman/nonhuman relationships and relational subjectivity. Thus, while my central focus is on Inuit and other Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in this article, I also look to posthumanism and its related discourse of new materialism as additional theoretical frameworks for unpacking *Journals* and *Split Tooth*, as such theories can offer a generative foundation for analysis when put into dialogue with Indigenous studies.

Critical or philosophical posthumanism is a multidisciplinary theory arising from the reaction against Enlightenment humanism's contention that the human individual is a bounded, rational subject separate from the surrounding environment. According to the philosopher Francesca Ferrando (2019), posthumanist theory is "post-dualistic" and "post-anthropocentric" in that it destabilizes the many normative binaries central to Western modernity, such as those of self/other, human/nonhuman, and nature/culture, among others, and strives to remove human beings from the ontological centre so that they may be reinserted into a wider meshwork of being. Rosi Braidotti defines the posthuman subject "within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity," and "as embodied and embedded, interconnected with the human and non-human communities" (Braidotti 2013, 49). Similarly, within the context of new materialism, a feminist theory grounded in the rejection of any ontological separation between humans and the surrounding material world, the boundaries between subject and object, discursive and material, mind and body are revealed to be false, and any "transcendental grounds" for human consciousness are rejected (Braidotti 2013, 66), as the human beings are but one kind of actor within a vast network of vibrant material agency (see also Bennett 2010).

Insofar as posthumanism and new materialism counter modern assumptions that the bounded human subject stands apart from and above the world, these relatively recent theories appear to share a common philosophy with aspects of Indigenous knowledges. Like posthumanism, Indigenous knowledges "provide a long-tested alternative to Western humanism" as they are rooted in "more-than-human" philosophies that recognize humanity as necessarily continuous with and inseparable from the natural world (Bignall, Hemming & Rigney 2016, 457). However, there are also many notable differences between Indigenous traditional knowledges and Western posthumanism, and potential issues arise when aligning the two frameworks. Notably, the introduction of posthumanism into discussions of Indigenous ontologies risks the failure to take Indigenous knowledges seriously in their own right as a means of living with and relating to nonhuman agencies that existed millennia prior to posthumanism's inception (Bignall, Hemming & Rigney 2016, 457). Francesca Ferrando describes posthumanism as a "transhistor-

ical attitude" that is not limited to the recent academic movement (2019, 22), but this understanding disregards the fact that Indigenous cultures never subscribed to humanist worldviews to begin with, and risks erasing the particularities of Indigenous thought in the interest of a universalizing framework.

Indeed, while Indigenous scholars such as Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) (2015), Zoe Todd (Métis/Otipemisiwak) (2016) and Vanessa Watts (Mohawk and Anishinaabe) (2013) contend that there is some overlap between Indigenous knowledges and posthumanism, a major issue within posthumanist theory is that Indigenous thinkers are perpetually excluded from academic discourse, and their ancient knowledge systems are rarely referenced or credited. Todd notes that these Euro-Western "discoveries" within posthumanism and its related disciplines are "actually things that Indigenous thinkers have known for millennia," and that the failure to recognize this is merely another way in which Indigenous voices and bodies are erased from academia (Todd 2016, 8). Moreover, although posthumanism and similar approaches have the potential of working alongside Indigenous knowledges in that they are both concerned with more-than-human agency, Watts posits that the interpretation of Indigenous traditions through Western frameworks allows non-Indigenous peoples to "keep control over what agency is and how it is dispersed in the hands of humans" (Watts 2013, 26). The pervasive tendency within academia to filter Indigenous stories and knowledges through Western epistemologies and concepts is a major reason why scholars such as Vincent Clement (2019) take issue with the notion of the "postcolonial"—one must only look to the epistemic violence that arises from the silencing of Indigenous voices within the academy to see the perpetuation of colonialism within the present. The temporal implications of postcolonialism and the fallacy of colonialism as something that belongs only to the past has led certain scholars to turn their attention instead towards decolonization (Singh 2018) or what Simone Bignall terms the "excolonial" in referring to an always yet to come idyllic future community that has been able to "exit-from-colonialism" while nonetheless recognizing the formative role of colonizing processes in shaping its history (Bignall 2014, 342).

Furthermore, in addition to posthumanist scholars who neglect to account for Indigenous knowledges and contributions within academia, it is also important to note that certain theories and contributions that fall under the broad umbrella of "posthumanism" may clash with or exclude Indigenous ways of being and knowing. For instance, N. Katherine Hayles's (2017) theory of "cognitive assemblages" that divides phenomena into the categories of "cognizers" and "non-cognizers" rejects Indigenous animistic perspectives that attribute agency and intentionality to environmental forces like wind, ice, or cold. Similarly, although Jane Bennett's foundational theory of "vital materialism" appears on the surface to be compatible with Indigenous ontologies of relational subjectivity and interconnectivity, Bennett explicitly disregards the spiritual elements central to Indigenous philosophies, consciously setting her theory apart from animism (Bennett 2010; Sundberg 2014). Yet, not all posthumanist scholars exclude or overlook Indigenous knowledge systems in their work, and some—particularly those

involved with feminist approaches to posthumanism—make a concerted effort to centre Indigenous perspectives. Indeed, scholars such as Donna Haraway (2016, 2017), Rosi Braidotti (2022), and Karen Barad (2017b) incorporate Indigenous spiritualities as an integral part of their theories. Following the work of these posthumanist thinkers then, it is my intention here to demonstrate how posthumanist theory can work *with* and learn *from* Indigenous peoples and their knowledges, particularly Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*, so that it may realize more of its decolonizing potential.

Modern "Progress" and Temporal Violence in the Canadian North

Though set over fifty years apart, both Isuma Production's *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* and Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* address the importance of shamanistic traditions and cosmologies within Inuit society, not as relics of the pre-colonial past, but as ways of being and knowing that remain integral to Inuit culture and identity today. Based on events recorded by the Danish ethnographer Knud Rasmussen in the 1920s, *Journals* traces the decline of shamanism in Igloolik. The narrative centers on Avva (played by Pakak Innuksuk) and his daughter Apak (played by Leah Angutimarik), both of whom must ultimately give up their shamanic powers to survive in a changing world increasingly dominated by Christianity. Though Avva was known to Rasmussen as "the last shaman" in the Canadian North, this finality is challenged by Tagaq's *Split Tooth*, which portrays a revitalization of shamanism and other traditional Inuit practices decades after the devastation their culture. Telling the story of a young girl growing up in the 1970s in what is now Nunavut, *Split Tooth* centres on the unnamed narrator's discovery of her shamanic powers, and goes to show that Inuit traditions continue to survive the devastation colonizers enacted on Indigenous communities and lands through the oppression of their knowledges.

In both *Journals* and *Split Tooth*, an explicit link is established between the "civilizational matrix" of settler colonialism, capitalism and Christianity (Braidotti 2022), and the relentless forward motion of modern progress, which for colonizers is thought to be inhibited by traditional cultures like that of the Inuit. In *Journals*, Apak's ex-boyfriend Nuqallaq (played by Natar Ungalaaq) explains to Avva that he and many other Inuit in the area have chosen to follow the way of the colonizers, adopting their technologies, customs, and religion. Nuqallaq says to Avva: "Elder, you follow our ancestors' way. This is beautiful, I respect it. But I've chosen to see which way the Whites are going." This sense that colonial settlers sought to replace traditional Inuit ways of living with the ideals of Western modernity is echoed in *Split Tooth*, as the narrator reflects on the devastating loss of her culture and language. Ruminating on the way many people no longer speak Inuktitut, the Inuit language, she notes that "Residential schools have beaten the Inuktitut out of this town in the name of progress, in the name of decency. Everyone wanted to move forward. Move forward with God, with money, with white skin and without the shaman's way" (2018, 50).

Shamanism is one such traditional Inuit practice that was long seen as an obstacle to modern progress. Since initial contact in the late 19th and early 20th cen-

turies, colonizers have used methods like the dispossession of Inuit bodies and lands along with forced conversions to Christianity and assimilation into Western culture as "civilizing" incentives necessary to bring Indigenous communities into the fold of modernity (Oosten, Frédéric and Remie 2006). As Simpson (2017) notes, these so-called "civilizing" forces of colonialism and Christianity constitute a direct attack on Indigenous grounded normativity, as they attempt to sever the connections between Indigenous bodies and their lands, tearing apart the political systems and knowledges that are rooted in these relationships. This assault on Indigenous ways of life is what Simpson calls "expansive dispossession"—the ongoing seizure of Indigenous lands and erasure of Indigenous bodies as a means of marginalizing the political systems housed within them (41). Because of this expansive dispossession, many came to see Indigenous peoples and nations as relics of the past, irrelevant to contemporary society.

From the Euro-Western settler perspective, Indigenous cultures and peoples have often been thought to be on the edge of vanishing, or else "out of time" altogether. Mark Rifkin (2017) contends that this static understanding of Indigeneity puts them in a "double bind;" in order to be incorporated into settler notions of modernity Indigenous peoples have long been expected to abandon their traditions and assimilate into Western culture. This for Rifkin creates a problematic binary between modernity and tradition, wherein the colonizer's "progress" builds "on top of" Indigenous peoples, forcing them into either integration or obliteration (2017, 7). This traditional/modern binary resonates with Thomas King's (Cherokee) (2012) concept of "Dead Indians" (settler ideas of what Indigenous peoples *should be*) versus "Live Indians" (who they *actually are*), as it is often the case that in order for Indigenous cultures to be considered "authentic," they must situate themselves within a static and unchanging imagined past, fitting into stereotypical Native tropes perpetuated by settlers to limit Indigenous self-determination.

Yet, as contemporary Inuit texts like *Journals* and *Split Tooth* demonstrate, the Western notion that "tradition" and "modernity" are necessarily antithetical to one another does not hold true within most Indigenous knowledge systems, where it is understood that linear, forward motion is not the only way of progressing. The assumed universality of Euro-Western Enlightenment temporal frameworks constituted by "homogenous" or "empty" clock time (Benjamin 2006 [1940]) seems to suggest that we are "all in a single time, on a single trajectory" governed by social and capitalist development and growth. This does not necessarily apply to non-Western cultures. Within many Indigenous traditions, the past is not static and time is not always linear. In placing an emphasis on temporality itself, *Journals* and *Split Tooth* demonstrate how for the Inuit, time is dynamic, multiplicitous and unruly, while past and future are always alive within the present. As Tagaq writes:

> Time has a way of eternally looping us in the same configurations. Like fruit flies, we are unable to register the patterns. Just because we are the crest of the wave does not mean the ocean does not exist. What has been before will be again. We are reverberations of our Ancestors and songs of

our present selves. (Tagaq 2018, 121)

Throughout both *Journals* and *Split Tooth*, linear and non-linear temporalities are in constant dialogue with one another—sometimes in conflict, and sometimes in harmony. Both narratives take on a circular shape rather than a linear one; In *Split Tooth*, the circularity is apparent in the final two words of the text: "Start again" (Tagaq 2018, 189). In *Journals*, the opening scene depicting a young Apak and members of her community is narrated by an older woman we soon learn is also Apak (now Usarak), reflecting on her past from much later in her life: "I am called Usarak, though I was named Apak when I was a young woman, during the time of the story I am telling you now." Such circular narrative techniques are characteristic of Inuit oral traditions, where there is no distinct beginning middle or end as "the entire story is always already being enacted" (Huebener 2015, 182). While linear progressions of time are associated with the Greek concept of *chronos*, where now marks the divide between past and future, Inuit may be more often understood in terms of *aion*, or no-linear, eternal, "mythical" time—a "time-before-time," or a time out of time (Braidotti 2014; Kilbourn 2020, 204).

It is the attempted erasure of these diverse understandings of time in favour of a universalized notion of Enlightenment-derived Western progress that results in what may be called "temporal discrimination" (Huebener 2015) or "temporal violence" (Preston 2020), as the flow of time is used as a means of controlling Indigenous bodies and eliminating their ways of life. Through temporal discrimination and violence, the effects of colonization are ongoing, as the universalizing impulse of settler models of time can "serve, even unintentionally, to legitimize the subjugation of non-white races" (Huebener 2015, 207). This temporal violence, then, plays a role in the ongoing expansive dispossession of Inuit and other Indigenous peoples in North America, as it sets the terms of modernity while continually attempting to locate Indigenous bodies, knowledges, and political systems outside of its bounds.

Simpson (2017) posits that Indigenous peoples continually refuse this dispossession, as they recognize that their power does not come from possession, but rather is derived from the deep reciprocal relationships with bodies, lands, spirits and ancestors (43). Isuma's *Journals* and Tagaq's *Split Tooth* resist dispossession as they refuse to be confined within the temporal frameworks enforced by settler colonialism, thus expressing a temporal sovereignty that is necessarily connected to the reclaiming of Indigenous bodies and lands, and the Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* rooted within them. Notably posthumanist theories of time can play a helpful interpretative role here, as like many Indigenous knowledges, they recognize that "homogeneous clock time" or linear progress is but one temporal rhythm among many. Posthumanism challenges the settler colonial notion that time only flows in one chronological direction from past to future. Instead, posthumanist thinkers ask how we might understand time and history as "multiple and simultaneous, ambivalent, fragmented, ephemeral, discontinuous and dissonant," while "registering the posthuman reality that diverse entities live diverse histories that travel incompossible lines of time" (Bignall and Braidotti 2019, 9). By inserting audiences within Inuit worlds, *Journals* and *Split Tooth* encourage us to actively

notice these different temporal flows so that we may begin to decolonize how we think about time.

Qanuqtuurniq and Temporal Fluidity in *Split Tooth* and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*

When interpreted through a posthumanist framework, Journals and Split Tooth can be read as what new materialist scholar Karen Barad (2017b) calls "time-diffraction stories." Time-diffraction stories for Barad are narratives that demonstrate how different times and histories (including those not-yet-realized) co-exist with all other possible times. Here, pasts, presents, and futures converge in ways that challenge the temporal expectations of Western modernity, disrupting normative settler conceptions of time (Barad 2017b, 68). Developing out of quantum field theory (QFT) and drawing explicitly from Indigenous understandings of time and space, time-diffraction stories pose a direct challenge to Newtonian models of reality that are linear, deterministic, and progressivist. Indeed, working from a posthumanist methodology of diffraction that recognizes the importance of difference without relying on opposition, Barad employs the concept of "agential realism" to explain how space, time, and matter are inseparable, as particular entities only come into being through their specific material entanglements, or "intra-actions" (see Barad 2007). Using the concept of "*spacetimemattering*," Barad explains how experiments in quantum physics provide evidence for "temporal diffraction"—just as particles can be indeterminate in space, they can also have a *temporal indeterminacy*, existing in different times. In other words, various times may be *superpositioned* onto one another, as temporalities are always entangled in specific and generative ways. As such, QFT and agential realism remake being and time together:

> No longer an independent parameter relentlessly marching forward in the future, time is no longer continuous or one. *Time is diffracted, imploded/exploded in on itself: each moment made up of a superposition, a combination, of all moments* (differently weighed and combined in their specific material entanglements). (Barad 2017a, G112)

Journals and *Split Tooth* therefore can be understood as time-diffraction stories in that they reveal how past, present and future are always already entangled with one another, undoing settler models of universal linear time.

Tagaq's *Split Tooth* is part memoire, part imaginative fiction, comprising a fragmented compilation of poetry, prose, art and myth that interweaves personal stories (*inuusirmingnik unikkaat*) with traditional Inuit stories (*unikkaaqtuat*). Though the parts of the text generally tell a fairly linear story of the narrator's youth, in various dream-like sequences her story becomes intertwined with the temporal indeterminacy of these *unikkaaqtuat*. For instance, a telling of the traditional story of the Sea Goddess Sedna brings readers back to a time before Christianity: a "time when the land was our Lord, and we were her servants" (Tagaq 2108, 85), while a rendition of the Inuit creation story featuring a fox and raven, which returns us to a "time-before-time" when humans and animals lived as equals. The linearity of the text is transformed as it is interwoven with these other levels of

storytelling, demonstrating how contemporary Inuit lives are inextricably entangled with the eternal time (*aion*) of the pre-colonial past.

Furthermore, the audiobook version of *Split Tooth* is read by Tagaq herself, featuring her own throat singing performances between each chapter. Here, the oral inspiration of the story is clear, these performances adding an element of traditional Inuit culture that cannot be found within the written version alone. Yet, the written rendition of *Split Tooth* includes a number of spare-line drawings throughout (illustrated by Jamie Hernandez), visually illustrating certain parts of the story in a style reminiscent of Inuit *Scrimshaw*, where storytellers would use images carved onto tusks or whale bones to assist in the telling of their tales. None of the chapters are numbered, and most lack titles. Each chapter is separated by a poem, which are not always obviously connected to the main plot. Though the prose tells the narrator's story of growing up in Nunavut, this linearity is challenged by the poems, which often seem to be written by an older, wiser individual, who seems years beyond the narrator. In one poem the writer's daughter is mentioned, where in others, she reflects back on her youth: "We didn't know we would spend the rest of our lives running/ Or we would have slowed down" (73). These poems thus pull readers out of the text's chronology, leaving them with a sense of temporal indeterminacy.

Similarly, this temporal indeterminacy can also be seen in *Journals* as pasts, presents, and futures, are woven together in order to claim temporal sovereignty. An example of how different times are superpositioned onto one another can be seen during the depiction of a traditional celebration in *qaggiq*—a communal igloo meant for ceremonies and gatherings. Here, Avva, his community, and Rasmussen (played by Jens Jørn Spottag) and his companions are all singing a traditional Inuit "*ayaya* song" (see Martin 2012), as Nuqallaq dances and plays the *qilaut*, a traditional drum made from caribou skin stretched over a wooden frame. The scene is soon overlaid with the voice of Orulu (played by Neeve Irngaut), Apak's mother, describing her worst memory: a time of famine years ago, when her son had just been born. As she tells this story, the camera focuses on Orulu in the *qaggiq*, singing along with the others. We then hear Rasmussen's voice asking: "And what was the happiest thing you can remember?" Orulu begins to describe how she was welcomed so warmly back to Iglulik by her community after she was married, and the scene changes: switching to a slow-motion shot of various members of Avva's community walking around outside in the sunlit snowy landscape, a sled-dog running between them. The singing from the *qaggiq* continues, "superpositioned" onto the scene along with Orulu's storytelling. The scene briefly shifts again, showing Orulu in an igloo with Rasmussen, crying and wiping away tears in her eyes, before switching back to sunlit memory. Orulu says: "I am overwhelmed by knowing I have had a happy life. Today I have been a child again. By remembering my youth I relive it." The film then cuts back to the *qaggiq*, as another performance begins.

This portion of *Journals* depicts the convergence of multiple timelines, as different moments in time become entangled in ways that complicate temporal linearity. The diegetic present enacted through the *qaggiq* scene is overlaid first with

Orulu's stories. It is unclear when Orulu's interview with Rasmussen takes place in relation to the *qaggiq*, just as it is not made evident whether the shot taken outside is meant to have been in the past or future. Here, "[t]he diffraction pattern, in this case, is a manifestation of different times bleeding through one another" (Barad 2018, 219-220). Like in *Split Tooth*, Isuma's film demonstrates the temporal indeterminacy of Inuit lifeworlds, as past, present and future become indistinguishable from one another. Far from empty or unilinear, the indeterminacy of time in both *Journals* and *Split Tooth* further resonates with Anishinaabe author Grace Dillon's concept of "Native slipstream," which she uses to describe how in many Indigenous stories present "pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream," disrupting settler expectations and challenging normative concepts of temporality (Dillon 2012, 10).

As a film based on the ethnographic writings of Knud Rasmussen, *Journals* also centres on the historical archive—albeit one that is radically transformed by Inuit communities in the present. Characters throughout the film are dressed in traditional Inuit clothing made from animal skins such as caribou and seal, and the cast and crew went to great lengths to ensure that everything from the way characters spoke and laughed to details like the *kakinniit* (facial tattoos) accurately reflected archival records. The camera often centres on characters for extended periods of time as they engage in the everyday practices integral to traditional Inuit ways of life, such as a scene focused on Nuqallaq's hands as he fixes the ropes on his dog sled. Russell Kilbourn (2020) posits that this film technique is important for conveying ethnographically important details, as well as creating moments of cultural continuity and remembering within the community. Considering the way that Indigenous cultures often emphasize observation as a key method for skill acquisition, films like *Journals* are becoming an important way of passing down this cultural knowledge to future generations (Tulugarjuk et al. 2021). If one wants to learn how to properly tie the ropes on a dog sled or how to prepare a *qulliq* (the traditional lamp fuelled by whale blubber), they can look to Isuma's films to do so.

The process of creating the ethnographic archive is also explored in the film, seen in the interviews Rasmussen conducts with Orulu and other characters, as well as in a scene depicting one of Rasmussen's companions, Therkel Mathiassen (played by Jakob Cedergren) sketching an illustration of an Inuit tool in his notebook. This moment can be contrasted with a number of other instances in the film where Inuit actors are depicted actually using these traditional tools. For instance, near the beginning of the film as Avva and his family are gathered around a fire chatting in untranslated Inuktitut, Apak is cutting up pieces of meat using an *ulu*, a multi-purpose knife with a semi-circular blade traditionally used by Inuit women. While Mathiassen's drawing is representative of an archival past frozen in history, reflecting Rasmussen's desire to record elements of Inuit culture before it was lost within encroaching modernity (Kamboureli, 2018), the use of traditional tools and participation in traditional practices like cooking meat, building igloos and making clothing from animal furs subverts this static understanding of the past. Sylvie Jasen (2013) contends that it "activates" the past

through its re-enactment, as the actors and members of the Inuit community involved in the film's creation "perform traditional songs, competition games, and ordinary daily tasks" (Jasen 2013, 7), using knowledge from elders to relearn and relive traditional ways of being and dwelling in the Arctic. Similarly, VK Preston notes that through the emphasis of "relived" traditional practices, Isuma creates a rupture in colonial epistemologies and temporalities, reconfiguring the meaning of "progress," "history" and "time" as linear concepts (Preston 2020, 161). The filmmakers thus counter colonial attempts at the control or expansive dispossession of Inuit cultures as they revitalize traditional practices, rituals, songs and dances. In other words, it is the "*doing* of Inuit practices" through such contemporary performances "that reconfigure epistemic violence and avow cultural and political resurgence" (Preston 156).

As the cast and crew of *Journals* participate in a decolonized re-enactment of Rasmussen's ethnographic journals, the present is interwoven with past and carried on into the future through its digital recording. These transformations of the archive *in* the present and *for* the present are important, as Barad contends that archives do not show the "bare facts of history, but rather a record of erasures"—erasures of histories of colonial violence, and the voices of those affected by it (Barad 2017b, 75). Yet these erasures are never complete, just as the past itself remains open to transformation, playing an important role in the world's ongoing becoming. From a posthumanist perspective, temporal diffraction not only challenges the concept of linear time, but also what it means to record history. Seeing as the disruption of chronological time fundamentally challenges humanist ideas of bounded, rational subjects, demonstrating instead how human beings are dispersed across time and space, defying wholeness or individuation, it becomes impossible to record histories in the traditional sense, as the past is never fixed or static, and human beings (as well as the more-than-human) are never determinate within it (Murris and Kohan 2021, 589). By breaking free of the settler-imposed constraints of unilinear time and traditional/modern binaries, texts like *Journals* and *Split Tooth* establish an Inuit temporal sovereignty that is crucial to the community's cultural and spiritual resurgence. In so doing, they disrupt Euro-Western humanistic assumptions that "progress" is necessary to the condition of modern humanity, and as time-diffraction stories they demonstrate how for the Inuit, as for many Indigenous peoples across North America, tradition is fundamentally modern (Martin 2012).

Material Hauntings and Eco-Erotics: The Assertion of Inuit Presence and Bodily Sovereignty

Inextricably tied up with Indigenous temporal sovereignty is bodily sovereignty—a material form of empowerment that stems from the rejection of settler-imposed temporal frameworks that attempt to control and erase Indigenous bodies and voices. Isuma's *Journals* and Tagaq's *Split Tooth* both grapple with these attempted erasures of Indigenous bodies (particularly women's bodies) enforced through the heteropatriarchal and "chrononormative" systems of modernity, ultimately refusing to remain contained within them. In emphasizing the sexual

agency of Indigenous women, and indeed through exploring non-normative sexual encounters with the other-than-human world, *Journals* and *Split Tooth* challenge the stratified ordering of oppositions like presence/absence, material/spiritual, and living/dying. In so doing, they effectively subvert the racial and gender hierarchies onto which these categories are mapped.

Understood within the context of grounded normativity and expansive dispossession, the erasure of Indigenous bodies and their forced separation from ancestral lands is part of an ongoing colonial project to erase the political orders housed within those bodies and the various material and spiritual relationships they imply (Simpson 2017). In particular, Simpson (2017) highlights the fact that Indigenous women's bodies are at particular risk for this kind of colonial erasure, as they are often the culture bearers within their communities, thereby embodying traditional knowledges and political structures in special ways. As such, settler colonialism is tied to a long history of gender and sexual violence against Indigenous women, whose sexual autonomy and agency presented a threat to colonizers. In other words, as Ashley Noel Mack and Tiara Na'puti (Chamoru) (2019) put it, gender violence *is* colonial violence. They write that "[g]ender violence is/was used to violently impose gender on Indigenous bodies, and gender dichotomization is/was a central strategy of colonial conquest and control" (350). Prior to colonization, most Indigenous peoples in North America did not adhere to strict gender binaries or heteronormativity, which are Western constructions used as a means of bodily control. In particular, Simpson notes how Christianity and its notions of guilt and shame were used to contain Indigenous women's bodies in attempt to limit the threat they presented to colonial power (2017, 107).

Evidence of the intergenerational trauma within the Inuit community as a result of this heteropatriarchal violence can be seen throughout *Split Tooth*, as the narrator describes various instances of sexual assault, both against her and other female characters. Contemplating the "Blind Faith" imposed by Christianity, *Split Tooth*'s narrator notes that "Christians seem to love Shame: shame on your body, your soul, your actions and inactions. Put a cork in all your holes and choke on the light of God" (2018, 77). As a coping mechanism for the abuse, the narrator describes going to "the faceless place" during these moments of violence, dissociating from her body and from material reality, culminating in an attempt to take her own life at the end of the text.

By enforcing strict gender binaries and bodily norms that target Indigenous women's sexual agency, Christianity and settler colonialism also participate in the perpetuation of temporal violence. Normative prescriptions of linear time and the relentless forward march of progress have long played a role in settler—particularly Christian—attempts to dominate "unruly" racialized and gendered bodies, those that have been at times considered less-than-human by Enlightenment humanism's standards. Here, the queer feminist theorist Elizabeth Freeman's (2010) notion of "chrononormativity" is helpful, as it demonstrates how time is used as a means of organizing and manipulating human bodies in the interest of attaining maximum capital production. As Freeman writes, chrononormativity describes how societal "manipulations of time convert historically spe-

cific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time" (2010, 3). For Freeman, there is a direct link between the homogeneous, linear time of modernity and normative gender binaries and configurations of "correct" sexuality, as these constraints play a role in creating "productive" bodies. It is especially significant, then, that *Journals* and *Split Tooth* both feature female Inuit protagonists who have what, to Western audiences, appear to be exceptionally strange and even impossible sexual experiences with not only the more-than-human, but the not-quite-living as well. These sexual encounters give rise to decidedly non-normative gender and sexual expressions that challenge the linearity and binaries of chrononormative modernity.

In rejecting the racial and gender hierarchies associated with settler modernity, *Journals* queers the binaries of presence/absence, material/spiritual and living/dying foundational to heteropatriarchal notions of linear time. The porous boundaries between life and death are most evident in *Journals* in various dream-like moments where Apak uses her shamanic abilities to cross the boundary of the spirit world. Everything is white in these scenes, including Apak's face, of which viewers get close-up shots as she appears to be engaging in sexual activities with someone who remains off-screen, but who we learn is the spirit of her dead ex-husband. Interestingly, the throat singing (*katajjaq*) that accompanies Apak's sex scenes are pieces composed and performed by Tanya Tagaq, similar to those in the audiobook version of her text. Traditionally a game of endurance played by two women, Inuit throat singing is a physically strenuous art form that calls attention to the gendered body (Nattiez 1999).

In these boundary-crossing moments, Apak clearly receives real physical pleasure from the spectral touch of her late husband, dissolving any strict separations between material and spiritual realms. Inuit understandings of presence and absence can thus work alongside posthuman frameworks of time that recognize how "the dying is within the living within the dying" (Barad 2017a, G112). Indeed, both Inuit and posthumanist notions of life and death as fundamentally fluid challenge unilinear notions of settler time while dismantling hierarchical dichotomies of presence/absence, being/nonbeing, as well as material/spiritual. As Murris and Kohan put it, "[o]ur relationship with the dead and the not-yet-there, that what is not visible, but still 'there' and 'not there,' both spatially and temporally, is an undoing of the Western metaphysics of presence" (2021, 593).

Significantly, this challenge to the humanistic emphasis on presence further highlights *Journals*' decolonial potential because it complicates settler notions of the "colonial void." Drawing striking parallels between the void or vacuum in the Newtonian model of the universe, where its emptiness is understood as a mere container for presence, and the way that colonizers have always been concerned with the "discovery" and occupation of supposedly "empty" lands (terra nullius), Barad (2017b) posits that Indigenous life has typically been seen as a kind of "voided" absence by settlers. This absence can be seen especially in Canadian settler ghost stories, where Indigenous specters often serve to reproduce the "disappearing Indians" trope, writing out "the bodies and voices of living, politically

active Indigenous peoples" (Cameron 2008, 388). However, stories like *Journals* and *Split Tooth* provide a direct counter to this disappearance, as they feature highly material spiritual beings who are *re-embodied*, rather than disembodied, asserting their absence through their presence. Indeed, the Indigenous femininity and sexuality explored in *Journals* resonates with Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's notion that black women are made out to exist in some kind of void or "black hole," somewhere between the visible and the invisible, in a paradoxical state of being ever-present, yet continually absent (Jackson 2018, 633). Here, she reminds us that while black holes appear to be empty, this is not the case—in reality, nothing is never actually nothing, and the voiding of black femininity is a "paradoxically dense yet voided im/materiality" (622). In other words, racialized and gendered bodies are inescapably material, despite ongoing attempts to erase them from narratives of Western modernity.

Like Apak, Tagaq's narrator also has a number of incredible sexual encounter with the more-than-human throughout *Split Tooth*, including with spirits of the dead. The Northern Lights play a prominent role in Tagaq's narrative, as they do in many Inuit oral traditions, as they are understood to be the souls of both the dead and the not yet born, demonstrating how death is not simply an ending, but also a new beginning. During the narrator's first encounter with the Northern Lights, she recounts how "[t]he lights begin to blur, and I swear they are calling me backwards/forwards in Time, back to a time before I was born and where I will return to after I die" (Tagaq 56). The slash between "backwards/forwards" indicates here that there is no true separation between these two states—time is not unidirectional, but rather loops back in on itself, so that movement either way results in the arrival at the same place.

Throughout the text, the narrator's encounters with the Northern Lights are highly embodied, visceral, and sexual. In one instance, "Light leaves Time and takes on physical form" (113) as the Lights penetrate the narrator's body, making her feel as though she is being split in two:

> The slitting continues down my belly, lighting up my liver and excavating my bladder. An impossible column of green light simultaneously impales my vagina and anus. My clit explodes and I am split in two from head to toe as the light from my throat joins the light in my womb and begins to make a giant fluid figure eight in my Body. (Tagaq 114)

When she returns home, she discovers a glowing, larvae-like substance leaving her body through her vagina. It is soon revealed that the narrator is pregnant, not with children from any human partner, but from the Northern Lights. Since the aurora borealis is made up of the spirits of the dead and those not yet born, she becomes pregnant with her own ancestors, both past and future. "My elders are in my tummy" (133), Tagaq's narrator states, "[t]hrough my babies I wordlessly speak with the past" (139).

Far from immaterial then, ancestral spirits are highly embodied, their material presence undeniable as they cross the boundaries between physical and spiritual, living and dead, past and present. Both in and out of time, there are no "disappearing Indians" here, as spectres are solidified, and flesh and spirit inter-

twine. Linear, physical time converges with the circularity of spiritual time, as neither can exist without the other. Again, spirit and matter, past and present, absence and presence converge, and ghosts are *re-embodied* rather than disembodied. Unlike the hauntings in settler-composed ghost stories, Barad contends that: "Hauntings are not immaterial," rather, they "are an ineliminable feature of existing material conditions" (Barad 2017a, G107).

Tagaq's text falls into the category of what Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice (2018) calls "Indigenous Wonderworks"—wondrous, imaginative and speculative stories that contend with phenomena outside the bounds of the everyday. Wonderworks for Justice are about that which is "other and otherwise," reminding us that "other worlds exist; other realities abide alongside and within our own" (Justice 153). In addition to her encounters with the Northern Lights, *Split Tooth*'s narrator also has a number of strange and non-normative sexual encounters with other nonhuman and animal beings, such as in a dream where she performs oral sex on a "man sized" fox. This passage is quite sexually explicit, detailing the sexual pleasure felt by both participants, but is also highly spiritual, as the mutual penetration of their bodies gives rise to a profound spiritual experience for the narrator (Tagaq 2018, 70).

Anishinaabe/Métis scholar Melissa Nelson (2017) refers to these types of stories as Indigenous "eco-eroticism"—a form of traditional storytelling in many Indigenous cultures where humans are interpenetrated with the more-than-human environment, often involving women falling in love or having sexual relationships with animals or other natural phenomena, like stars (or the Northern Lights). Nelson notes that these stories are not necessarily meant to be taken literally, but rather are meant to express deep love and kinship with the environment, and to highlight the non-hierarchical relationships that exist between humans and more-than-humans. In describing the "visceral ontologies of intimacy" in eco-erotics, Nelson uses new materialist scholar Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality," a posthumanist theory that recognizes how "'the environment' is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves" (Alaimo 2010, 4). Trans-corporeality for Alaimo gives rise to an interconnected understanding of the world that "marks a profound shift in subjectivity" (20) as the humanist illusion of the bounded self gives way to a posthumanist understanding of the self as porous, fluid and multiplicitous. Moreover, Nelson highlights the fact that eco-erotics are involved in decolonizing processes, as they undo human exceptionalism and challenge modern heteropatriarchal structures. She writes that:

> After centuries of oppression, expressing the joy and diversity of our Native sexualities is truly an anticolonial, liberating act. Questioning the internalized authoritarianism that denies and demonizes our psychospiritual and animal closeness to 'nature' is a decolonial and revolutionary act of survivance. (Nelson 2017, 235)

This decolonizing aspect of Indigenous eco-eroticism is foundational to *Split Tooth*, as the narrator's dream-like non-normative sexual encounters with not only the Northern Lights, but also animals like the fox and a polar bear, refuse to

be contained within the chrononormativity of Western modernity, overcoming the years of bodily shame and guilt enforced by Christianity.

Significantly, in *Posthuman Feminism*, Braidotti (2022) draws explicit parallels between forms of Indigenous sexuality that refuse normative settler paradigms rooted in heteronormativity and the gender binary and a posthumanist approach to bodies (human and otherwise) and their sexual natures. From a posthuman feminist perspective, sexuality is something that cannot be contained by binary modes of thinking and is always multiplicitous and relational. Furthermore, Braidotti highlights the way that Indigenous knowledges and stories can help us in recognizing our shared "animalness," fostering an ethics of love, care, solidarity and respect for the material world (Braidotti 2022, 207). In both *Split Tooth* and *Journals*, the non-normative sexual experiences depicted not only foreground Indigenous women's sexual agency, but they also demonstrate how in a trans-corporeal world, human bodily autonomy is inextricably tied up with that of the more-than-human, emphasizing non-hierarchical relationships and the importance of reciprocity. In what can be seen as a posthumanist fashion then, Tagaq and Isuma's texts move beyond the heteropatriarchal, chrononormative, and anthropocentric boundaries of settler colonialism, asserting a bodily sovereignty that is inextricably connected to spatial and temporal sovereignty.

Cryotemporalities and Inuit Spatio-Temporal Sovereignty

Much like Indigenous bodies, Native ancestral lands also continue to suffer from ongoing temporal violence, as settler visions of progress contribute to the ravaging and destruction of the environment. Within the matrix of colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity, wild nature has historically been connected with unruly femininity, both presenting a threat to (Protestant) modernity's linearity, order and reason (Jackson 2018; Watts 2013). Like Indigenous bodies, particularly those of Indigenous women, expansive dispossession and erasures continue to marginalize Indigenous lands and the various more-than-human entities that inhabit them, as the colonial void is filled with not only human "others," but nonhuman others as well (Barad 2017b). Yet these erasures are never final, as the material traces of their histories are a part of the world's continued becoming. Although the stories told in both Isuma's *Journals* and Tagaq's *Split Tooth* demonstrate the ways in which humanistic and Christian unilinear temporal frameworks continue to sever Inuit connections with the land, they also challenge these narratives of decline and loss by again demonstrating that settler-imposed chronological time is not the only temporal rhythm that matters, and progress is not the only way forward. In posthumanist terms, they encourage audiences to slow down and recognize the diverse temporal rhythms that make up planetary existence, revealing its various assemblages in which humans are only a part. Like posthumanism's understanding of subjectivity, the Inuit worldview recognizes that the self is porous, fluid, and multiplicitous, co-constitutive with the environment, and spatially and temporally open to ongoing reconfigurations. Both posthumanism and Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit* therefore work to radically de-center the human in time and space, as human temporalities are always implicated in more-than-hu-

man pasts, presents and futures.

In contrast to Euro-Western assumptions proclaiming the unilinear nature of time, Indigenous temporalities are not limited to a single uni-directional path, but recognize a multiplicity of temporalities, each interwoven with different locations. Drawing from Daniel R. Wildcat's (Muscogee Nation) (2005) work, Barad (2017b) notes that Indigenous traditions resist universalizing or homogenous notions of history and time, as there is no single understanding of "progress" upheld within them, no one way forward. Rather, there are many potential ways of moving through the world, each uniquely tied to various landscapes, as "[t]he experiences of time and history are shaped by places" (Barad 2017b, 60). Both Tagaq's *Split Tooth* and Isuma's *Journals* highlight the temporal agency of the Northern land in their work, as the rhythms of the weather and seasons assert themselves in these texts, taking over the flow of narrative and production.

In *Split Tooth*, seasonal changes have considerable impact on the narrator and other characters in the story, influencing their experiences and emotional states. Summer and Winter are described as forever engaged in battle with one another, framed as an ongoing struggle between light and dark, movement and stillness, and life and death. In Nunavut, where summer brings twenty-four hours of sunlight and the depths of winter mean never-ending darkness, time is experienced differently than other parts of the world, as though "Everyone's clocks tick sideways" (Tagaq 2018, 129). In the spring and summer months, as the sun and life return to Nunavut, the characters in *Split Tooth* are described as being alive, vibrant, and mischievous. "As children in spring, we have the run of the town" (7), the narrator states. In summer, the narrator describes joining her friends in a "celebration of freedom, electricity, and curiosity" (11). The land and summer sun that warms it are seen as life-giving forces, as "The Land soaks up all negativity" (131), giving people the strength they need to survive in the North and empowering the main character: "The sun can rise, and so can I" (122).

In contrast, during the winter months described throughout the text an aura of stillness and sadness descends upon the characters. Tagaq's writing changes during these dark times, a lack of exclamation points reflecting the loss of youthful joy experienced by the characters in spring and summer. Working a monotonous job stocking shelves at the general store in the winter, the narrator's tone is devoid of excitement, reflecting the overall state of the community during this time:

> Death and Life walk together. Someone is found frozen by Cape Cockburn. Someone committed suicide. Someone is pregnant. Merry Christmas. Happy Halloween. Sock the seasons watch the deaths. (Tagaq 88)

The land, now covered with snow and ice, is seen as a harsh, destructive force. During these winter months, the agency of the icy weather is emphasized, growing stronger and more overpowering as that of human characters seems to diminish. It is within the fall and winter that most of the text's scenes detailing sexual violence occur, and when the narrator reflects most on the guilt and shame that Christianity has brought. Although this sense of disempowerment changes after the narrator is impregnated by the Northern Lights, an event that imbues her

with bodily autonomy and a sense of cultural sovereignty as her attachment to the land (and therefore to tradition) is solidified, the frigid weather and dark days clearly have a significant impact on her psychospiritual state.

In the Canadian North, the frozen landscape contains within it a sense of slowness, as time seems to crawl to a near stop. The land's slow pace is not only reflected in Isuma and Tagaq's creative works, but woven into the very fabric of their production, demonstrating how these texts are not made by humans alone, but are rather profoundly shaped by their more-than-human environments. In describing the temporalities of the Arctic landscape, Preston employs the concept of "ice times" or *cryotemporalities*, which are "assemblages of climate feeling and measurement (of past, present, and future)" that include ecological shifts and crises such as global warming (Preston 2020, 145). These cryotemporalities for Preston are characterized by their non-linearity and unpredictability, and though influenced by human activity, can never fully be contained by it. "Born of reckoning with melting and sinking worlds," Preston writes, "ice times teach through situated knowledges and epistemologies as they transform global futures" (145). This Arctic-time can be seen especially in the audiobook version of *Split Tooth*, as Tagaq often narrates her work at a very slow pace, drawing out each sentence and carefully enunciating each word, often leaving long pauses between phrases. Like the rhythmic freezing and thawing of the Arctic landscape, her narration rhythmically flows between slower and quicker paces, particularly in her reading of passages describing the environment.

In a similar fashion, *Journals* incorporates many long takes that slowly pan across the northern landscape and the people within it as they walk through the wind and snow. These long, drawn out scenes of characters slowly trudging through the snow, making their way towards and away from the camera, as well as the many long takes involving characters talking to one another in Inuktitut or engaging in various traditional practices and skills are what many Western viewers deem the "boring parts" of Isuma's films (Raheja 2007). Yet while maybe "boring" to some, Michelle Raheja (2007) contends that these are especially significant aspects of the film, as they give rise to an Inuit epistemology rooted in this slowing of time. Raheja goes on to posit that through this slow pace, Isuma "take the non-Inuit audience hostage," forcing them to take on an Inuit perspective wherein they must be more aware of the surrounding environment (Raheja 2007, 1178). Moreover, Raheja writes that "[t]he slowness of the sequencing [in Isuma's films] matches the patience one must have to hunt on the ice, wait for hours at a sea hole, traverse long distances on foot or in a dogsled, or battle more than five hundred years of colonialism" (2007, 1178).

The numerous long, drawn out takes in *Journals*, as well as its minimalistic style mean that the film could be classified as an example of "slow cinema"—a cinematic style that contrasts with the fast-pace of most popular contemporary films (Tiago 2016b). In addition to the long takes, Isuma also use slow-motion shots throughout *Journals* to decelerate the film's temporal flow even further. Notably, this use of slow-motion first appears when Avva is explaining to Rasmussen how he developed his shamanic powers, and about why the Inuit follow

certain taboos. As Avva sits with Rasmussen in his igloo, telling him about his spirit helpers (*tuurngait*)—powerful entities of the land, sea or sky that can take a variety of human and nonhuman forms to assist shamans—the scene cuts to a slow-motion shot of Inuit community members preparing a dog sled. As Avva continues speaking to Rasmussen, the scene switches back to the two of them speaking, then shifts to a long, drawn out shot of three figures walking towards the camera, their feet crunching in the snow as the wind howls. As Avva begins to describe the reasoning behind his culture's taboos, the scene cuts to another slow-motion shot of various members of his community outside, talking, laughing, and playing. Avva's voice overlays this moment, as he explains:

> You too cannot answer why life is the way it is. All our customs come from life and turn towards life. We can't explain anything, but you can see for yourself. We know a taboo was broken when we suffer from bad weather, or from the Great Woman who rules over all the sea mammals [....] We follow our ancestors' rules because they work. They protect us so we can live without worry, even if our customs are different from yours.

As he speaks, the shot focuses on certain characters, including Apak, holding up her thick caribou-skin hood and shifting her weight from one foot to another, the movement of her body slowed considerably. The camera then focuses on a group of children and adults playing a slowed game of jump-rope, as Avva continues: "Our greatest danger, is that the animals we kill for food and clothes have souls like ours. We have to satisfy them so they won't take revenge against us for using their bodies."

Here, the cryotemporalities of the Arctic assert themselves onto the film, as place-based knowledges and traditions are connected to its temporal flow. The use of slow-motion and this and other subsequent scenes can be understood as the icy land and its other-than-human inhabitants momentarily taking control of the film's pace, forcing viewers to acknowledge their rhythms. As Avva discusses the importance of maintaining respect for and reciprocity with the land, including the animals, ancestors, and other spirits that inhabit it, this more-than-human agency refuses to be ignored. Indeed, Tiago de Luca (2016b) notes that slow cinema is one way filmmakers can centre more-than-human agency, and slow-motion can play a part in this. Similarly, the use of slow-motion in the shots of the Inuit community going about their daily lives as Orulu tells Rasmussen about the experiences of her youth (in a scene described earlier in this article) further establishes a deep connection between the slow temporal rhythm of the land and memory. As Watts (2013) notes, for many Indigenous peoples, memory is not only communal, but deeply embodied and embedded in place (see also Kilbourn 2020).

In the final scene of *Journals*, after the first segment of the film's credits, we see a widescreen shot of the Arctic landscape, with a group of people far off in the distance, riding a dogsled through the snow. The camera begins to slowly move in, getting incrementally closer to them, only to start zooming back out before we are able to get any indication of who they might be. As the shot zooms out, it does so in slow-motion, gradually moving further away from the subjects until they

are just specks in the distance. This use of slow-motion as the camera starts to zoom out can again be read as ice-times taking control of the shot, the film giving itself over to the temporal agency of the arctic land. As Luca (2016a) posits, the use of long shots in slow cinema can be used as a means of decentering human agency. This refusal to adhere to the anthropocentrism of most cinema is precisely what this scene does, pulling viewers away from the people shown on-screen before any kind of identity can be attributed to them. By showing humans alongside their sled dogs, moving towards a community in the distance surrounded by the vast whiteness of the landscape, the composition of the shot emphasizes an Inuit worldview where there is no hierarchy between humans and other-than-humans, as the boundaries between them are always porous and fluid.

Notably, the seasonal time and ice-times explored throughout both *Journals* and *Split Tooth* can be starkly contrasted with what may be called the "Great Acceleration" of the Anthropocene—our current geological epoch in which the earth has been radically and permanently altered by human actions. The Anthropocene is inherently connected to the temporal linearity of modern progress, leaving a trail of death and destruction in its wake as "[d]eep histories tumble in unruly graves that are bulldozed into gardens of Progress" (Gan, Tsing, Seanson, Bubandt 2017, G6). As Anna Tsing writes, "[p]rogress is a forward march, drawing other kinds of time into its rhythms. Without that driving beat, we might notice other temporal patterns" (Tsing 2015, 21). In order to recognize these diverse temporal rhythms "in the shadow of the Anthropocene's 'anthropo-'," Tsing contends that "we must reorient our attention," and participate in an "art of noticing" the infinite multispecies assemblages and multiple temporalities that, while sometimes including the human, also extend far beyond its typical boundaries" (22). Like posthumanist approaches to time that emphasize these multiple temporalities, texts like *Journals* and *Split Tooth* also encourage audiences to slow down and notice temporal rhythms that exist beyond (and existed well before) the anxious pace of capitalist modernity. Indeed, the multiple temporalities and acts of noticing in Isuma and Tagaq's work are themselves political acts of resistance, as they reject the goal-directed behaviours enforced by ideologies of industrial and technological advancement. Processes of decolonization not only involve the liberation and recognition of Indigenous bodies and knowledges, but also of their lands and their spirits—all of which are inextricably connected through grounded normativity. As such, in their centering of more-than-human temporal rhythms such as the Arctic's cryotemporalities, *Journals* and *Split Tooth* reject the universality of anthropocentric and Eurocentric progressive notions of time, in so doing asserting an Inuit spatio-temporal sovereignty crucial for cultural survival and resurgence.

Conclusions

As time-diffraction stories, Isuma's *Journals* and Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* highlight the embodied and embedded nature of Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*, involving what Karen Barad refers to as "re-membering" through the "bodily act of returning" (2017b, 84). Here, a material and spiritual engagement with the past

is a crucial step in the healing of colonial trauma. Likewise, Mohawk and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts posits that Indigenous peoples have a certain responsibility to remember traditional knowledges rooted in bodies and ancestral lands in order to counter the effects of "colonial amnesia" that have caused some members of Native communities to forget the Old Ways of listening to and speaking with the land. "This is not a question of "'going backwards,'" she writes, "for this implies there is a static place to return to" (Watts 2013, 32). But as time has never been linear to begin with, re-membering for Indigenous communities is not about going back to a past frozen in history, "but rather a material reconfiguration of spacetimemattering in ways that attempt to do justice for the devastation wrought and to produce new openings, new possible histories" so that "time-beings may find a way to endure" (Barad 2017b, 76). This process of tracing and re-enacting colonial pasts within time-diffraction stories is often uncomfortable, even painful, as collective traumas are experienced deep within the body. This pain can be seen in Avva's tearful goodbye to his spirit helpers, and especially in *Split Tooth*'s narrator's attempt to take her own life.

Yet the suffering endured by these characters is not for nothing, as the retracing of these traumatic histories is not simply a return to the past, but also an opportunity for the past to be re-written within the context of the present and for the future. In *Split Tooth*, the narrator ultimately survives her suicide attempt, noting: "I woke up already hurting, and have been hurting ever since" (2018, 187). As a shaman tasked with a responsibility for the wellbeing of the community, she takes on the suffering of her people and their lands in order to release them from the cycles of abuse perpetuated by colonialism. Indeed, as much as *Journals* is about endings, it also encompasses its own form of continuity. At the end of the film, Avva is forced to choose between starving, or consuming meat forbidden to shamans, an act that is thought to cost them of their powers. Knowing that he must take part in a Christian conversion ceremony in order to survive, the end of the film depicts Avva saying goodbye to his spirit helpers, whose heartbreaking sobs follow them as they walk off into the distance. It is important to note, however, that while Avva moves off-screen before the credits start to run, his three spirit helpers never disappear completely. They are still there at the end of the film, perhaps waiting to be found by a new generation of Inuit. Despite the tremendous pain and suffering the characters in *Journals* and *Split Tooth* face as a result of temporal violence, the core narrative these texts portray is not one of victimization, but rather, of *survivance* (Vizenor 2009), as their creators speak out from the colonial void, laying claim to the sovereignty and self-representation they have long been denied.

Throughout this article, I have attempted to highlight various similarities between Inuit ontological-epistemological frameworks and critical posthumanism (and the related theory of new materialism). Both understand human subjectivity to be temporally indeterminate, as well as embodied and embedded in the world. Inuit and posthuman identities and selves alike can be seen as relational and multiplicitous, diffractively dispersed throughout space and time. *Journals* and *Split Tooth* demonstrate that time does not simply flow in a unilinear direc-

tion—modern progress and *chronos* are not the only relevant temporal rhythms. Inuit time, like posthumanist understandings of temporality, deconstruct various binaries on which modernity and Enlightenment humanism are founded, such as traditional/modern, human/nonhuman, linear/non-linear, spatial/temporal, presence/absence and material/spiritual—oppositional hierarchies that have long been used for temporal discrimination and settler domination of Indigenous bodies and lands. Moreover, in foregrounding Inuit *Qaujimajatuqangit*, Isuma and Tagaq's texts fundamentally challenge the notion that time is human-centric, revealing a multiplicity of temporal flows that extend beyond human frameworks to include the rhythms of the earth, as well as those of the ancestors and other spirits. Time is shown in this sense to be fundamentally *post*human—post-dualistic and post-anthropocentric in its infinite configurations.

While Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers contend that posthumanism and new materialism could be powerful tools for countering Eurocentrism (Anderson 2020; Rosiek, Snyder & Pratt 2020; Sundberg 2014; Todd 2016), and could potentially play an important role in bridging the gap between Indigenous knowledges and the Western academy (Rigby 2014), in order to realize this potential such scholarship must prioritize Indigenous ways of being and knowing—including the spiritual dimensions central to their cosmologies. Indeed, if the goals of this theoretical field include taking into account those who have previously been left out of definitions of the "human" as Francesca Ferrando (2019) suggests, those working under the umbrella of posthumanism must not only recognize the historical erasures of marginalized peoples, but must also work with and through these erasures and their entanglements, giving voice to those who continue to be silenced by colonial systems. While scholars such as Simone Bignall, Steve Hemming and Daryle Rigney (Ngarrindjeri) note that a greater appreciation of Indigenous knowledges in the Western academy (and society in general) can lead to productive alliances, they stress that "alliance does not require assimilation—and indeed, properly resists it" (2016, 474).

Reflecting on how posthumanism can contribute further to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, Julia Sundberg contends that embodied movement may be especially key to decolonized knowledge-making. She writes that "[a]s we humans move, work, play, and narrate with a multiplicity of beings in place, we enact historically contingent and radically distinct worlds/ontologies" (Sundberg 2014, 39). In learning to "walk with" others, Sundberg notes, we can engage in a form of "participatory reciprocity" and contribute to the development of a "multiepistemic literacy" crucial to the political and social goals of posthumanism. Isuma's *Journals* in particular provides many long, drawn out takes of people walking through the Arctic landscape, their movements and engagements with their material environments embodying a specific Inuit ontology. The film thus provides ample opportunities for non-Inuit viewers to participate in practices of "walking with" these Inuit characters—opportunities to learn from them, developing new forms of knowledge through an openness and willingness to engage with difference differently.

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MOVEMENTS

Video and Artist Statement

THE POOL

Artist Statement

GEISTĖ MARIJA KINČINAITYTĖ

Figure 1.
Screen capture from *The Pool* (2020).

The Pool takes the form of a video essay, in which the shore, symbolic of limit, incursion and threshold, is explored as the site par excellence for incantations of or encounters with Otherness. The camera that insists on capture discovers that landscapes are agentic, generative bodies, evading fixed explanation and instead appealing to fluid modes of fictioning. First presented as an installation at Vartai Gallery in 2020, the video essay is based on Elaine Tam's *The Pool* (2020)—a tripartite piece of performance writing comprising *Sessions*, *Diagrams* and *Afterword*. The text interweaves theory and fiction through the form of transcribed interviews charting a series of shore-side events recounted by an unidentified Narrator. A moving image version of *The Pool* was created driven by a desire to translate the text's fictional and theoretical dimensions that approach the shore as a demarcation, a place where the classical, idealised voyage must risk subversion by Jacques Derrida's unforeseen counterpart: the *arrivant*.

The video's affective landscape is woven as a movement between the inner and outer landscapes, making up its experiential texture. *The Pool* engages with the material specificities and complexities of a moving image as a haptic and somatically engaging medium, which enables embodied and material relationality and exchange (Bruno 2014). In this instance, the screen itself becomes a kind of material topography—a pleated surface, that is in dialogue with the inner archi-

tecture of our bodies and its manifold pleats, folds, and textural membranes. Through this material dialogue, *The Pool* engages with the psychic and physical boundary crossings while exploring the pull of "the unknowable gravitational core" which is approached by Tam in the text in relation to Luce Irigaray's three hospitable relationships: Nature, Lover and Mother (Tam 2020, 57). In the video, this seductive pull recounted by an unidentified Narrator manifests as a desiring movement that exposes boundaries between multiple interiors and exteriors of both the landscapes and the self: "As with the inner core of the earth, it cannot be seen nor touched, but is nonetheless the deep centre around which molten layers encrust and stratify—its latest expression being the outer-most surface upon which we walk." (57). This aspect is emphasized in the choice of the filming location itself, a volcanic island—an inversion of a molten centre—its shore caressed by the approaching, overflowing and receding waves. It sets a premise for *The Pool*, which takes the form of a voyage exploring the paths towards the core of the self as always in relation to exteriority.

In this context, Jean-Luc Nancy's reconceptualization of corporeality beyond dualisms of mind and matter is useful for considering the shifting centre of the self, which is expressed in terms of intimacy as always taking place in relation to exteriority (Nancy 2008). Nancy approaches the self beyond the notions of absolute interiority and identity, thus privileging a notion of being in terms of exteriority, exposure, and ontological plurality. Considering bodies as multiple limits exposed to each other and always already outside the logic of one's own body (*corpus meum*), corporeality is reconfigured as a multiplicity of intersecting bodies, human and nonhuman. Therefore, the ideal of integrity, an absolute sovereignty of the self is compromised when existence is thought in terms of originary *co*-existence and *co*-belonging, which rejects *the* universal body defined by the onto-theological logic.

Throughout the video, a gesture of folding between the inside and the outside meets at the edges of the self through various encounters with nonhuman entities, the oceanic limitlessness, and the *sub*terranean. These encounters are explored through an unfolding movement towards an experiential manifestation of existence as relational. In other words, following Erika Balsom's thought on the cinematic image as oceanic, this video essay attempts to create an opening where one can "leave *terra firma* and delve into the liquid flux of oceanic feeling [which] is to undertake a radical reorientation of perspective." (Balsom 2018, 10). Therefore, *The Pool* creates an affective movement through which the gravitational pull towards relationality can be sensorially explored. It is an invitation to plunge—*deeper, deeper, deeper*—reaching the most intimate exteriority of the self beyond terrestrial biases.

By plunging into the oceanic where gravity can be defied, *The Pool* participates in the debates on the amorphous term of the posthuman by mapping the edges of the self in relation to the deep time of geological formation of the earth. Following Kathryn Yussof's analysis of the inextricable links between geology, slavery, and the Anthropocene, it is significant to address that geology as a category of knowledge allowed transactions between bodies and materials, a process during which

"the inhuman categorization and the inhuman earth" were pressed into intimacy that served "as a node of extraction of properties and personhood." (Yusoff 2018, xii). Therefore, by focusing on the landscapes as generative bodies that appeal to fluid modes of fictioning, *The Pool* attempts to contribute to an ontological reconsideration of the 'human' via the figure of the *arrivant*, which exposes the limits of human mastery and unsettles proprietary relations. In this video essay, the *arrivant* embodies the unforeseeable future events, as well as an invitation to affirm what is excluded, forgotten, other.

The Pool was made and exhibited just before the pandemic unfolded in 2020. In an exhibition review of *smooth space, pleated*, Jogintė Bučinskaitė addresses the effects of *The Pool* as transposing "nature's indifference and foreignness to humans onto us, asking where this feeling begins and ends when we consider ourselves. Where do our human feelings as well as bodies begin and end? Does human necessarily mean terrestrial, and vice versa?" (Bučinskaitė 2020). After the past few years of unfolding uncertainty on a global scale, this video essay has acquired an additional dimension for an interpretation. The time of crisis exposed forgotten material and immaterial networks of relationality, unsettled the integrity of the onto-theological body, and compromised the self-sufficiency of a neoliberal individual. Therefore, to address the increasing awareness of co-existence and co-dependency that became even more exposed since *The Pool* was made, I invite you to write your own subtitles. They can take a form of a response to the shifting perspective of what it means to be 'human,' taking into account the networks of relationality that fold the self and constitute a shared sense of existence.

***The Pool* (2020)**
UHD single-channel video, stereo sound
Duration 14 min.
https://geistekincinaityte.com/The-Pool
Camera, video and sound editing by Geiste M. Kincinaityte; sound by Simon Allen, Jan Hendrickse and Sandro Mussida; story and script for subtitles by Elaine Tam.

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Exhibitions and Screenings of *The Pool*

The Pool (2020), *smooth space, pleated*, 7 Feb–13 March 2020, Vartai Gallery, Vilnius (Lithuania). Production and exhibition of *The Pool* was funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture.

The Pool was screened as part of a performance lecture with Elaine Tam at the conference *Tactics and Praxis: Creativity, Pleasure and Ethics in Academic Work*, 5–8 July 2021. CRASSH, University of Cambridge (UK).

The Pool (2020), *we are made of star stuff*, 4–27 March 2022, 253 Hoxton, London (UK).

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MOVEMENTS

Peer-Reviewed Article

Queer Posthumanism Through the Wachowskis

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This article traces the development of queer posthumanism in two of Lana and Lilly Wachowski's screen collaborations: the feature film *Cloud Atlas* (co-directed with Tom Tykwer, 2012) and the Netflix series *Sense8* (co-showrunners with J. Michael Straczynski, 2015–2018). The Wachowskis' adaptation of David Mitchell's postmodern novel *Cloud Atlas* established a template for the queer posthumanism of *Sense8*, and together these two screen texts demonstrate how the destabilisation of the human is pivotal to queer ideas of the collective. These Wachowski texts suggest that such destabilisation is not only a common interest of critical posthumanism and queer theory, but also a necessary political move to achieve the liberatory project underpinned by the "transformative coalition work" set out in Cathy Cohen's influential reimagining of radical queer politics (1997, 438), as they cinematically realise the "new kinds of coitions and coalitions" envisioned by Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston (1995, 2).

The "collective" is one of several evocative conceptual figures (alongside the "cyborg" and the "monster") that illuminate the convergence of critical posthumanism and queer theory, as traced through a variety of film examples in my chapter on queer posthumanism in *Screening the Posthuman* (Henry 2023). These examples include *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999), a pioneering queer posthumanist film at the turn of the century, whose premise of colonizing John Malkovich prefigures the centrality of complex interconnectedness to the queer posthuman worlds of *Cloud Atlas* and *Sense8*. These screen texts are of course also preceded by another significant 1999 film, *The Matrix*, and its two 2003 sequels, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, all co-directed by the Wachowskis. Using a trans studies framework, Cáel M. Keegan's auteurist study argues that "the Wachowskis' cinema establishes a common cinematic language for sensing beyond gender's dictated forms, and therefore 'the real,' that can be periodized to the turn of the twenty-first century" (2018, 5). This periodization aligns with the pivotal year of 1999 for queer posthumanist cinema. While the trajectory outlined in this article finds a degree of precedent in the early Matrix films—and might be understood as a kind of modal for Neo's modal in the fourth instalment in the franchise, *The Matrix Resurrections* (Lana Wachowski, 2021)[1]—the focus here is on the connections between the more critically neglected *Cloud Atlas* and *Sense8*. Lana Wachowski notes that "[t]he ideas of *Cloud Atlas* continue echoing in *Sense8*" (interview in Keegan 2018, 148), and it is these connecting ideas that this article seeks to tease out through a framework of queer posthumanism and its privileging of the collective.

These late 1990s origins of the Wachowskis' expansive and interconnected exploration of queer posthuman relationality also coincides with seminal works in queer theory and queer of colour critique, such as Cathy Cohen's influential reimagining of radical queer politics in "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens" (1997). As Elliott H. Powell writes, "while Cohen is interested in these *individual* marginalized subjects, she's more concerned with theorizing a broad-based *collective* political vision that centers the overlapping experiences of oppression among these marginalized subjects" (Powell 2019, 188). Cohen's intersectional liberatory project is organised around "those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality" (Cohen 1997, 441), just as these exemplary Wachowski texts are organised around a cast of characters who fit this description. *Cloud Atlas* and *Sense8* perform "transformative coalition work" (Cohen 1997, 438) through their innovations in narrative structure and film form. For Powell, to pursue Cohen's new queer politics "is to redefine coalitions as a relational politics of collective resonance" (Powell 2019, 188). I argue that this concept of "collective resonance" is evocative for understanding *Sense8*'s premise of "limbic resonance," where similarly (as Powell has argued in the context of Black popular music),

> [T]o resonate is to amplify and animate; it is to simultaneously vibrate out and vibe with in unexpected, unintended, and uneven ways; and it is to then mark, draw, and produce a collective with those who share and experience such resonance, but are differently affected by it. (Powell 2019, 189)

Through the two case studies below, I unpack the medium-specific ways in which the Wachowskis generate such a "a relational politics of collective resonance." While the audience is also brought into the collective (for instance, in *Sense8*'s strong fan community), this article uses textual analysis to focus on how queer posthumanism is articulated through the narrative, thematic, and formal elements of the texts themselves.

Cloud Atlas is a precursor to the queer posthumanism of *Sense8*, with its narrative and formal experimentation foreshadowing the Wachowskis' more elaborate queer posthuman features in the Netflix series. Three central narrative and formal features of *Cloud Atlas*—foregrounding interconnectedness with others, challenging humanist and heteronormative ideas of a "natural order," and celebrating the transcending of boundaries—are refined and underscored in *Sense8*, and the amplification of disorientation, celebration, and embodied pleasure further enhance the radical queer political notion of "collective resonance." Beyond their adaptation of *Cloud Atlas*, the Wachowskis had further scope to develop their model of queer posthuman relationality in the expanded serial narrative of *Sense8*. Here the collective of protagonists, the eight "sensates," evolve toward ideals of queer posthumanism, including Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston's "posthuman bodies," José Esteban Muñoz's "queer utopia," and the collective orientation of Rosi Braidotti's posthuman ethics (each elaborated further below).

In line with Braidotti's posthuman ethics, the "self" in these two texts is conceived as a "moveable assemblage within a common life space which the

subject never masters but merely inhabits, always in a community, a pack or an assemblage" (2016, 26). The emphasis on interconnectedness, community, and the collective in these Wachowski productions challenge humanist ideas of the individual subject or autonomous self, and forge queer relationality. The Wachowskis develop the collective orientation of posthumanism by foregrounding queer community and queer pride.[2] Just as the "explosion in queer perspectives of the nonhuman" in recent scholarship has seen "queer as a pivot for pushing explorations into new materialism and posthumanism further than it currently sits" (Harris and Jones 2019, 19), the Wachowskis use cinema and television storytelling in ways that disorientate humanism and evoke posthumanism's non-unitary subject—with its "enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others" (Braidotti 2013, 49)—through queer models of the deeply interconnected and intersectional collective.

Within and between these two popular screen texts, the Wachowskis weave a political vision of *collective resonance* in an accessible way to broad audiences. These texts play an important role in popular screen culture in the narrative and affective translation of queer and queer of colour perspectives on posthuman relationality. The conceptual ideas underpinning these Wachowskis texts—such as feeling and healing collectively—are not new, particularly in queer of colour theory; however, the Wachowskis repackage these ideas up in rainbow pride, collective sensory pleasures, and formal televisual innovation. Like the films themselves, this article connects to parallels of thought across posthumanism, queer theory, and queer of colour critique, and joins in the celebration of queer posthuman collectivity.

Cloud Atlas (Lana Wachowski, Tom Tykwer, and Lilly Wachowski, 2012)

Some of *Cloud Atlas*'s features are inherited as an adaptation of David Mitchell's novel, which as Hélène Machinal notes, is characteristic of postmodern writing in its "generic hybridity, a fragmented structure, interrupted narratives, and an emphasis on illusion and simulacrum" (Machinal 2011, 127). Postmodernist novels connect to posthumanism in that they "undermine the ideological assumptions behind what has been accepted as universal and trans-historical in our culture: the humanist notion of Man as a coherent and continuous subject" (Hutcheon 1988, 177 cited in Machinal 2011, 135). *Cloud Atlas* (novel and film) uses various formal techniques—techniques that I characterise below as constituting a queering of film form—to challenge these humanist assumptions. Posthumanism is also central at the novel's thematic level as it invites readers "into a posthuman world that details what the human could become in a future society characterized by the annihilation of human identity, a subjection of the human through technology, and a reduction of human beings to mere commodities" (Machinal 2011, 127-128). Luke Hortle cites Machinal's chapter as a notable exception to the general scholarly neglect of the novel's posthuman aspects (2016, 256), and in general the film has received significantly less scholarly attention than David Mitchell's novel. Hortle's examination of the novel's posthumanism frames it as queer—arguing that it "depicts the posthuman as a fundamentally queer presence" (Hortle 2016,

256)—and reappraises its intervention in posthumanism's theoretical project by examining its "depiction of human consumption practices, non-reproductive sexuality, and Anthropocene futurity" (Hortle 2016, 253). Hortle and Machinal's readings point to various posthumanist aspects of the novel, but here I focus on three broad queer posthumanist elements of the film that anticipate those of *Sense8*.

Firstly, *interconnectedness* is foregrounded through a range of devices, including the alignment of moments of action and tension across stories set in different times and places (devices used frequently again in *Sense8*). Match cuts are used to connect story worlds and characters, for example, the barefoot running of Hae-Joo Chang and Somni-451 across the bridge between buildings in Neo Seoul in 2144 is matched with that of Autua across the ship's mast in the 1849 story, and in turn each are shot at from below by their oppressors. The novel "asserts the necessity of connectivity and continuity" (Machinal 2011, 138), a feature magnified by the film's cinematic structure and techniques. Lana Wachowski noted that one reason they were drawn to adapt the book was its vision of "a humanity that unites all of us and transcends our tribal differences" (Lana Wachowski quoted in Rosen 2012). Unlike the novel, which tells the six stories sequentially, the film interweaves the stories and highlights connections through formal devices including parallel editing and the repetition of dialogue and score in the soundtrack (particularly the main theme of *The Cloud Atlas Sextet*). In doing so, it departs from structural aspects of the novel but also from the linearity of continuity editing that has long been standard in Hollywood cinema. Like the spatial and temporal leap at the end of the Mount Rushmore scene in *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959), discussed by Lee Edelman, *Cloud Atlas* similarly "flaunts the discontinuity of what its continuity editing joins" (Edelman 2004, 96). Interconnectedness is foregrounded in the Abbess' dialogue, "Our lives are not our own. From womb to tomb, we are bound to others, past and present…," which becomes a voice-over in a montage of the other stories, and is repeated later in the film by Somni-451. This also prefigures Nomi's declaration, "I'm not just a 'me', I'm also a 'we,'" in the first episode of *Sense8* (discussed further below). The common birthmark on characters in different times and places also points to a fundamental connectedness, and foreshadows the geographically-dispersed genetic pool of intensely connected protagonists in *Sense8*.

The decision to cast actors in multiple and diverse roles across storylines builds connections between characters and foregrounds the theme of human interconnectedness. *Cloud Atlas*' casting and performance is comparable to vaudeville, "particularly in its racial, ethnic and gendered cross-play and its unusual blend of farcical, pantomimic characterizations and realist performances" (Peberdy 2014, 172). As Donna Peberdy argues, the film "offers a radical example of the ensemble as a metaphor for global interconnectedness" (2014, 167). Gabriel Estrada notes that the effect of parallel editing between these actors in their diverse reincarnations is to "intimate that all people are ultimately transgender and transracial actors in a universal soul struggle for freedom" (Estrada 2014, 3). In this way, the film is a prototype for *Sense8*, which does not use the same

multi-role casting of *Cloud Atlas* but uses parallel editing extensively to forge interconnectedness and a sense of global collective struggle.

In emphasizing interconnectedness, the film erases differences, the consequences of which have been insightfully analyzed through a queer Polynesian lens in Estrada's article (2014) and the lens of transculturality in Stephen Trinder's reading of the film (Trinder 2019, 232–44). Estrada critiques the film's "queer settler colonial logics," noting that the film interconnects political struggles and persons "within sharply demarcated understandings of Western freedom and humanism" (Estrada 2014, 3). Similarly, Trinder argues that the film is tainted by colonial discourse and an assumption of Western values as superior and is therefore "unsuccessful in disseminating the fluid and hybrid nature of transculturalism" (2019, 241). Thus, while the film works to blur the boundaries of difference to emphasize shared humanity, critical race theorists highlight how the text's ideal of transcultural interconnectedness belies monocultural assumptions and ethnic hierarchies. Such readings of the film echo earlier critiques of posthumanism's whiteness and Eurocentrism and point to the legacies of humanism's hierarchies and assumptions within these screen representations.

The second key element of queer posthumanism is the way that the film challenges the idea of a "natural order." The need to uphold a hierarchical "natural order" is voiced most explicitly by actor Hugo Weaving's villains. As Boardman Mephi in the story set in 2144, he says to Somni-451 (who is a clone, or "fabricant," and therefore below "pureblood" humans in the hierarchy): "There is a natural order to this world, Fabricant, and the truth is this order must be protected." As Haskell Moore in the story set in 1849, he tells his daughter and son-in-law (who intend to join the abolition movement): "There is a natural order to this world and those who try to upend it do not fare well." He warns that their efforts toward the abolitionist cause will be futile: "No matter what you do, it will never amount to anything more than a single drop in a limitless ocean." The son-in-law replies, "What is an ocean but a multitude of drops?" which again highlights queer posthumanist values of interconnectedness and collectivity. Aligning villainy with the upholding of the "natural order" positions those who challenge this perspective as the heroes—or indeed, the revolutionaries—of the film. This is echoed in *Sense8*, where the villains are representatives of medicine (Dr Metzger) and science (Mr Whispers) who attempt to uphold the "natural orders" of gender and species (e.g., by planning to lobotomize the transgender sensate, Nomi, and by hunting down the sensates with the resources of the Biologic Preservation Organization). As Donna Haraway notes, "Queering has the job of undoing 'normal' categories" (2016, xxiv). *Cloud Atlas* "queers" the normal and natural; for instance, through its vaudevillian ensemble casting and performance (discussed above), it denaturalizes performance and casts actors in roles across gender and ethnic lines.

The third key element of queer posthumanism is the film's celebration of *transcending boundaries*, as Lana Wachowski foregrounds in the making-of documentary, *A Multitude of Drops* (Josh Oreck, 2013): "So much of the movie thematically—and in the book—is about this transcending of boundaries, and we

thought that it'd be neat to try and transcend time and space, and storytelling and genre." Again, this aspect is most explicitly conveyed in dialogue, here delivered by actor Ben Whishaw as Robert Frobisher in the 1936 story in a voice-over that carries over a montage of sex and intimacy between different couples:

> All boundaries are conventions, waiting to be transcended. One may transcend any convention, if only one can first conceive of doing so. Moments like this, I can feel your heart beating as clearly as I feel my own, and I know that separation is an illusion. My life extends far beyond the limitations of me.

At the end of the montage, Robert Frobisher's lover, Rufus Sixsmith, wakes on a train as if the sequence was a dream. In other parts of the film, these queer characters are shown as transcending the separation of distance in other ways, for instance, their separate spaces being merged into one mise-en-scène (Figure 1). These cinematic techniques reinforce the way that the novel transcends postmodernity "by introducing a philosophical dimension that goes beyond the individual level to a more collective one," taking on a "phylogenic perspective, one that widens the prospect to the human species" and its potential future (Machinal 2011, 127). In the novel's central two narratives, there is "an evolution from an individual perspective to a more collective one" (Machinal 2011, 130). *Cloud Atlas* emphasizes these ideas through transcending various boundaries across genre, time and space, using techniques that become further elaborated in *Sense8*.

Figure 1.
Compositing the separate spaces of Rufus Sixsmith and Robert Frobisher into one mise-en-scène in *Cloud Atlas* (2012).

***Sense8* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski and J. Michael Straczynski, 2015–2018)**

The narrative action and spectacle of *Sense8*'s premise resonate with a theoretical move to reactivate Sara Ahmed's notion of disorientation in the context of posthumanism (2019, 13). Ahmed (2006) and Haraway (2008) assert the value of disorientation in queer phenomenology; for Ahmed, "queer describes

a sexual as well as political orientation" and "a queer phenomenology would function as a disorientation device" (2006, 172). *Sense8*'s title sequence both echoes *Cloud Atlas*'s forging of a collective perspective through globe-hopping interconnectedness and encapsulates how the series operates as a "disorientation device." As Keegan's analysis indicates, the title sequence "teaches us how to engage the text" and "aesthetically prepares us for the feeling of *Sense8*'s narrative 'cluster' geometry. Space and time will contract rapidly as the sensates' enhanced sensories gather into a collective point of immediacy" (Keegan 2018, 111–12). This fast-paced montage first features bridges and rivers with flows of traffic and water; interactions between nonhuman animals intercut with human sport and cultural pursuits; touristic and local activity in configurations of individuals, pairs, and crowds. The effect of this montage is to highlight both diversity and interconnection (the idea of one world closely connected and parallel in its various human and nonhuman activities), while also featuring landmarks and cultural events particular to international locations where the series is set (such as London and San Francisco). Moving bodies—walking, dancing, embracing, marching—are foregrounded and paralleled with the flow of traffic and water through similar use of fast motion and fast cutting. As Ahmed explains, "[i]n simple terms, disorientation involves becoming an object" (2006, 162), and through these parallels, the title sequence makes the human body an object. The dizzying sequence effects a queer posthumanist "disorientation." Just as Anne M. Harris and Stacy Holman Jones (2019) reactivate disorientation in examining "the queer life of things," *Sense8* reactivates disorientation in disrupting interlinked heteronormative and humanist ideas about human bodies and their connections to others. Indeed, *Sense8* materialises disorientation through storytelling, conveying the phenomenological experience through its characters for queer posthuman ends.

Sense8 further develops narrative and formal devices of interconnectedness in following the stories of its eight globally-dispersed protagonists who comprise a cluster of "sensates," a group of individuals who can psychically[3] visit one another and share their skills and sensual experiences. These sensates, or *homo sensorium*, are a variant species of human who share strong psychic, kinaesthetic, and emotional bonds within their cluster, and can act together when one of them needs support (sometimes alongside close homo sapien allies). The concept of the cluster realises Ahmed's assertion that "[t]he queer body is not alone; queer does not reside in a body or an object, and is dependent on the mutuality of support" (2006, 170).[4] The eight sensates—Lito, Riley, Sun, Wolfgang, Will, Kala, Capheus, and Nomi—are diverse in terms of race and sexuality as well as personalities, skill sets, and occupations. Their diversity brings strength to collective action, akin to a band of superheroes, as they tackle a range of personal and collective challenges including evading the villain Mr Whispers (the leader of the Biologic Preservation Organization who is trying to hunt them down). The sensate cluster exemplifies the conceptual figure of the collective that is central to queer posthumanism.[5]

Sense8 presents a response to Rosi Braidotti's call "to work towards multiple actualizations of new transversal alliances, communities and planes of

composition of the human: many ways of becoming-world together" (2016, 24). Such actualizations forge a posthuman ethics, infused with positivity through the series' often celebratory mode:

> The ethical ideal is to actualize the cognitive, affective and sensorial means to cultivate higher degrees of empowerment and affirmation of one's interconnections to others in their multiplicity. The selection of the affective forces that propel the process of becoming posthuman is regulated by an ethics of joy and affirmation that functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions. (Braidotti 2016, 26)

This posthuman ethics of "joy and affirmation" aligns with the queer celebration of pride, foregrounded in the scenes of Nomi and her girlfriend Amanita participating in San Francisco Pride in the first episode (including their sex scene that concludes with a shot of a rainbow-colored dildo—Figure 2). In this first episode, pride is established as a basis for this affective community when Nomi vlogs about Pride, which continues as a voice-over for a montage of the other characters in their respective lives as well as shots of San Francisco Pride parade, including Nomi and Amanita on a motorbike together in the parade: "Today I march to remember I'm not just a 'me,' I'm also a 'we,' and we march with pride." The centrality of celebratory pride to the queer community and the affective bonds of the cluster are underscored again in season two through Lito's coming out speech and the "cluster" of sensates dancing with the huge crowds at the São Paulo LGBTQ Pride Parade.

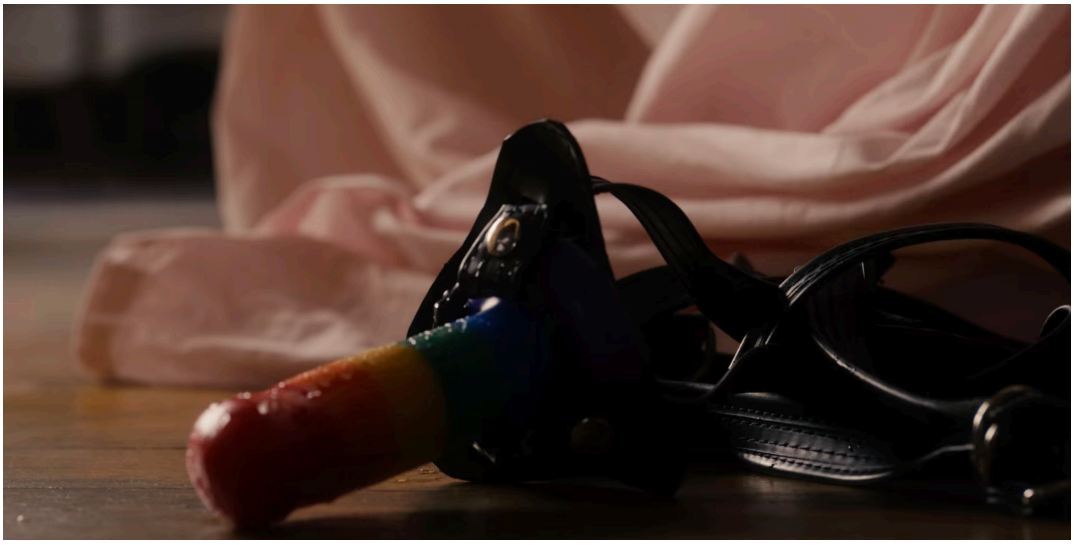

Figure 2.
Celebratory pride and queer prosthetics in *Sense8* (2015-2018).

Sense8's "positive passions" are fostered through the joyous scenes of sex and dancing[6] (as discussed in more detail below), as well the generic pleasures from the range of genres that the series draws on (including martial arts and action). Often these visceral thrills involve the sensates stepping up to their mutual responsibility, helping each other out of difficult situations such as in the numerous

fight scenes (which often draw on Sun's martial arts skill), or when Lito uses his cocktail-making skills to help Sun stay undercover, or when the other sensates inspire Lito and Capheus to respond articulately to journalists in the "Who Am I?" speech. The series reflects the way that "Posthuman ethics expresses a grounded form of accountability, based on a sense of collectivity and relationality, which results in a renewed claim to community and belonging by singular subjects" (Braidotti 2016, 26). The characters forge a closely connected affective community underpinned by the queer affects of pride and joy, which is reinforced through the formal devices such as cross-cutting, flashbacks, and switching sensates in the frame to highlight that they are psychically or kinesthetically present to each other.

The sensates (and viewers) share the intensities of mutual embodied human experience, including birth, dancing, and sex. In the analysis below, I examine how co-showrunners, the Wachowskis and J. Michael Straczynski, shape these ecstatic moments into queer posthumanist ones. I argue that the sensates epitomize Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston's "posthuman bodies" and José Esteban Muñoz's "queer utopia," presenting a model of queer posthuman relationality. The globally-dispersed bodies of the main characters in *Sense8* can be understood as "nodes in fields, inflections in orientations" forging "new kinds of coitions and coalitions" that Halberstam and Livingston envisioned (1995, 2):

> The urgency for new kinds of coitions and coalitions is too compelling in an age of continuous and obligatory diasporas [....] Posthuman bodies are not slaves to master discourses but emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context. Post-human embodiment, like Haraway's "feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations [....] Embodiment is significant prosthesis." (195)

Their sensate engagement with each other is channelled into the pleasures of queer experience. Some characters, such as Nomi and Amanita, are already embedded in queer identities and communities, but as the eight former strangers form their queer sensate pack, even the straightest of the cisgender heterosexual characters are recruited into new "coitions and coalitions," inducted into queer pleasures.

The characters' relationships, and their individual subplots, work toward Muñoz's utopian queer futures (Muñoz 2009) and Halberstam's disruption of heteronormative values of family and inheritance to imagine alternative ways of being (Halberstam 2011). *Sense8*—like the animated children's films that Halberstam analyses—can be understood as "queer fairy tales" where "romance gives way to friendship, individuation gives way to collectivity, and 'successful' heterosexual coupling is upended, displaced, and challenged by queer contact" (Halberstam 2011, 119). As Lisa King notes, the cluster members in *Sense8* "come to form a family of sorts, but one that challenges the sexist, racist, homophobic heteronormative, Western nuclear family that operates through normalizing

and bio-powers" (King 2020, 129). The sensates' need to form "alternative forms of family rooted not in biological relatedness but in care-taking, support, and the deep appreciation of difference" (King 2020, 130) is most marked in Nomi's experience of being hospitalized against her will by her transphobic mother, who conspires with a doctor to give Nomi a lobotomy, before Nomi's girlfriend helps her to escape. *Sense8* depicts more loving, accepting, supportive, and celebratory forms of relation in the sensate alliance, as well as in characters' "chosen families," such as the friendships between Nomi and Bug, Wolfgang and Felix, and Lito and Dani.

Drawing on Clare Croft's and Muñoz's definitions of queer identity as "first and foremost a question of collaborative, communal existence, rather than an atomized, singular mode of subjectivity," Zoë Shacklock understands queerness as "a collective form of embodied action, a set of shared kinaesthetics, one that offers new forms of intersubjectivity and connection" (Shacklock 2019, 516–17). These definitions resonate with Braidotti's centering of collectivity in posthuman ethics as discussed above. *Sense8* is a key example in Shacklock's analysis of how dance (and other forms of movement) creates queer connections, community, and alternative forms of relationality. The centrality of kineaesthetic empathy is highlighted not only through dance scenes (such as the birthday party montage that cross-cuts between them celebrating together in their various locations), but also through group sex scenes and the montage of the sensates' births.

The sensates come together in orgiastic sex scenes in the sixth episode of season one, and the first and last episodes of season two. These sex scenes resemble music videos, featuring a song on the soundtrack that structures the trajectory of the orgy and generically contributes to the aestheticization of the tableaux of beautiful naked queer bodies in choreographed and rhythmically-edited entanglements. The first season's orgy scene reinforces the building of connections between sensates that is central to the season's narrative. The sensates enter each other's spaces, for instance, Lito (physically based in Mexico City) "visits" Chicago police officer Will as he works out in a gym, and San Francisco-based Nomi and Berlin-based Wolfgang join in the group sex scene. As Shacklock describes, "Once the sexual encounter begins, any sense of binaries or existing ideas of sexuality and gender disappear—instead, there is just fluidity, of both desire and bodily form" (2019, 518). The series' sex scenes are in keeping with a conceptualization of posthuman sexualities that reflects queer deconstruction of binary categories:

> According to Braidotti (2013, 98–100) the key determining feature of post-human sexualities comes from the shift from isomorphic binarism, where the world and concepts are bifurcated into seeming oppositional categories which conceal the dominance of one term perpetuated over the failure of the other term to achieve equivalence, to rhizomatic connectivities. (MacCormack 2018, 36)

The second season's orgy scenes both begin with montages of the various couples having sex. The scene cuts between difference spaces, building with additional character appearances (including the non-sensate lovers of cluster

members), and reaching a climax with the climax of the song. Through parallel editing, match cuts, and an increase in the pace of editing, these scenes ramp up the connections between characters and the eroticism of the scenes, forging "rhizomatic connectivities" (MacCormack 2018, 36). These formal techniques put the globally dispersed lovers in sync, and then depict an enhanced pleasure achieved through their sensate ability to be present and share experiences and emotions. These scenes reach the "grander scale" of posthuman sexualities, "a cosmic understanding of connectivity that could be described as cosmogenic" (MacCormack 2018, 41).

Sense8's "rhizomatic connectivities" are also established through its queering of reproduction and depiction of birth. In addition to having human parents, the eight sensates are "birthed" by a member of another cluster, Angelica Turing, at which time they are awakened to each other's presence.

> Birth in *Sense8* thus exists as a multiplicity, a complex event that is connected to the past, produces a future, and operates as a form of connection between multiple subjectivities. Here again *Sense8* emphasizes the branched, braided, multiple imagination key to both seriality and queerness. (Shacklock 2019, 524)

Episode ten of the first season ends with a scene depicting the sensates' original births in flashback. In the present day, the sensates watch a classical music concert and—as in the sex scenes—the music (here Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 'Emperor': I. Allegro*) features alone on the soundtrack. Each sensate in turn is shown enjoying the concert and then flashes back to their mother giving birth to them (in a variety of countries and circumstances). The graphic, non-normative depiction of labour and childbirth in this six-minute montage queers birth imagery: "We are asked to watch as women enjoy an ecstatic, orgasmic moment that is not explicitly sexual. Their militant nonconformity to the norms of conventional (hetero)sexualized femininity… alludes to the true liberatory potential of (queer)sexualized femininities" (Jolly 2018, 421-22). It also evokes Stockton's concept of a "backward birth" wherein the gay child has been "unavailable to itself in the present tense. The protogay child has only appeared through an act of retrospection and after a death" (Stockton 2009, 6). The "backward birth mechanism" connects them retrospectively; the montage of flashbacks to their original births marks the death of their humanness and underscores their common characteristic of being sensates. The queering of birth in *Sense8* also evokes Haraway's notion of a "third birth" that presents an alternative to Western patriarchal narratives:

> [P]erhaps a differential, diffracted feminist allegory might have the "inappropriate/d others" emerge from a third birth into an SF world called elsewhere—a place composed from interference patterns. Diffraction does not produce "the same" displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear. Tropically, for the promises of monsters, the first invites the illusion of essential, fixed position, while the

> second trains us to more subtle vision. (Haraway 1991, 300)

Sense8 uses both bodily movement and formal techniques to queer birth and sex on screen, producing this "more subtle vision," and moving viewers to a kinaesthetic understanding of queer posthumanist relationality and pleasure.

Conclusion

These readings of two Wachowskis' productions have demonstrated the development of queer posthumanism in their storytelling and aesthetics, including the narrative and formal innovations that centre the collective (as opposed to the individual) and activate "transformative coalition work" on screen. The way that Mitchell's postmodern novel both "denounces the dangers of a uniformed and universal view of history and man" and "asserts the necessity of connectivity and continuity" (Machinal 2011, 138) is underscored in the *Cloud Atlas* adaptation and the Wachowskis' later work in *Sense8*, where the potential for queer posthumanism significantly develops. *Sense8* began to realize Francesca Ferrando's prediction (published in the same year that *Sense8* launched on Netflix) that:

> Over time, the hybrid may evolve more radically into a multidimensional understanding of being. Posthuman media productions will eventually follow no central plot or hero, but develop a diffuse representation of subjectivity through a rhizomatic interconnection of seemingly unrelated stories, addressing the never-ending question of identity "who am I?" as "who are we?" We are [...] the Posthumans. (Ferrando 2015, 278)

In line with other auteurist visions of queer posthumanism on screen, the diverse and deeply interconnected characters of the Wachowski epics similarly "exemplify queer packs that threaten humanist and heteronormative understandings of self and other" (Henry 2023, 153), often by employing popular film genres. The Wachowskis' brand of queer posthumanism is infused with positivity and pride, posing posthuman questions alongside a celebration of collective modes of survival and pleasure.

Notes

1. Notably, following their collaboration on *Cloud Atlas* in the interim, Lana Wachowski worked with David Mitchell and Tom Tykwer again for *The Matrix Resurrections*. This latest Matrix sequel offers self-reflexive commentary on queer and trans readings of the prior Matrix films (along with other queer pleasures, such as its casting) but the franchise's overall relationship to posthumanism is perhaps best understood through *cyberpunk*'s intervention in posthuman discourse as opposed to queer posthumanism. See Foster on cyberpunk "as an attempt to intervene in and diversify what posthumanism can mean" (Foster 2005, xiii), which is akin to the impact of queer theory on posthumanism, as discussed in Henry (2023), Harris and Jones (2019), and the present article.
2. The centrality of queer community and pride again comes to the fore in the first season of the Showtime series, *Work in Progress* (2019-2021) which Lilly Wachowski wrote and executive produced alongside creators Abby

McEnany and Tim Mason. The series puts a range of queer and lesbian social spaces on display, depicting main character Abby (Abby McEnany) navigating and enjoying both familiar and new spaces such as a games night with lesbian friends, a queer family brunch, and performances at a queer bar. The central romantic relationship between Abby (a 45-year-old lesbian) and Chris (a 22-year-old queer transman) also narrativizes several themes from the Wachowski collaborations including transcending boundaries and overcoming tribal differences.

3. Or more aptly for posthuman embodiment, it is perhaps best described "less a 'psychic' connection than one of what we might call kinaesthetic empathy, in which they understand each other through sharing their body's movement and occupation of space" (Shacklock 2019, 517).
4. This concept of the cluster is expanded extra-textually, serving as "a symbolic structure for the emergence of its own fandoms and social media affinity cultures" (Keegan 2018, 108).
5. The sensate cluster also echoes Morpheus' multi-skilled crew (Trinity, Switch, Cypher, Mouse, Tank, and Dozer) in *The Matrix*. Both collectives are underpinned by awakenings (to the existence of the Matrix and sensates respectively), a view of reality that other (mere humans) cannot access, and a mission of resistance against those who exploit them (epitomized by the villains Agent Smith and Whispers).
6. *The Matrix Reloaded*'s rave dance scene—intercut with a sex scene—is prototypical for the formal techniques and sensuous expression in *Sense8*'s dancing and sex montages.

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MOVEMENTS

Short Story and Artist Statement

Sideways Age

KELLIE LU

Backstage is quiet. Through a slit in the black curtain I can see a red banner swaying low like a drooling tongue. "THE NEXT EVOLUTION," I know it says, as if it's been written on my brain. I hold the capsule and press it onto my scalp so it hides under my hair, like Ba instructs. So *this* is the secret that my father has been working on for months. A lump. Has he taken it from the Project? Part of himself? He's always enjoyed tinkering, never mind the consequences. That thing he always says: "pain makes life sweeter." I'd rather avoid it, myself. "Ba, what's this going to do to me?"

"Don't be so scared. Enjoy new things," he says in typical exasperation from his seat on the folding chair. My father does what he thinks is best for me. He doesn't always see the full picture.

The little patch warms up next to my body, and I get the first tingle that something is wrong. Not with me. With him. He looks the same as usual, as much as anything is usual: his bowed head leaning over his silver neck sheath, his ridiculously muscled smooth left arm and the wires piercing into the skin of his right, a round stomach above one robotic leg and the other hairy, veined, and very fallible human one.

It must be the eye contact. He's looking at me from beneath his papery drooping eyelids. This feeling—I remember when he first joined the Project, and he had messed with the wiring on his right arm to see if he could make it play the piano, since he'd never learned how. It contorted and crackled and Ba and just sat there, laughing and laughing at the terrible discordant notes while I freaked out. Eventually, he got me to push the global reset button on the back of his neck, since his limbs were designed to be unable to hit it. It was so simple, but when I was standing there, holding the back of his fleshy neck, counting those seven seconds, I'd felt very strange. What I realized was that Ba and I had never stood this close to each other for such a long time.

That look creates that same feeling: a new too-close-ness between us. As if he can read my thoughts, he nods the way he does with his whole torso and turns away. I'm probably overthinking. I worry about what I *should* worry about: the exposition that's about to happen.

"Are you feeling drained?" I ask. "Where is your charger? It's in your bag. Did you bring your bag? I put it right by the shoe rack."

"No."

"Good thing I brought the extra. I knew you'd forget. Ba, you never think about the future."

"If I run out of juice, I just shut down. Get some rest. No big deal."

A member of the PR team with crinkled eyes slides between me and my father. Time for me to disappear into a hollow outline. I stand back where I can

gaze from darkness onto the warm, toffee-colored stage.

"Hey. Everything's gonna be okay, I'm sure of it." My ex-husband stands too close for people who should be an employee and customer. I lower my sore shoulders and bat the air with my clammy hands to dry them.

"I feel like there's something wrong with my dad," I say.

"You saw the signs. They're all good. The doctor and technician say he's never been healthier."

"The way he looked at me. He's waiting for something, I don't know what."

"Do you want me to ask them to delay?" he asks.

"That's not what I mean. It's deeper. Why do you never take my worries seriously?"

"I *do*," he snaps. "I'm the one who tries to act on them."

"I can't have this conversation right now."

"I wouldn't have so much to doubt if you didn't always worry over nothing," he hisses. "Don't talk to me if you're going to waste my time. I'm the one who's *actually* part of this project." He returns to his crew.

I watch the program begin sulkily from the foreshortened side of the stage. "Welcome back, friends and family. We're so happy to have you join us once more as we unveil the latest advancement in Mister Z's progress—soon to be an advancement to your life as well.

"We're eager to announce the tech that will change everything, but we can't forget what body augmentations have already done for regular people. Mister Z wants to share a heartfelt message of gratitude for the support and excitement he's received. These are his words, translated from his native Chinese."

A young Asian woman emerges from the curtains at the other end of the stage with several cards. She's wearing a fitted dress whose color meshes with the curtains so that her pale limbs look comically separated from each other, like a disassembled doll. With her skin that color she must be *from*-Asia from Asia, I decide. As she begins to speak, I try to discern whether her accent is Korean. I can't bear the thought of my ex-husband seeing me hang onto each carefully pronounced word, thinking that I'm blowing things out of proportion. I stalk over to the projectionists, or whatever this team that doesn't want anything to do with me is called, and watch them cycle through photographs and images to put on screen.

"I came to America with just two hundred dollars in my pocket to find a better life. Working hard, I was able to build a happy home for my family with my own small business."

My Ba doesn't have photos of himself from back then, so a few of his pictures of places are scattered between faraway photos of Asian people that could be him. I know that my father was some sort of technician in training in China; I know he left for the US against his parent's wishes, and that's why I don't know them; I know he had a dog that ran away after smashing his mother's potted plants, and that's why he wants a dog when we get a large enough place. I wonder whether this speech is actually his words, or their Frankenstein monster. Ba stands there, squinting at the crowd as he usually does, finding this or that to

chuckle at. It's strangely inappropriate—or, as the audience probably interprets it, nonthreatening.

"Out of nowhere, my body was shaken by mysterious, undiagnosable pains. I could no longer work. My family suffered immensely."

The marbled cross-sections of internal organs are interrupted by a photograph of a young child. How weird that this random child is wearing the bib I used to love—and then I realize it must be me. I have never seen it and my brain whirs to place it—is that background smudge our cabinet, or am I constructing this memory right now? The uncertainty makes me feel more exposed than I would if they were slicing me open onstage. Why didn't they ask me whether they could show my image? Did Ba choose to put it there, or did they find it from his files? It could even be merely someone else's image. My doppelganger is blown up on display. I can picture the audience's furrowed pale faces, shining with pity in the reflected light of the stage. There are two of me: the here and the there, the present and past, private and public, familiar and unknown.

"But now, with these body parts from the future, I can transcend my limitations. I can work harder, longer, and get new pieces that will allow me to do more than ever before. I will even be able to protect myself from the incoming climate changes by surviving on limited food, filtering my own water, and needing little rest. Soon, I will welcome you, too."

The host's voice returns. "Life-changing body enhancements are already available to you. We *want* you to have them! But now we're here to show you something beyond the limitations of the physical, an experimental augmentation that opens a new frontier. Do you see it on him?"

The silence of scrutiny. They told me that the last appointments had been checkups. What new enhancement? Why didn't they tell me about it?

"Introducing: the Third Eye! It's barely visible." The projectionists show a small triangular chip. "You see, Mister Z still looks like the normal hard worker that he is—of course, beyond his amazing new body—but we have given his *mind* the capability to use the same language as the technological processes that permeate our life. Yes, that's right, we've created a device that allows human beings to exert the ultimate control over machines!"

The crowd erupts into hooting and whistling. Unruly frenzy bursts from pheromones of passion.

"Just by thinking as he normally does, he can link to home devices, perform complicated calculations, and manipulate computing infrastructure in a way that no individual has been able to before. Think of your favorite life-enhancing technology. Now, your capabilities are expanded by its powers as well. Whereas before, we had to rely on moderated interfaces to interact with these powerful processes, we can now dissect, track, and instruct them intimately. All we have to do is get in that right state of mind, and *bam*! We become the masters of technology. It's completely safe, and entirely lawful; in fact, we're government-sponsored.

"Yes, this is science-fiction; yes, this is the future. And we have made it *now*!"

The messy roar of the crowd washes over me; blood rushes in my ears and I think I hear sobbing, singing, fucking. What have they done to Ba? How much of

him is really himself anymore?

The voice floods my skull. "How many of you would like to be the next one to step into the future?"

#

As soon as Ba steps through the door, he parks himself in front of the TV and turns it on without reaching for the remote, which disturbs me. I ask him what the Third Eye does and why he didn't tell me about it. He says he didn't think about it: "These new things are just normal to me." And that was it. Once he turned his back to tinker, I couldn't help but to fly into a rage with all those pent up feelings from the exposition, and I yelled at him, and now I'm in the other room with the door closed because I need my space, because at 6 I have to make dinner because otherwise he just makes instant noodles, which have no nutrition, and at around 9 I'll wake him up and move him from the couch to the bedroom after wiping down his back, which none of his mechanical limbs can reach, turn off the TV and lights. From 9:30 to 10 I'll have my alone time before needing to get ready to bed. If he just took better care of himself, maybe I'd have a real job by now. My ex-husband would tell me to stop worrying about him. But how could I leave my own Ba like that? Before this cyborg program, his health was rapidly deteriorating. Even now that he's no longer dying, Ba still doesn't know how to live.

I hear a strange noise from the other room and choose not to investigate. Ba often does weird experiments, and I'm tired of worrying over him if he isn't going to work with me. An even mechanical thump sounds at set intervals, like the rhythmic precision of an assembly line machine. Yet I get this strange tingling, as if every dendrite in my body is capturing some strange signal. I don't want to give in to my anxiety. I clamp down on the fear and stoke the anger so that I stay where I am, pretending I'm relaxed.

There's one thing I can do that will take my mind off this. Mentally, I'm already there.

"Hello," the phone version of my ex-husband says.

"Hello."

"How are you feeling now?"

His voice sustains me. "Better."

"Did you just want to talk?"

"Yes," I say. "This Third Eye thing has been bothering me so much—I just needed to talk to you again."

"I thought we weren't going to say that kind of thing to each other anymore."

"Then why did you approach me at the exhibition?"

"You looked worried. And I'm sorry about what I said to you then. About 'actually' being part of the team."

I take a deep breath. "It's—fine."

Silence occupies the space between us. Unless: "Actually—I need your help."

The words come out of my mouth and the ground destabilizes. This is a crucial moment. Now, truly, starkly, my former lover and I are separate beings that no longer share the amoeboid pulse of one fate. The stiff actin and myosin that we used to structure our lives together now serve as tools to push each other apart as

we sort which organ belongs to whom. He has no more obligation to me. He has no reason not to refuse. My pain, his pain, are clearly separated by a membrane.

"So you need me again. What is it?" His voice is flat.

My voice trembles. "I wish I could get in there! I need to figure out what that Third Eye is doing to Ba."

"I don't have that level of clearance. All I know is—well."

"What?"

"Don't expect too much, okay? Your mind always goes too far. But the biggest reason we haven't released it yet is the security risks."

"So that's what wrong with him? He has some sort of virus? That makes sense."

"No. Listen to me. The Third Eye is a way of communicating, which means information goes two ways. And that's dangerous because of the threat of viruses or hostile sentient takeover. They're testing the security of the firewall on him. In theory, everything should be sealed and fine. But if somehow you got access past the firewall—you'd be able to see everything that's going on."

"You're saying if I get past the firewall, I can talk to the Third Eye."

"Well, not *literally* you. The firewall is *good*. It's not really a traditional firewall—it's specifically designed to prevent and destroy any sentient hostile takeovers. There isn't a real way to break into it. It's not possible."

A clanging peal of laughter bursts out of me. "You led me on this wild goose-chase just to tell me it isn't possible. You're so in your head—you don't really care."

"You're really going to accuse me of this? I'm risking my *career* to tell you this, and you're ungrateful as always. What about all those times you made me pick him up, send him off? We busted our asses so hard to get good jobs, not going out, not making friends, and now I have one. I was the one who got him *in* the program, the whole time advocating for him as the perfect candidate."

"And now you treat him just like that: the perfect candidate for experiments." I wish I would just cry. Tears are a visible gauge of pain, that can be collected and measured with precision. And yet, like rain on my father's mechanical body, all that water beads off and disappears. "I despise you."

"I despise *you*," he retorts.

I miss him so much. His vituperative conviction leaves no room for my constantly humming malaise. It's always clear where we stand, what he's feeling, what he wants to do.

His voice crackles, though I'm not sure whether it's his voice or the connection. "I miss you."

"I miss you," I echo. I don't say, "I want us to get back together." I don't say, "I've absorbed all the cheesy heartbreak media we used to laugh at." I don't say, "Without you and Ba, I'd have no one."

He says quietly, "I can't do this anymore," and hangs up.

I'm left alone with that beat from the other room. Anger and misery and love mix together. I close my eyes. I wish I could walk out of my body, exit and just leave myself behind. I wish I could hurtle forward through time, unburdened, not having to worry about what I'm going to eat or where I'm going to live once my home floods in 50 years. A being of pure electrical impulse. The thumping

grounds me. I cast my mind out to follow it: across inky darkness I travel, over networks of lights that I know are cities and flashing webs that are biological wiring. The world fits in my mouth, and yet I can peel apart bundles of muscle fibers just by tracing my finger.

When I hear the thumping, I begin to buzz again, not quite pain but a terrible suffocating unease. I see something: five. Five things, why are there five? Deep dread blankets me. I can't move. It settles over my limbs to press me down—I have limbs now, long and rough. Not the curves I'm used to; different, yet they're just *right*. My mind gropes soft clay together to create a fresh five-fingered hand, a knobbly Adam's apple that pulses and wobbles, hedges of tangled hair climbing over taut shiny leg skin, a pink-and-blue mottled, veiny penis pointing stiffly upwards. I feel disgust at the newness of it all, like the memory of the disgust that comes with puberty. Awkwardly, I push bones to slide under translucent skin. The world feels different: the breeze more palpable, the ground under my feet more still, as if asleep. It is I who am transformed, and each element is new.

I speed across landscapes I cannot see, as if they're covered in black velvet, as some wire pulls me ever forward. As the thumping grows in volume, through the darkness I see a rust-red tree. Although it's not a tree. It's larger than I had initially thought. Each section has limbs that are not tree limbs but those of animals, or a section that has petrified upwards into a marbly facade, or branches that exist purely through mathematical expression and I don't know how I know that. The thump, like a drum, beats my footsteps towards the tree.

The trunk of the tree bulges with blisters of wrongness. Each nodule has been encapsulated, with sap leaking down, or blood, or sizzling electric charge. Towards the center, the wood is gray and dead. As I approach, a small triangular chip descends in time with my strides. Time speeds. Where the chip embeds, wood is eaten away by masses of grubs and armored insects until the trunk becomes a hollow living shell. And that shell extends around a great closed eye. My Ba's eye.

"孩子。我们终于可以互相了解一些。"

His voice is at once around me and filling me. I feel wetness down my scalp and it is the capsule Ba had given me, weeping down my neck and dripping onto my back. He gave me a way into his Eye. And now I can see that despite everything, despite the glorious horrific beauty of this tree, despite the power and terror of its myriad parts, my Ba is but a shell.

"不要想以前。不要想將來。You have to live a happy life without me."

I walk into the embrace of the hollow trunk. I am only Ba's child, flown into his opening, safe in the hollow he has made for me. The closed eye leaks sap as I press into the fine web of wrinkles on its lower lid. Our closed eyes see nothing, together: time is inconsequential. It should pass on without us.

Yet, it does not. I feel a buzzing from Ba's body and everything halts: sap hovers. Blood stops running. The chip shudders, and a great artificial scream gathers itself as it ruffles the landscape. The scream is my scream and the scream of the space and a scream of warning. Force starts at my fingers to strip flesh into sizzling strips and stab between the bones of each joint. Fire. Fire hops upon

my body, charring flesh, crackling and hissing. Fire spreads like soldiers across the landscape, fire spreads like an order, fire spreads like a wasting disease. I am burned like at a barbecue, I think ridiculously, as it consumes. In my flailing, the Eye Ba has given me opens, and Ba's great Eye opens too. A red round eye, red like the luck signs we hung on our door, shot with thick veins of blood that are shaped like his roots, and all the fire enters into its inky black center.

Suddenly I'm wrenched out and returned to my old body in our old apartment. My mind feels the space around me as my heart and lungs thump, and this body springs up from the seat. I start to run even before I hear the clanging crash. Doorknob crunches into wall. My slippers slap on the hardwood—one flies off and I nearly trip. There, through the lit frame of the kitchen doorway, is a glinting mass of limbs twitching and punching and turning. My father's body. All I can think of is that one time at camp when my childhood friends and I smashed a daddy long-legs. Those long spindly legs like wires had detached from the tiny fluid-filled body sac. They trashed furiously, mindlessly, already-dead things that refused to accept their fate.

The pots I'd left on the stove still rolling on the floor from the impact. My father is still in motion, heading towards the floor lamp I'd taken out because they hadn't fixed the kitchen light. One limb spins out and hits the long body of the lamp, which topples with slow, studied grace onto a fleshy extension that is the back of my father's skull. I run in. My slipper will protect me. I reach in—my arms shield the blows from his. Blood begins to stream over silver metal, like the blood on the tree. I reach towards the back of his neck. My hand feels around the slickness—there's the reset button!—until a piston-powered blow to my stomach folds me in half. I push my willpower through the pain in the fibers of my muscles, reset when something hard meets the side of my jaw, to bring these bones forward and find that indentation. My finger fits perfectly into its hollow. Just seven seconds, but it feels so long again, holding my father as he loses himself. Five, six, seven, and his limbs fold together, realigning into a ridiculous chest-puffing position suited to a superhero, not my old Ba. His head slumps forward. His eyes are not quite closed and a thin white crescent peeps out from underneath his soft, leathery lids. His chest isn't moving.

#

"You and your Third Eye thing were what killed Ba."

"You said we saved his life! You said it was better to try."

"It made him a machine."

"He liked the augmentations!"

"But you didn't care about *him*!"

My ex-husband gives off a sigh that feels dead and sad. "I know you're upset right now—" what an understatement! "—and this is not the real you. I love you still."

"I love you, too."

"But I can't do this anymore."

"Fine. I'll be free tomorrow."

"No. This! You! I won't be your punching bag anymore."

My mouth is dry. "My *dad* just died."

"Exactly. You always act vulnerable and make me want to protect you. Sometimes I wonder: do you do it on purpose? I told myself either way, I have to stop. So I'm stopping. Right now."

"I'm sorting things out," I beg. The tears are flowing when no one is here to see them. Just a few more minutes on the phone!

"I love you. Goodbye."

"Love you—" He has already hung up.

Ba died under a flurry of confusion from technicians, doctors, and threats from the PR team all proclaiming that there couldn't possibly be an explanation for his sudden deterioration. They decided to declare that his death was due to tampering with the Third Eye. If it's going to look bad for them either way, why not blame it on Ba and me? I wonder if they know how right they are. And it looks oh, so terrible: their invincible man gets an experimental augmentation and dies. Either the body augmentations failed, or the Third Eye, and neither bodes well. And my face and name have been plastered upon the eyes of the world. I am known as an anarchist, anti-science idiot and conspirator, never to be trusted.

They're right. With the capsule Ba gave me, I am still able to travel to that space where I found him. That rust-red trunk and those beautiful masses of limbs are gone, but I sit on top of the stump that remains and I feel his energy, drawing from the deep velvet earth, humming beneath me. I have access to the digital machinery that scaffolds our world. I want to bash holes in the walls built by groups like the one that saved and destroyed my father's life to open spaces for the forgotten and shunned people like me. In the empty apartment I used to share with long-gone bodies, I lay my body as a site for experimentation. I will ask strangers and strange friends to teach me the tinkering skills Ba once had. I will scour the web for unlawful augmentations to unmake them. I will try to build a life out of the sentiment of what was lost. I feel so lonely.

Artist Statement

Sideways Age is a posthumanist short story co-written by a human, me, and the AI Cocreator, which is built on GPT-3. Though I conceptualized and wrote the bulk of the story, Cocreator was used in the outlining and writing stages to generate ideas, story structure, and to fill in content.

Since writing this piece in 2021, AI artwork has grown in controversy. What we can say for sure is that it is not leaving. The vision that I argue for in this short story is more pressing than ever. I want a world in which the technologies that a few small groups create can be a method for populations to extend and improve the domains of their lives. We cannot will technological developments away, but we can demand that they are developed for good.

I would write, then ask the AI to generate text. It would continue my structure, continuing my outline or placing dialogue in a scene, but I would often iterate through the details it described regarding characters or actions. The AI, after all, is trained on the entire body of the Internet up until October 2019. Those details floated from literature archived in cyberspace as well as blog posts, comments, and code, an amalgamation of intentionally public-facing exclamations as well as the ugly wires behind the panel. I would pick from what it offered, discard what was not my goal, and recast. The process of writing with AI removes some of the tedium from traditional writing, but adds an engineering component: tinkering with settings, running the machine to test an output, and repeating the process.

Part of the work of this story is to destabilize the structure of authorship. Creating and consuming media are acts of reaching across the boundaries of the constructions of time and individuality. Media transports ideas and emotions into many collectives: the original ideas that are drawn from a collective of people's experiences; the collective of the audience, in whom it must evoke comparable ideas and feelings; and the collective feeling that is needed in order to touch the majority of the audience. Writing with AI is adding another collective, the collective of the body of work that is called the Internet, a collection of strange snippets that humans wanted to throw at each other. A huge amount of information is exchanged daily, shaped by the technology through which it travels, algorithmically driven in front of us. The knowledge that we acquire and incorporate is driven by both human and machine. In many pieces of media, a delineator between human and machine so far has been humans' unique capacity for art and emotion (Dick, 2010). What about a machine that draws from human art and emotion and creates them, too? And why do we care about this delineation? Are machines a threat, essentially alien, or a natural competitor? It certainly seems so, when the word "tech" evokes some billionaires' race to jet into space and leave the rest of the globe to deal with their climate disaster, or construct ever-more-exploitable sources of labor (Bankhurst, 2021). But this work, both in its making and its content, argues that that is not what tech must be. Technology can prolong life or make it more comfortable. Yet, the most important question is the

purpose of its development. In this story, the narrator's father is someone who is called a biological relation who is no longer wholly biological, whose alienation from his kin comes not from his makeup but from the failings intrinsic to love. He brings the monstrous to the intimate. His child is his caretaker. I would suggest that technology is not something separate from or opposed to him, but rather a part of what shapes his experience.

It has long been the work of speculative fiction to imagine the future as it could be. By raising these questions, I hope to strengthen the bonds between love, care, and questions of human technological changes.

Disclosure Statement

I wrote this piece when I was in a paid position as a social media ambassador for the AI Cocreator; the work is my own.

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MOVEMENTS

Video and Artist Statement

The End

Artist Statement

MOLLY JOYCE

Figure 1.
Screen capture from *The End* (2019).

The End is a music and video work created in collaboration between musician Molly Joyce and visual artist Maya Smira. The music is inspired by German singer-songwriter Nico's cover of the classic song from The Doors,[1] and expands to a multi-layered voice and vintage toy organ recording, reckoning with loss of physical sensation and movement and intersecting with multiple camera angles focusing on two physically different hands. The work was created with support from the Swatch Art Peace Hotel in Shanghai, China, and filmed and premiered there in May 2019.

The musical material involves my voice, vintage toy organ, and electronic processing of both acoustic sources. These elements are common features in my artistic practice cultivating disability as a creative source. I have an impaired left hand from a previous car accident, and therefore have difficulty performing with most musical instruments due to the loss of dexterity and flexibility. However, the organ's set-up of chord buttons on the left-hand side and a keyboard part on the right-hand side is very natural and idiomatic for me to perform on, and therefore a continual presence in my musical work. Since starting to perform on the organ I have added my voice along with electronic processing of both sources including delays, filters, reverbs, and more to create an enveloping electroacoustic musical soundscape, all in pursuit of exploring disability as a creative source.

Artistically speaking, the work seeks to illuminate loss of physicality through the combination of video, music, and lyrical language. It culls from my direct

experience with acquiring a physical disability, and the inevitable questioning that results as part of such experience and asking where the lost physical movement and sensation went and landed. In the car accident I broke my left hand as well as lost two out of the three nerves in my left arm. Ever since the accident I have continually questioned, artistically and personally, the process of losing these nerves. For example, I often have twitches and involuntary movement in my fingers, which I believe are the result of phantom nerves and the last endings of the two nerves lost. Furthermore, the wrist of my left hand cannot extend backward, and therefore I continually question where the lost nerves progressed, ones that would typically facilitate such movement.

Figure 2.
Screen capture from *The End* (2019).

Therefore, in my artistic work, I continually query and search for where the lost nerves went and landed. Inquires such as: "Why did they leave my body?"; "Where are they now?"; and "Will I ever be reunited with them?" continually fuel my artistic inquiry and longing. I often ask these directly in the lyrical language I sing, specifically in *The End* with lines such as "of everything that moves, the end," "in an enervated land," and "desperately in need of some stranger's hand." These reflect the ever-problematic dichotomy of reaching the end of physicality, and how it forces a reckoning and longing for even more physicality and ultimately someone else's body in an almost posthuman sense. I believe this questioning is evident in the work's lyrics:

this is the end, beautiful friend, the end

my only friend, the end, the end

of our elaborate plans, the end, the end

of everything that moves, the end, the end

no safety, no surprise, the end, the end

I'll never feel you again

in an enervated land

this is my hand, of the end

this is my scar, of the end

this is my scar, scar, of my veins, my arteries

my scar, scar, scar

can you picture what we'll be

so immobile and free

desperately in need of some stranger's hand

this is my hand

this is the end

my hand

The work also questions and posits the afterlife of the "human" to a wider ecology, in conversation with disability, music, video, lyrical language, and the overriding sun seen in the video. To me the sun represents the overriding presence of the inevitable. An inevitable that eventually we will all have to reckon with: the loss and disappearance of physicality, mobility, and sensation within our bodies, and ultimately the inevitable confrontation with disability. Even as disability is continually around us, in the bodies of ourselves and others and as a condition that can be temporary to permanent, congenital to acquired, and visible to invisible, I believe it is often sidelined and pushed to the background rather than foreground.

Additionally, these queries reflect the amorphous idea of the posthuman offering the chance to re-examine what is and can be considered "human." I wish to inquire if humans always have the allotted nerves and movements they are supposed to, or if the concept of human is also inclusive of lost nerves. I also wish to ask if the human body is inclusive of nerves once held that chose to leave, that chose to escape the physical body yet remain in mental memory and energy, such as that of the disabled body and in my case acquiring a disability and thereby physical loss and immobility. I hope these queries bring posthumanism into conversation with the disabled body and specifically a body that acquired a disability, in exploring an intersectional focus on the binaries of mobility and immobility, physicality and fragility, and ability and disability.

Therefore, I believe that *The End* highlights a notion that the disabled body is critical to advancing posthumanism at the margins. It is accentuating historically marginalized perspectives of disability culture as central to this intersection, with

the added intersection of musical and video content. The work also re-evaluates the notion of "moving beyond" the "human," in exploring the intersection between technology and culture with music, video, accessibility, and lyrical language. I ultimately wish to question who is permitted to be seen as posthuman, and if this involves disabled bodies and disability embodiment.

***The End* (2019)**
Duration 6 min.
https://youtu.be/Trz-u-nxIGQ
Created in collaboration with Maya Smira at Swatch Art Peace Hotel in Shanghai, China.

Notes

1. Nico, "The End," John Densmore, Robby Krieger, Ray Manzarek, Jim Morrison, recording Summer 1974, Island, track 7 on *The End...*, 1974, compact disc.

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MOVEMENTS

Thought Piece

Beneath *Barelife*:
Still-Birth, Slow Cinema, and the Camera

MARK SLOANE EBBAY

Giorgio Agamben's concept of *barelife* remains a productive ground for formulating frameworks with which to think about how we today go about conceiving of "qualified life of the citizen," especially when ideas of qualified life, qualified citizenship, and human life remain continually contested terrains (Agamben, 1998, 124). Whether in thinking through biopolitical regimes arising within the COVID-19 pandemic or the many other various attacks on categories of human rights, the concept of *barelife* still seems a fruitful one for interrogating the ways in which we still fail to account for the most marginal of beings as protected individuals or entities. It also remains utilized in attempts to rebuild categories of the human in a holistic and all-encompassing way. The concept of *barelife* is utilized productively in an essay by Victor Fan, entitled "Rebuilding Humanity: Gaze of the Exile and Chinese Independent Cinema," wherein he calls attention to Agamben's idea that "a political community is subjectivized precisely by desubjectivizing *all* [sic] human lives to bare lives," and his idea that "the state's power to instantiate and manage them instantiates its juridical authority" (Fan 2017, 148). Additionally, in a talk given at Columbia University in commemoration of the late Thomas Elsaesser and in the midst of the pandemic, Fan revisited the essay (2020). What the essay and talk made apparent were two avenues of expansion with regards to Agamben's *barelife*. First, they made apparent a tautological relationship between the human, the qualified citizen, and qualified life. Each are dependent on the other for their proper definitions and each are never able to resolve themselves without the proper constitution of the other. Second, Fan's work invites the application of the biopolitical framework of *barelife* to slow cinema. In his essay, Fan takes examples of slow cinema, though he never directly addresses the linking of *barelife* and the formal aesthetics of slow cinema. Here I return to *barelife* not to reclaim it as a biopolitical framework but to address the liminal boundaries that structure it, and then to think critically of its applications to slow cinema.

Agamben figures the *barelife* as a categorical state of being into which we are slowly configured; he describes the *barelife* as an existence (not yet in the realm of the "human" and yet one which possesses a "body") "stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide; he can save himself only in perpetual flight or a foreign land" (Agamben 1998, 103). However, in practice, considering the option to save oneself through flight to a foreign land comes up against the contemporary bans on entry from and into many countries in the midst of the global pandemic. Thus the figure of *barelife* and its historical and material specificity may not be totally applicable as a framework for thinking of subjectivities and being in neoliberal capitalism at present, where national, social, and cultural boundaries are readily unsettled to the point of their vanishing; likewise we are seeing the boundaries of being and subjectivity readily dissolved and reconstituted, made instrumental for the construction of

categories of those national, social, and cultural boundaries. At present, we have seen this in the management of national and local movement of bodies via the distribution of vaccine identification cards. This is important as a reminder that the structures that manage such movements and define our bodily boundaries are ever-shifting, and while biopolitical frameworks remain potent for thinking about such boundaries we must be able to account for these shifts. In such a present, what subjectivities are afforded to one born in an era where flight and foreign land may no longer constitute options for escape or establishing forms of agency, subjectivity, or being? Furthermore, what is to be said about a subjectivity that exists in relative alienation while both bound to the peripheries of national understanding and unable to be recognized by its borders? The idea of *barelife* as the barest form of life is still dependent on qualification of life in the first place. In my reading, it exposes a tautological relationship of the qualification of life in order to then render it bare, and then for the idea of qualified life to again be built upon that quality of bareness. I conceive of *still-birth* here in an attempt to escape the tautological relation of qualified life to *barelife.*

Still-birth is the term that I propose we use to think about the extremes of deprived subjectivities that result as a function of systemic state powers that seek to deprive the body of agency and symbolic potential such that it can be appropriated for its own gains. *Still-birth* evokes at once the notion of the stillborn baby, evacuated of life and all symbolic meaning invested into its conception, but it also evokes the present ongoing process of becoming, of always still being interpreted, if not born, symbolically and materially. It may fall outside the normative understanding of life or death, but its being persists nonetheless. S*till-birth* suggests a framework for thinking productively about the suspension of life and of being through a desanctification of life; it suspends life not as a category to return to, but as a category fraught with failure. *Still-birth* exists on the border of conception as agent, subject, and object; it fails to exert agency in a manner legible as life, and thus cannot register fully as subject, but it is also never totally relegated to object as it also bears potentiality in the possibility of resuscitation. If the values of life are as fraught as Agamben suggests in stating that "today politics knows no value (and, consequently, no nonvalue) other than life," then devoid of the value of life, what might be the limits of reconstituting being (1998, 13)? I posit *still-birth* as a being in the locus of a framework that attempts to trace being beyond the outskirts of legibility as life through agency, subjecthood, and objecthood. *Still-birth* attempts to negotiate a form of being unstructured by the tautological formations of qualified life, *barelife*, and human life.

Still-birth suggests further that in what is becoming an increasingly techno-centric world, life can be productively read and challenged as a mediated and mediatized category which, while presenting some meaningful ways of progressing through space and time, need not be the transcendent and governing category of reality. *Still-birth* seeks to understand shifts in being as they are informed by the dominant logics of neoliberal capital; if the *barelife* is something into which its "inhabitants are were transformed," then, beyond not being able to be killed, or killed with impunity, the *still-birth* cannot even be born, but yet must find other means of material being (Agamben, 1998, 97). That is, its ways of coming into being, or manifesting in the world and the thing which it comes to be are not legible according to present categorical schema of being. *Still-birth* suggests that when forms of being emerge under current racial, colonial, and capitalist schema, they may not necessarily be legible as *barelife*. It suggests further that a conception of *barelife* may also be contingent on a strata of being that structures

it, or even necessitates its conceptualization as a foundation for Agamben's own formulation of *barelife*. Put another way, I seek to explore the possibility that *barelife* itself, as the category of exclusion upon which proper political life is dependent, might also be dependent on an exclusion of being unable to be appropriated into even a category of life in its barest terms; that even *barelife* in its most minimal sense may contain some exceptionally qualified life. The *still-birth* is what emerges from beneath *barelife*, the thing that proliferates "to the limits of the visible and the invisible, rather than to disappear for good" (Foucault, 1976, 42). In the *still-birth*, at once vacuous and capacious, the body seems to be the site of this conflict even before its conception, while it is still being conceptualized, and on the border of the symbolic and the real. If the body is the site of conflict at which being is reduced into a point of nonexistence, it is from this nonexistence that the remains of an existence can be recuperated and can realize a possibility of embodiment (Agamben 1998, 97). Embodiment seems here important not only to point out a failure of state power to account for being, but also to gesture towards the potential in *still-birth* to think of being prior to embodiment.

I theorize the *still-birth* because it is both full of installed potential–none of its own really, but that which it inherits–and without any real agency or subjecthood. Yet, at the same time its demands on its hosts are powerful. It demands nutrition, to occupy space freely, and psychical investment, all without much output of its own. Even as I am able to name it (*still-birth*), it defies being named. It does not live, but neither does it die upon breaching the world, never to take a breath of it, but not needing it for the sustenance of its own potential. Yet, as it gestures toward a potential, it seems never to be realized; and still, the fact of a potential never to be realized makes impotentiality a seemingly impossible recourse.

Agamben situates the *barelife* as being able to reclaim power by choosing to embody potentiality, or otherwise to choose to not realize their potentiality. *Barelife* is thus able to reconstitute some form of agency and subjectivity for itself. However, what happens to potentiality when being is guided by dominant, or even totalizing, social, political, and economic forces? Does it get sealed in a realm of inaccessibility? It would seem that beneath *barelife* lies the *still-birth* which, while able to perhaps realize that potentiality exists, is a being inevitably marked by the failure to actuate that potentiality in the present. For *barelife*, being has the capability to realize potentiality temporally in the present as actuality and simultaneously is "*capable* of the act in not realizing it," and thus, "it is sovereignly capable of its own im-potentiality" (Agamben 1998, 45). In other words, it would seem that access to one's present and history are the prerequisites to action and inaction: to one's potentiality or impotentiality. *Still-birth*, on the other hand, is situated as lacking a history within which it might reclaim potentiality, but it is a potentiality that is also made obsolete by future-oriented technocentric neoliberal capitalism—in either course potentiality seems just outside of reach. In the midst of these tensions, neither potentiality nor impotentiality seem to be possible for *still-birth*. What then might this mean for those for whom the struggles of decolonization remain unresolved, and for the various artists and writers still engaging with these struggles? I argue that the *still-birth* challenges this notion in that potentiality becomes fully deprived. As such any realization of potentiality or impotentiality seems negated in totality. Further, the drives of neoliberal capital make the tensions between potentiality and impotentiality so indistinguishable that they become nearly impossible to grasp and make serviceable to the legibility of exploited forms of being. *Still-birth* calls into question a being's potential to be, and draws attention to the liminal space from which it is constituted.

To further examine this, I take the examples of Lav Diaz's *Storm Children Book One* (2014), *The Woman Who Left* (Diaz 2017), and Bong Joon-Ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013) as cases which take advantage of the technologies of the camera and narrative structures of filmmaking in order to unveil the manufacture and coordination of exploitable being in the service of narrative and plot. Or, in other words, I examine the ways in which each film's conception of time and space constructs worlds and meanings in accordance with the concept of the *still*-birth. I will first examine Bong Joon-Ho's *Snowpiercer* for the ways that it is able to abstract a hyperbolic form of world; through its narrative progression, all forms of being which might fall into filmic discourse as actors (including "extras" seemingly unimportant to the central progression of the film), the film unveils an instrumental way in which they are exploitable for the construction of the film's own drives. *Snowpiercer* thus presents a corollary representation to our present reality which allows us to reconsider seemingly basic notions such as being, subjectivity, and agency. However, I observe also the film's limitations as it posits that exploited forms of being remain an exceptional case. In the case of *Snowpiercer*, this form of being takes shape in the form of the child and the forces which are figured to be in the service of its rescue.

I then read Lav Diaz's films alongside *barelife* and *still-birth* because of the ways that his films capture and represent people in barely legible ways, such that their certainty of being is not entirely clear. I read his films for the ways in which they mobilize figures which are at first appearance easily legible from an audience perspective, but which then become subverted by way of various inversions and rejections. First, I examine his 2014 film *Storm Children* for its framing of a natural disaster and an emergence of being which become constitutive to our understanding of the operations and mediations of reality. Being here emerges in the form of children, just as the figure of the emergent child is critical to *Snowpiercer*. I will argue that the two films serve as parallels in their depictions of exploited being, and I will go on to compare the ways that each film's media reality[1] figures the exploited child in relationship with the world and the world's relationship to it. Next, I read Diaz's 2017 film *Ang Babaeng Humayo* (*The Woman Who Left*), for the ways that this film depicts the emergence of being in relation to a constructed media reality in order to demonstrate the relative ease of the construction, collapse, dissolution, and reconfiguration of categories of being. While works of slow cinema, Diaz's films are exceptional in the ways that they illustrate the rapidity in which being is readily unsettled and reconstructed not in categories that are so easily legible, but which are always subject to a tendency to relegate being to categorization—to naming. His films take advantage of the technology of the camera to capture and observe a scene without the automatic interruption of the blink of an eye to refresh the gaze in order to observe such an event unfolding. In the midst of such an unfolding, he seems to mobilize the camera's limits of observing being as it is categorically made and unmade and the various ways it is able to manifest as a way of then returning to the dominant logics of political operation that result in their conceptualization.

Together these films provide insight into the ways that we are driven to reproduce the "fundamental categorical pair of Western politics": that is, the exclusion and inclusion that separates a *barelife* from a *political existence* (Agamben, 1998, 8). Yet *barelife* still has a way of grasping power in that it "remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion" (Agamben 1998, 13). Contrary to this, *still-birth* seemingly has no option to reclaim power or agency, as I will elaborate through

my analysis of a slice of the critical reception of Diaz's films and critics' attempts to understand violence on Filipino bodies and the imagining of a Filipino future. In these sample reviews, the *still-birth* is evoked when being is relegated to a space where its body cannot exist, but yet becomes a receptacle of violence and stripped of a potential for imagining a way out of the violent situation, or even shaping its future. *Still-birth* is thus situated as having no possibility of being in this timeline or any imagined futures. In a sense, the *still-birth* seems stripped of any notion of potentiality, that thing which "precedes actuality and conditions it, but also seems to remain essentially subordinate to it" (Agamben 1998, 31). At the same time, it brings to mind the colonial heritages of thinking through the human and through the idea of man to conceptualize *freedom* as this aspirational form of agency. It is this relation of potentiality to actuality that the *barelife* still retains that I argue is evacuated in the position of *still-birth*. *Still-birth* is unable to exist in this or any other time, but rather is constantly torn between the temporalities that define different termini of its existence. *Still-birth* exists barely: always as a seemingly inert mass that is the product of multiple (intersecting, if one prefers) histories of violence; it is not yet dead labour, nor does it ever seem like it will become such, but it exists beyond and beneath the already barely qualified life of *barelife*. *Still-birth* manifests as the unincorporable (uncapitalizable), outside of capital's structures. Beings conceptualized in terms of the *still-birth* are impossible to make into wage labourers, and capital's social structures render them so far beyond being legible as labour that hardly a trace of their vital force can be found in it.

Before delving further into Diaz's films, where the driving mechanisms of reality are veiled through carefully mediated aesthetics and a carefully constructed media reality, I turn to a more readily apparent representation in Bong Joon Ho's *Snowpiercer*. This film's narrative uncovers class conspiracy and illustrates revolutionary war on an eternally running train, revealing at the end of the film that children are being born as pieces to turn the cogs that keep the train's eternal locomotive force intact. The factors that play a role in the decision of the child becoming a machinic component in *Snowpiercer* are simply that the child fit the environment, as only children of specific stature can play the part. As an example of *still-birth*, these children are neither human nor machine, but are merely reduced to components that maintain their various environments' guise of eternal operation. The child's life is of no importance as it becomes the necessary component to continue the machine's eternal drive. It can never return to its original environment, because its manifestation was as an environmental component to begin with: an embodiment that structures and sustains the environment without necessarily having real forms of agency or subjecthood. Its having lived is also effaced by the narrative situation of the revelation of the cog-child coming towards the end of the film—it has naught but moments of embodiment, and when it is embodied it is only as a contradiction: human child and cog in a clockwork machine.

Seemingly, *still-birth* here has neither class nor culture with which to put at stake in participation or even declaration of revolution. Its revolution is only to turn the cog. It is plucked off the assembly line and embedded immediately into the machine it was destined to support. Rather than *barelife*, whose inclusion into the political realm forms a nucleus of sovereign power, *still-birth* suggests that at times being may be already channeled into networks of use where political inclusion and exclusion are impossibilities (Agamben, 1998, 6). The conflict in *Snowpiercer*, then, is that of the alleged agency of properly qualified citizens,

exploited in their own right, who must come to terms with the exploitation of beings relegated to a lower class who are constitutive of their own realities. This we find at its most heightened form in the main character Curtis, who knows that in his world, beings knowingly feed upon their exploitation of each other, evident in his own horrified confession of the pleasure that "babies taste best."

However, the film's critique seems limited in the ways that it reveals just one category of being subsumed into the machinery of the world that it constructs; this is similar to the way that *barelife* is made an instrumental category to the production and maintenance of modern states and forms of power. In other words, the film seems to suggest that the reality of the present is structured and able to operate by way of the exploitation of just one specific underclass of being, rather than exploring the possibility of a plurality of underclasses of being. So, *Snowpiercer*, while productive in taking film narrative and putting it in service of the work of unveiling exploitation, has its limitations in still making certain types of exploitation exceptional alongside the forms of being that are made instrumental to its operation. The film utilizes classical narrative structure to illustrate a plot in which a group of resistance fights stages a rebellion from the back of the train making their way to the front of the train where the higher class occupants of the train reside and in order to overturn the rule of that dominant class. Yet, it still succeeds in drawing attention to the limited ways that even in these forms there exist ways of tracing them and a connection to social and political life, without the need to resuscitate them into a normative form of qualified life. The emergence of the cog-child is the critical figure for the illustration of this point. While the narrative illustrates that the rebellion does reach the front of the train and successfully leverages violence to negotiate with the ruling class, they come face to face with the cog-child that structures their reality of their life on the train. As beings made instrumental to capital as the structure and driving force of society today, and in light of the fact that capital continues to make exploitable these forms of being, *still-birth* questions the limits of escape so long as being in the world remains contingent on static definitions of qualified life. *Still-birth*, via *Snowpiercer* in the figure of the cog-child as an almost-disappeared body, seems unable to bear the signifying potential of a qualified life yet it gestures towards a mode of meaning where life is indexed in its full plenitude as a banal or mundane political category.

Like the cog-child in *Snowpiercer* whose origins are ambiguous, *Storm Children* takes the figure of the child and suggests the impossibility of tracing the precise mechanisms and webs of power and technology that surround a natural disaster. The disaster treated in this film is Typhoon Haiyan and its aftermath in Tacloban City. Whereas *Snowpiercer* finds being in the aftermath of a fictitious calamity which references present and "real" (albeit with its limitations being in the genre of science fiction) conditions of being, *Storm Children* uses the aftermath of a non-fictional calamitous environmental disaster. The film illustrates an aftermath of waste and survival and the beings emergent in such conditions. As a documentary, the film follows its little subjects and the ways they navigate being in relation to the waste of the environment. Critic Ronnie Scheib makes note of "pint-sized subjects" in Lav Diaz's *Mga Anak Ng Unos* (*Storm Children: Book One*) who "exist entirely in the present scavenging the past for survival" (2015, 57). Yet the film demonstrates through its construction of a media reality in the immediate aftermath of natural disaster that being emerges not only in relation to a scavenged past, but also what it looks like when being is constructed while lacking the means to construct itself as qualified life. Like *Snowpiercer*, *Storm*

Children draws attention to the ways in which exploited being may at times distract from the macro-level structures that support the environments in which they are exploited. *Storm Children*'s clever trick is in calling attention to environment through the torrential rains of typhoon Haiyan and its aftermath. The film begins with the screaming volume of the typhoon's rains as its unmanageable force crashes in the surroundings, gesturing toward environments beyond the control of human management and agency. In his review, Scheib seemingly fails to recognize this environment entirely, and while he does acknowledge the film's tiny subjects as emerging from it, he does not question the figure of the storm and the importance of this environmental component to the structure of the film. The film gestures toward the question of whether the storm gives way to being or if being gives way to the storm. In its survival of catastrophe, is it being or the environment which is made exceptional?

Such tensions seem to act as the fulcrum upon which the scale of morality tips in Diaz's *Storm Children*. Scheib's insights on the scavenging children in *Storm Children* miss the ecological allusions that Diaz installs at the onset of the film and elaborates as products of long histories of material exploitation. Rather than scavenging, then, in the scene in question, the children actually perform an archaeology of waste, an archaeology of a certain afterlife. It is an archaeology not done in order to find some sort of entryway back into the social and political structures from which their status hails; instead, scavenging here acts not to set aside "its own potential not to be," but rather as a way for *still-birth*, even without the freedom to choose between potentiality or impotentiality, to find a form of being (Agamben, 1998, 46). *Still-birth* activates itself here in bearing the contradictions between an impossible existence and the structures that render it so (Agamben, 1998, 47). For all the waste and destruction that the typhoon did bring, it might be a surprise to see some form of being persisting in its aftermath. Indeed, we might be tempted to classify or categorize the sight of children scavenging as a recovered life. Slow cinema and *still-birth* here might converge in presenting the possibility of qualification, but its slow durational form allows a view into the ways we perform that qualification. We cannot help but meditate on these children, as scavengers and as subjects existing somewhere between boundaries of qualified life; *Storm Children* challenges its viewers to rethink any easy declarations about this kind of being and its relationship to our own present social and political situations.

Diaz's *The Woman Who Left* takes a similar narrative structure, using its environment in order to give way to the production and configuration of being. Before offering my own thoughts on how this film opens up to such readings, however, it might be helpful to consider some critical literature and reviews of Diaz's works. Though auteurist discourse on Diaz tends to not directly discuss *The Woman Who Left* as part of the same constellation of Diaz's films (usually made up of such films as *Norte* and *Evolution of a Filipino Family*), some general conclusions and assumptions can be drawn from these critics' analyses. Writing for *Offscreen*, Parisa Hakim Javadi notes of Diaz's film *From What is Before* (2014) that it was "filmed at an actual Filipino village that in 2013 still had a Sixties/early-Seventies kind of look" (Javadi 2018). Another critic, Johnathan Hopewell, writing from Variety magazine, critiques one of Diaz's latest films *Ang Hupa* (*The Halt*, 2019): "It's understood that Diaz's low-budget techniques require a suspension of belief: thus we accept a powerful dictator only seems to have a staff of two" (2018).

What we see in these two critiques of Diaz's cinema are two things. First, an inability to place the Philippines in the world at the present moment. Second,

a certain impossibility of imagining a future for the Philippines no matter dystopian or utopian it might be. Then, at the center of this all: the Filipino being, constructed as *still-life* through these critics' interpretations, which seems to then become folded into time and space itself, but yet whose existence is seemingly unacknowledged.

Still-birth disturbs time and space in such a way that it becomes possible to reconcile the paradox of a "real" Filipino village's materiality as being caught in the past and its actual existence in 2013 (the time at which the film was circulating in festivals) without challenging the reasons why these material conditions allow for this type of existence to be acceptable. It is telling that Javadi did not wonder further about the said "real Filipino village's" existence in 2018 (when the article was written) and the forces that make its material reality a possibility. Her observation, however, allows a window into the temporal incongruity of being that is necessary for capital's continued operation as the basis for the production of social interaction. When we see the *still-birth* emerging from the constellation between critic and film, we experience the jarring incongruence of such materially deprived existence in the present. S*till-birth* suggests that the possibility of qualified life necessitates a degree of permission to the exploitative forces that bring about its operation and maintain its existence through the continuation of its production. *Still-birth* further gestures toward a suspension of the structuring powers that guide our understandings of reality, to such degrees that mythological (in the Barthesian sense) forms of being come to structure in their stead. *Still-birth* here also draws attention to the notion that being is exploited and made instrumental to the operations of capital even in the moments of its conception in the imagined realms of political existence.

Diaz seems to take advantage of such slippages in the ways we conceptualize being and the confrontation that occurs within ourselves and against our systems of constructing political existence in *The Woman Who Left*. It follows a wrongly imprisoned woman, Horacia Soromostro (Charo Santos-Concio), a former schoolteacher who, after having served thirty years of her life sentence, is released from prison because the true perpetrator of the crime suddenly has become overcome by the desire to confess her sins. My reading will focus on the emergence of being from the structures that frame the emergence of these beings as indistinguishable from their environments and constitutive of the operation of their media realities. The film begins in medias res with its action first unfolding in an auditory register through an acousmatic radio program that plays alongside introductory credit roll. As slow cinema, with its long takes, long scenes, and often static positioning of the camera, this framing makes this action difficult to grasp. The action occurs invisibly through the sonic echoes of the radio as it points to the difficulty in grasping the modes of power in which technology operates. When the action becomes visible, it is of a seemingly idyllic scene with women tending to pastures and tilling soil. The credits and radio broadcast act as a sonic bridge that emphasizes a disembodied voice of sovereign power always in action and never static or fixed, even as it indexes itself into the media reality's immediate past. The content of the radio broadcast identifies, among other things, a rising occurrence of kidnapping in the Philippines to epidemic proportions and elaborates that the victims tend to be among certain classes of people: tourists, children of Chinese-Filipino businessmen, and children of celebrities and politicians. Finally, the radio broadcast indicts the government for not being able to provide protection for these classes of people and suggests that they might flee to other parts of the country, or perhaps other countries.

The radio segment suggests a sort of paradigm for inclusion or exclusion into Filipino public life: only those that are able to generate capital are able to have their existence acknowledged by the public and the government. Meanwhile those like Horacia, ex-convicts and otherwise, are kept from achieving any kind of actuality by means of acknowledgement by public programs or the Philippine government. The radio broadcast continues to describe statistics collected by the Philippine National Police, affirming the position of the protected class of citizens while leaving us to wonder about what protections the inmates of this prison unit, wherein Horacia dwells, might be afforded, if any at all. This voice "expresses the bond of inclusive exclusion to which a thing is subject because of the fact of being in language, of being named" (Agamben 1998, 20). From this sonic bridge proceeds the visual image of women tilling fields, which eventually gives way to the revelation of the protagonist of the film: a wrongly convicted woman now set free into the world.

What follows is a vaguely neo-noir plot where Horacia investigates her wrongful imprisonment and confronts her ambitions for revenge against the forces which caused it. Along the way, she meets two locals who form a constellation of being around her. Each of their interactions, when one or the other is drawn in and out of this constellation, allows a moment for the audience to reconsider the ways that the film frames them and subsequently our own mechanisms of framing and perceiving being. In the first place, Horacia, while free and cleared of her criminal past, becomes the investigator of her own conviction. She seeks justice on her own terms, though audiences are left to consider how we might judge the morality of her own vengeance. Here she is figured as the exceptional protagonist and driver of the narrative, but through her interactions with others in the constellation of their being, the ease with which we interpret her as a just and moral political figure is unsettled and contradicted.

Unlike Horacia, who emerges from this tightly politically framed space, the figures who surround her emerge in the dark void of the night, framed by the darkness of the environment and the underdeveloped light of the slums. It is night, the slums are barely lit by streetlamps, most of the scene's lighting is provided by the communal light provided by the shacks of the slums and the streetlights. While underdeveloped and only scantly available, this is the only light that offers a view of the site. The figures of the scene are framed simultaneously, then, by insufficiently available light, and the all-consuming darkness of the night. The camera, static and unmoving, keeps everything in frame while the long duration of the shot gives way to an idea of the slow settling of the scene. The gated and guarded mansion of Rodrigo Trinidad (the mastermind behind Horacia's wrongful imprisonment) hovers over the slums, which almost appear as the mansion's foundation. While scoping out the mansion, Horacia happens upon a vendor peddling balut (partially cultivated duck embryos: a popular Filipino snack) to the armed guardians of its gates. The vendor, after completing his business, converses with Horacia about the classes of protected citizens discussed in the opening radio broadcast and about Rodrigo Trinidad's shady dealings. Throughout the scene, this vendor is made only barely legible, being faintly traced by the light of the slums—their being never entirely produced or constructed. Dealing only in appearances, we are unable to position them in the world, and they thereby exist only properly in relation to Horacia.

Following the conversation, the balut vendor rises, revealing his disabled form; while bellowing with resounding timbre, "Balut! Balut!" His being thereby folds again into the sonic environment of the scene; the camera acknowledging

his existence as a part of the scene while abandoning it as its sonic traces echo out of the scene and our memory. That same night, making her way home after abandoning her mission of scoping out the mansion, Horacia sees a figure dancing in the street. She stands, back turned to the camera, watching the figure, lit only by a solitary streetlight. Without warning, the figure collapses to the ground and begins convulsing. Horacia then runs to her aid. The camera cuts to closeup with Horacia cradling the figure in her arms, with both figures only faintly traced by the light. Neither figure moves and they are both quite still before the unknown person sits up and asks, "Where am I?"

Figure 1.
Screen capture from *The Woman Who Left* (2016).

This person's name is Yolanda and their presentation invites feminine readings from the signifying power of the dress they wear and their long hair, but their gender is only gestured to through these signifying features: it is never fully elaborated in the diegesis. Indexed in the costuming is the instability of our own structures of inscribing value to life. Like the disabled balut vendor, Yolanda's figure simultaneously invites and rejects such inscriptions of meaning. In these scenes it is the framing of the light that provides only a faint trace of the physical being of these characters, light enough to trace the contours of their being, but never enough to commit to the act of categorizing their being into a fixed and settled position. Like an omniscient and omnipotent voice that hails "hey, you there!," these lights hail and interpellate being, minor and as integrated as they may be to the structures of our lived realities (Althusser, 1970, 174). In *The Woman Who Left*, Diaz makes clear through the constellation of these figures our limitations in perceiving being outside of the value systems of qualified life. Yolanda and the balut vendor are introduced in such a way that we might be tempted to read them as instrumental to Horacia's own plot, but it is actually

Yolanda who carries out the assassination of Rodrigo Trinidad and exacts revenge on Horacia's behalf. Horacia, upon learning of this fact, screams. While the only being figured in the diegesis as a qualified life, Horacia seems to be figured in the narrative as expressing anger not for her continued existence as such but for the relative failure her character experiences in being able to influence the outcome and form of her being.

Figure 2.
Screen capture from *The Woman Who Left* (2016).

In conclusion, throughout this article I theorized the *still-birth* as a state of being which is unable to bear the signifying potential of life as a necessary component of modern political inclusion; in this sense, it is excluded from having any rights worth protecting. This concept becomes useful in a world where being conceived, being imagined as a concept or becoming a material existence in the world, means being explicitly deprived of potentiality. While the histories of colonialism that inflect this discussion ultimately lie outside the scope of this essay, I hope that my integration of *still-birth* into readings of Lav Diaz's films might open its possibility in future writings. As Agamben himself states early in *Homo Sacer*, "modernity does nothing other than declare its own faithfulness to the essential structure of the metaphysical tradition" (Agamben, 1995, 8). *Still-birth* is an attempt at unsettling just one of those structures in what I hoped to have demonstrated as a tautological relationship between *barelife*, human, qualified life, and qualified citizen. Many of our contemporary categories of being are already compromised when considered concurrently with histories of exploitation embedded into colonial and capitalist schemas. Frantz Fanon stated that the human laid dormant in a "zone of occult instability," but in the present perhaps it isn't towards the human but to the *still-birth*–of the beings in constellation, and these constellations themselves—that we should seek a return (Fanon, 182, 1963). To take the *still-birth* as a starting point means thinking without taking life for granted nor necessarily thinking of an inscription of life as an end goal of a political project that aims to reclaim a more holistic version of humanity.

S*till-birth* suspends the notion of life in an attempt to depart from the tensions from which it has historically inscribed meaning to our shared existences.

Disclosure Statement

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Notes

1. I adapt the term media reality from Elsaesser's "media-world" in order to describe the ways in which filmic worlds can be constructed through visual and aural references to reality (Elsaesser, 1993, 243). Importantly, Elsaesser's media world acknowledges the very constructedness and mediated nature of the world, while also recognizing that this does not absolve viewers of inactivity and that it should rather motivate the viewer to act morally responsibly in light of it. In my own formulation, I adopt the word reality over world, however, to draw attention to the ways that film may at times only demonstrate an immediate reality: an immediate media reality from which we may draw conclusions but which may not always be able to be extended into the world at large.

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MOVEMENTS

Video and Artist Statement

Entering the *Beyond

Artist Statement

RAI TERRY

Figure 1.
Screen capture from *Entering the *Beyond* (2021).

Entering The *Beyond begins with a close-up of Abbey Lincoln's mouth opening as she raises her voice from non-lyrical singing into a controlled frenzy of hollers and screams. This clip from her 1964 performance of "Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace," along with the image of a person being dipped into baptismal waters, is repeated throughout the work. It was my intention in placing these directional anchors throughout the piece to have them remind the viewer of the stakes as they are swiftly transported through various modules of a vibratory network. It is this network through which Black culture is constantly moving back and forth across the diaspora. Similar to how information travels throughout the brain and body through synapses, this network functions like an ecstatic nervous system and briefly opens a space for realities *beyond what can be known in the colonial present, and which run counter to the historical evidences found in Western archives.

In her 2018 essay of the same title, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman outlines "The Black Ecstatic" as "an aesthetic performance of embrace, the sanctuary of the unuttered and unutterable, and a mode of pleasurable reckoning with everyday ruin in contemporary Black lives under the strain of perpetual chaos and continued diminishment." (2018). As Abdur-Rahman describes them, these necessarily communal moments of rupture begin to tear at the very fabric of the spatial

Figure 2.
Screen capture from *Entering the *Beyond* (2021).

and temporal ontology of the West. This ontology has been primarily upheld by archives which, while often thought of as neutral and universal repositories of legitimized information, are actually designed to keep certain histories in, while keeping certain people out. In doing so they greatly lend themselves to endorsing the dichotomy between Black peoples and the enlightenment definition of humanity. However, the vibratory network of Black culture is a counter archive that has always circulated outside and in excess of these definitions. Following Abdur-Rahman, I illuminate a microcosm of ecstatic moments that come in the space between the synapses through which Black culture travels, and which open a space *beyond what can be known in the colonial present.

The film overlays numerous coded gestures which are immediately recognizable to those engaged in the communal activities that have been outlawed; they disrupt Western society, and so they are marked as indications of a non-humanness. These moments are part of a choreosonic performance which is made up of an erotic grammar which cannot simply be known, but must also be felt. It is in these moments, free from the constraints of surveillance and immediate risk of arrest or death, that the fundamental queerness of Blackness can become apparent. Stepping, shouting, winding, juking are portals to realities where Black pleasure is paramount, where a common vibration arises across spaces that are marked as queer or not queer, and across all socioeconomic and geographic boundaries. Rapturous moments drawn from the church, the ballroom, the cypher, the dancehall, the moshpit, the houseparty, the carnival, and the sidewalk form an embodied archive that sustains the everyday moods, sensations, and performances of Black life outside of what can be captured by traditional Western archives.

Much of the footage used in the work is gathered from YouTube, with some footage acquired from the South Side Home Movie Project and the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. A major aim of the project was to explore the ways that Black life is largely excluded from, and impossible to be contained within, the textual documents that fill colonial archives. There is no index or catalog that marks these musics, dances, practices, nor are they keyword searchable in digital repositories. Many of the videos utilized in the film were originally recorded on videotape, with some born-digital videos likely recorded on cell phones. It is important to note that from the 1980s through to the 2000s, videotape and digital media have been more accessible formats for Black people in lower socioeconomic classes, making it so that large portions of Black communities could record the interior lives of themselves and their families for the first time. This footage remains almost entirely uncollected by archives, despite the format's instability and imminent obsolescence. While the textual documents that disparage Black life as "other" and uphold white supremacy remain under heavy guard within the walls of the archive, decades of self-reflective materials and footage of quotidian Black life have been recorded over and disappeared.

As audiovisual technologies continue developing rapidly, and archives turn to synthetic DNA as brick and mortar buildings run out of space, one must wonder where the impulse to compulsively collect and hold items comes from, and what its ramifications are for the environment. To consider stepping out of the Eurocentric archive is to turn toward a different, more organic informational architecture; a network of shared cultural knowledge that surpasses the geographical and generational boundaries imposed by the colonial order. The film mimics the choreosonic performance in the speed and formatting of the footage in order to simultaneously signify to the Black queer diaspora while subverting the colonial gaze. Just as the vibrational network moves quickly and without regard for ideals of decency in order to remain outside the detection of those who would denigrate it, the film cross-references ecstatic moments based on their erotic register. One such instance in the film is what appears to be a dance battle between a Chicago juke dancer in a basement and a little boy doing a praise dance in a church. As the clips transition back and forth across the synapse, a commonality arises. Junctures such as these are not representative of equivalencies, but are indexes of an ecstatic vibrational frequency upon which valuable information can flow outside of, and undetectable to the colonial order.

Expressions of unfettered Black subjectivity cannot be contained in archives of textual depiction, nor in traditional Western archives which seek to hold history in stasis. Black culture exists *beyond what can be captured by the humanist projects that adhere to the colonial definition of humanity, what Sylvia Wynter describes as "Man." (1984). These will always cast Black bodies, Black movement, Black sound as excessive, disruptive, in need of being tamed or destroyed. Where the humanity of "Man" has relied on textual evidence to uphold its supremacy, Black people have relied upon the vibratory network, the space between the synapse, a space both present and *beyond the realm of Western humanity. This

Figure 3.
Screen capture from *Entering the *Beyond* (2021).

embodied archive is a momentary interruption of the humanist project, of white supremacy, of the colonial order.

This film offers a new kind of evidence, that there can be another kind of archive, one which is not constrained to the violence of description, but rather engages the fleeting expanse of ephemeral life.

*: The asterisk placed before the word beyond is meant to gesture toward the chaos which is always attendant to Black life, and which the space created beyond still lies on the premise of.

Entering the *Beyond* (2021)
Duration 14 mins.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewybJp8gZPk

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BOOK REVIEWS

Posthumanism

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance.*

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

THOMAS GOW

Within contemporary Indigenous Studies and its related fields, Robert Warrior's Indigenous Americas series has been home to a number of major contributions, including Glen Sean Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (2015). Encompassing works of political theory, literary and media studies, and legal histories, among others, the series is notable for the variety of disciplines with which it is engaged. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* is both of the same calibre as earlier high-points in the series and deeply reflective of this interdisciplinary spirit. Expansive, challenging, and beautifully written, the book's theorization of Indigenous resurgence as a response to settler colonialism demonstrates how resurgence is intertwined with matters of political economy, gender and sexuality, pedagogy, and aesthetics. As is to be expected from a project of such scope, the book occasionally gestures to pressing issues without engaging with them in full. That being said, scholars with commitments to any of the above matters would do well to engage with Simpson's work. Film and media scholars, in particular, will find that the centrality to Simpson's analysis of representational and aesthetic issues makes this an important text for thinking through the relationships between material anticolonial politics and artistic production.

In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson develops what she calls "the Radical Resurgence Project" (Simpson 2017, 34). Simpson has been described as one of the foremost theorists of resurgence, and with this book she provides a critical account of resurgence theory at the same time as she confirms its importance (Coulthard 2014, 154). Prioritizing Indigenous leadership and Indigenous values over recognition on the terms of the liberal settler state, resurgence theory asserts that only re-empowered Indigenous nations, not colonial institutions, can lead to decolonization (Coulthard 2014, 154–56; Alfred 2005, 151–56; Simpson 2017, 47–49). Here Simpson articulates what she sees as resurgence theory's potential limitations: its deployment as an endpoint in Indigenous scholarship, rather than a practical theory in need of further development; its openness to queer and feminist critiques; and its co-option by the settler state and its institutions to refer to a cultural, rather than a political, process (Simpson 2017, 47–50). Nonetheless, resurgence for Simpson is not to be discarded; it "represent[s] a radical practice in Indigenous theorizing, writing, organizing, and thinking, one that is entirely consistent with and inherently from Indigenous thought" (Simpson 2017, 48). She therefore uses the term "radi-

cal resurgence" to clarify that her work is concerned with the "fundamental transformation" of Indigenous life in opposition to settler colonialism and the related systems of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and capitalism (48–49). This understanding of resurgence provides the foundation for the book's subsequent contributions.

One of these contributions is to build on Glen Coulthard's work in *Red Skin, White Masks*. In particular, Simpson's work in this book is informed by the concept of "grounded normativity," which Coulthard develops in reference to the ethical and relational understandings that stem from "Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge" (Coulthard 2014, 13). Coulthard first introduces the concept while theorizing how Marx's 'primitive accumulation' thesis might be made useful for the analysis of settler colonialism; one of the key issues he raises in doing so is the primacy of dispossession (as opposed to proletarianization) in both the treatment of Indigenous peoples by the Canadian state and in Indigenous anticolonialism (Coulthard 2014, 13). Grounded normativity thus names the "place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice" (Coulthard 2014, 13). In her own use of the concept, Simpson intervenes with respect to the issues of dispossession and anticapitalism that are central to Coulthard's work. Like Coulthard, she emphasizes both the relationship between dispossession and capitalism and the role of grounded normativity in Indigenous anticapitalism (Simpson 2017, 72–73; Coulthard 2014, 13–14). What is innovative about Simpson's approach is the way in which she applies the concept of grounded normativity in order to re-conceptualize dispossession itself. Rather than conceiving of dispossession wholly in terms of land, she calls for an understanding "of *expansive dispossession* as a gendered removal of [Indigenous] bodies and minds from [their] nation and place-based grounded normativities" (Simpson 2017, 43). By seizing on the interconnection between body, mind, and land inherent in grounded normativity, Simpson establishes a theorization of dispossession which is attentive to the settler-colonial commodification of both land and bodies and which emphasizes the centrality of heteropatriarchy to settler colonialism (41). The role of colonial gender and sexual norms in settler-colonial processes has been addressed by other scholars (see, among others: Hunt and Holmes 2015; Rifkin 2011). However, Simpson's 'expansive dispossession' is unique in its succinct and holistic integration of Indigenous anticolonialism and anticapitalism with Indigenous queer and feminist thought. This combination of broad scope and conceptual elegance is one of the book's key merits.

Having established her theorization of expansive dispossession, Simpson devotes a significant portion of her book (three of twelve main chapters) to exploring the deep interrelationship between heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism and asserting the importance of contesting heteropatriarchy as part of radical resurgence. In these chapters, she combines, among other methodologies, reflections on her experiences as a teacher, historical analysis, and literary criticism. The valuable contributions here are too numerous to discuss in the space of a review, so I would like to focus on one aspect of Simpson's discussion that is particularly relevant to film and media scholars. For those of us whose research or teaching work involves the politics of representation, the issue of stereotypes as they are reified or subverted is foundational, perhaps even to the point of seeming banal to scholars invested in other theoretical avenues. However, Simpson weaves an analy-

sis of negative stereotypes throughout this section that usefully re-articulates the stakes and limitations of these issues. First, she links the internalization of racist and misogynistic ideas about Indigenous women with the dispossession of land (Simpson 2017, 86). She then returns to the subject via a reading of Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and an engagement with the canonized book's treatment in settler literary scholarship. Simpson argues that Canadian literary scholars have neglected to discuss Moodie's textual racism or have otherwise, in a reflection of the dominant settler "Canadian narrative of the past," sought to absolve themselves of responsibility for Canadian settler colonialism (98–100).[1] They have done this by either situating the text in an isolated historical context (despite the continuity of the racist beliefs expressed in the text up to the present day) or by suggesting Moodie's similarity to Indigenous women on the basis of shared experiences of marginalization (99–100). Finally, Simpson identifies a tendency for liberal activists, post-Idle No More, to coalesce around representational issues in lieu of land issues. These "easy wins," she writes, "only give the illusion of real change": "It is not acceptable to wear a headdress to a dance party, but it is acceptable to dance on stolen land and to build pipelines over stolen land" (113). To read these chapters as a media scholar is to see both the importance of researching and teaching the politics of representation re-framed in the context of Indigenous women's experiences and the limitations of representation-focused research in that context. Whether critiquing dominant representations or theorizing liberatory alternatives, Simpson's work reminds us that we must be conscious of the ease with which our work (produced, in the Americas at least, on stolen land) might be appropriated by a liberal order interested in the 'easy win' and antipathetic to 'real change.'

Following Simpson's examination of the relationship between heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism, the book turns to a consideration of Nishnaabeg pedagogy. Here the author contrasts the Nishnaabeg story of Binoojiinh (a child) learning to make maple sugar with the constraints imposed by the settler-colonial education system. In doing so, she articulates the nature and importance of Nishnaabeg theory and pedagogy and rejects the terms implicit in attempts to 'Indigenise the academy.' The Western academy, Simpson writes, has never truly recognized Indigenous knowledge. As a result, efforts to integrate Indigenous peoples and knowledges into the academy place Indigenous scholars in "a never-ending battle for recognition" in an institution whose "primary intention is to use Indigenous peoples and [their] knowledge systems to legitimize settler colonial authority" in both the education system and, by extension, Canadian society at large (171). On what really constitutes Indigenous education, Simpson is direct: "Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within [Indigenous] intellectual practices unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes" (154). The "[r]adical resurgent education" for which she advocates is thus threatened by, and in opposition to, settler-colonial dispossession (166, 170, 173).

Simpson's analysis is important and provocative, and her critique of the Western academy is matched by the form of her writing; this is a book that self-consciously eschews the conventions of Western academic writing in favour of Nishnaabeg intellectual practices and aesthetics (30–32). Reviewing it as a settler scholar, that is engaging its arguments and evaluating its usefulness in a Western settler academic context, is therefore a troubling task.

Warning of the academy's tendency to incorporate Indigenous knowledges only insofar as they can serve Western scientific norms, Bundjalung scholar Douglas L. Morgan writes: "What appears to be an accommodation of Indigenous knowledges is arguably a continuation of practices of appropriation" (Morgan 2003, 45). There is a very real risk of committing this sort of appropriation in a review. I can discuss and express my admiration for some of the book's many contributions, but it contains intellectual dimensions that should not be instrumentalized, at least not by me, and at least not in this context. As such, I will conclude my discussion of Simpson's treatment of Nishnaabeg theory and pedagogy by simply saying that it should be of interest to scholars invested in decolonial pedagogy in a settler-colonial context. How Simpson's work might relate to such scholars' research and teaching practices will depend on their positionalities and commitments.

The final chapters of *As We Have Always Done* are dedicated to a consideration of how radical resurgent organizing might function. "[P]lace based and local" as well as "networked and global," resurgent organizing follows Glen Coulthard's critique of the settler-colonial politics of recognition and Audra Simpson's theorization of generative refusal in its disinterest in state recognition and its emphasis on the possibilities inherent in refusing the settler-colonial frameworks provided by the state (Simpson 2017, 175–79). These chapters will be of particular interest to film and media scholars, as Simpson develops her argument through an in-depth consideration of Indigenous aesthetics. She discusses art as a medium for Nishnaabeg "reciprocal recognition" that could counter "shame as a tool of settler colonialism" (186–87). Furthermore, Simpson suggests that studying Indigenous artistic production is useful "as a mechanism for moving from individual acts of resurgence to collective ones" (198). Building on Jarrett Martineau's scholarship, she writes that Indigenous aesthetics can be deployed for the purposes of the "coded disruption" of settler colonialism and the "affirmative refusal" of the "commodification and control" of Indigenous cultures, enabling direct communication and relationship-building between Indigenous artists and Indigenous audiences (198–99). In certain respects, Simpson's work here shares much with Michelle Raheja's theorization of visual sovereignty. Like Raheja, Simpson is interested in how Indigenous artists "speak to multiple audiences," in the integration of Indigenous aesthetics and epistemologies in artistic practice, and in the relationship between art and anticolonial resistance (Simpson 2017, 200; Raheja 2010, 193–94, 199–200). However, Simpson's approach to Indigenous aesthetics is valuable in its own right, particularly in its attention to relationality, colonial and anticolonial affects, and embodiment, not to mention its location in a broader conceptualization of Indigenous resurgence (Simpson 2017, 198–99). Scholars whose research addresses the relationships between media, settler colonialism, and anticolonialism will find in these passages a significant intervention.

One of the final arguments Simpson makes in *As We Have Always Done* exemplifies a key area in which the book falls slightly short of its ambitions. In a crucial examination of the role of solidarity with other movements in resurgent organizing, Simpson writes that "there is virtually no room for white people in resurgence" (228). Because "dispossession, capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy" are central to settler colonialism, possible allies for Indigenous resurgence are "not liberal white Canadians who uphold all four of these pillars but Black and brown individuals and com-

munities on Turtle Island and beyond that are struggling in their own localities against these same forces, building movements that contain the alternatives" (228–29). The author goes on to highlight a number of questions that would need to be addressed and work that would need to be accomplished in order to construct such "constellations of coresistance" (229–31). This, in and of itself, is not a fault but a set of issues to be addressed in another project (indeed, Simpson's collaboration with Robyn Maynard, forthcoming at the time of writing, may be just such a project). However, the brevity of this section is emblematic of the references to anti-Black racism and Black scholarship throughout the book. Black intellectuals in a variety of disciplines, including Katherine McKittrick, Fred Moten, Christina Sharpe, Robin D. G. Kelley, and Dionne Brand are cited, but their work is seldom discussed in any kind of depth. As a result, the book's analysis of settler colonialism in relationship to other manifestations of white supremacy feels somewhat underdeveloped.

Nonetheless, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resurgence* is vital reading for the many major contributions it does develop. Its theorization of how Indigenous resurgence is intertwined with matters of political economy, gender and sexuality, pedagogy, and aesthetics gives it an interdisciplinary significance that is matched by its substantial insights. Film and media scholars invested in the relationship between material anticolonial resistance and artistic practice should find the book an essential supplement to more discipline-specific scholarship.

Notes

1. Film and media studies, of course, has its own issues with scholars neglecting to address the racism of canonical texts adequately. The most famous and best-addressed example is likely D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* "ha[ving] been canonized by decades of dominant film criticism that has insisted on the distinction between (or the paradox presented by) the film's politics and aesthetics" (Stewart 2005, 27).

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APARAJITA DE

Since the introduction of a digital turn to humanities scholarship shifted the contours of the conventional modes of examining the production and dissemination of culture and identity, digital humanities scholarship has created both nebulous and interdependent discourse communities. In one of the earliest anthologies arguing for the emerging field and its far-reaching influence, Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth have advocated for an independent yet interconnected field thus, "The digital humanities, then, and their interdisciplinary core found in the field of humanities computing, have a long and dynamic history best illustrated by an examination of the locations at which specific disciplinary practices intersect with computation" (Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth 2004, xxiv). In its evolution as a fast-growing field of research and archival work, the fluidity of Digital Humanities allows for exploring newer ways of representation, politics, and research mediation. Furthering that conversation, in 2016, Roopika Risam had discussed Digital Humanities within the conceptual framework of intersectionality, underscoring the need to decolonize and delink Eurocentric critical theories that have traditionally marginalized the works of Black feminist scholars while they simultaneously advocated for a certain kind of hierarchization and institutionalization of local knowledge. The current edition of essays, *The Digital Black Atlantic*, expands that conversation by intersecting Digital Humanities and Black Diaspora Studies.

This volume of diverse essays reconfigures and reinterrogates the scant sites of representations that include and embrace intersections of diaspora studies, more specifically Black and African diasporas and their connections with Digital Humanities. The editors, Roopika Risam and Kelly Baker Josephs, offer a foundational perspective to their critical niche. It is a "juxtaposition—of disciplines, cultures, and methods—within the African diaspora," they advance (2021, ix). Aimed to transform the conversation around the digital inquiries and inequities centered on African diaspora cultures' digital production, this volume of essays offers scholars and the advanced students of diaspora and digital humanities a set of tools, citations, diverse perspectives, terms, and a discursive foundation to enable a more inclusive and complex relationship within and between the disciplines of diaspora, Digital Humanities, Black and African diasporas.

Pivoting on Paul Gilroy's seminal *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and*

Double Consciousness (1993), the editors' nuance is on the side of an expansive definition of Black Studies within and beyond the Atlantic. In a classic decolonial gesture, each writer independently forges a challenging, transformational, and inclusive space to realize the potentials of the digital black diasporas. Individual chapters may well be assigned for advanced undergraduates to underscore the fluidity of areas of inquiry within this focus. In the subsequent chapters of the edition, writers foreground the frameworks of a conceptual methodology of Blackness as it relates to the Digital Humanities, provoking conversation on revisiting the limitations and intersections within traditions of Black Studies and the demands of digital humanities and its methods (see Risam and Josephs 2021, xiv). Methodologically, this approach integrates empirical experiences through games, memory projects, digitized book projects, and data with the questions of contemporary Black Atlantic perspectives and theoretical modes of studying cultural production. Diverse voices of archivists, game studies scholars, historians, cultural and literary studies scholars, and librarians inform the diversity the editors seek to assimilate in the volume. In reevoking the traditions of Black Studies, what is revealed is the exclusion or glossing over of Black histories, Black presents, and futures (see Risam and Josephs 2021, xiv). As a progressive site for the reemergence of critical Black politics, the volume boldly sets out to articulate the need to institutionally shift the contours of Black digital production and scholarship around it while simultaneously reminding its audience that we can do more to advocate the dismantling of those systems that oppress (or exclude) black bodies, voices, and experiences. In the inherent and liberatory possibilities of a volume of this kind, a more complex engagement with the afterlife of this work, of its valence in policymaking, with which more privileged scholars curate and document black lives digitally, seems to be an avenue to explore further (See Noble 29).

The collection is divided into four sections, each strategically titled. The first section begins with "Memory" and reinterrogates the "histories of contemporary archival impulses toward African diasporic experiences" (Risam and Josephs 2021, xvii). The second, called "Crossings," emphasizes how Black Atlantic digital humanities negotiate temporally and spatially. The third, "Relations," brings out the connections and resonances created by the continuous exchanges in the dynamic Black Atlantic digital and analog spaces. The concluding section, "Becomings," articulates the aspirations and emphasizes the growing scholarship of the digital Black Atlantic diaspora. For this reviewer, each section encompasses and informs the overall interdisciplinarity of the book and its emphasis on the transformative and agentic significance of such a perspective in thinking about the Black Atlantic, the digital Black Atlantic, and about the construction of Blackness in the diaspora. The essays of the first section of the book are particularly incisive. For instance, Janneken Smucker's "Access and Empowerment: Rediscovering Moments in the Lives of African American Migrant Women" discusses the strategies of student engagement in revisiting oral histories

in Southern Black women's narratives as they moved from the segregated South to urban Philadelphia (Risam and Josephs 2021, 49-56). The emphasis on how oral histories change and transform the narrative of the Black experience in the United States is singular and emplaces the genre from a predominantly white, literate, privileged scenario to a more diverse one (49). Following Smucker's, Angel David Nieves' essay is a refreshing take on oral history and queer witnessing that reinvigorates this volume's aims of advocating for equitable and diverse spaces to foster renewed engagement with forms of praxis to "reveal complexity, contradiction, and frustration regarding the development of intersectional lives" (Risam and Josephs 2021, 59).

The relevance and interconnection of the essays in this section become more insightful when they are located transnationally. Under "Crossings," local and global sites of production are discussed. Alexandrina Agloro presents a fascinating study of how *the Philippi Music Project* enables a music-centric community of care through transnationally located digital ubuntu, in Cape Town, South Africa (69-76). The question of access and intersection informs the collaborative arguments forwarded in "Radical Collaboration to Improve Library Collections" by Héléne Huet, Suzan Alteri, and Laurie N. Taylor (95-107). Here, the authors talk of nomenclature in library cataloging systems of well-funded institutions in the West which, while providing access to literature and culture from the African diasporas, reify and reduce canons based on geographic locations, as they subsume local complexities and interdisciplinary connections. This chapter pairs well with Amy Earhart's earlier essay on the technologies of recovery that hold the potential to restore the history of Black textual production from the editorial standpoint (31-48). Another one at a later section titled, "Black Atlantic Networks in the Archives and the Limits of Findings Aids as Data" also reconnects to the earlier two chapters by navigating the ways and means of transcribing the metadata used to describe archival collections of the Black experience (168-180). In forging pathways for allowing agency and inclusivity to produce knowledge on the Black experience, this essay advocates for a more liberatory standard for using archival finding aids to create network graphs (169). This connection amongst voices and essays within the sections creates a symphony fostering breadth, interconnections, and a social justice framework.

The concluding section of the book, titled "Becomings," teases out the possibilities for continuing conversation along the diverse scope of the field. This section includes essays discussing Digital Humanities projects to videogame research, to revisiting tropes of biases and prejudices that connect the discussion of Africa in video gaming to the "transatlantic European slave trade" (184). A co-authored chapter titled "Musical Passage: Sound, Text, and the Promise of the Digital Black Atlantic" explores the sound of Jamaican life from the 1680s, recreating musical notations to recover artistic voice and the real authentic in the history of the enslaved and the colonized. In the collaborative chapter by Kaiama L. Glover and Alex

Gil, which concludes the volume, the book's attempts at understanding and dismantling intertwined networks of access and hierarchization find a reinforcement.

The authors speak of a collaborative project using storytelling techniques to elaborate on the series of interactive and content-oriented maps they created to trace the migratory movements of intellectuals from the Francophone world to the Anglophone with better access. This conversation opens future avenues for discussions on access and ability of coders, globally situated with strategic information yet with limited percolation. For this reviewer, the last chapter engenders the expectation of an Afterword reflecting on the new frontiers and questions that a project of this kind raises. Questions on environmentally situated Digital Humanities projects, the intersection of disability and access within Digital Humanities and Black Diaspora studies remain unasked, and the volume invites researchers and students to continue to widen the scope of that conversation. An index of the critical terms and scholarship used would have also proved useful. Overall, the salient feature of the volume is to point to the need for generating and expanding the scope of the conversation around the Black Atlantic by incorporating global and transnational voices in Digital Humanities scholarship for recentering the inclusive project of a liberatory Humanities; and this volume is a rewarding experience into the experimental, novel, and imperative recovery process towards that goal.

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Moya Bailey. *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance.*

New York: New York University Press, 2021.

SHANIA PERERA

Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey's excellent collection of essays *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* provides important insight into how black women utilize digital media to amplify their voices amid vitriol from a white, cisgender, and heteronormative majority. Coined by Bailey in 2008, the term *misogynoir* refers to "the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience, particularly in US visual and digital culture." (1). It describes "the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization." (1). Bailey's text is ripe with examples of misogynoir in popular media that justify the necessity of digital resistance in online spaces. This resistance, as Bailey claims, has the potential to transform into tangible collective action. She states that digital alchemy redefines everyday digital media into "social justice media" (24) which then represents women of color, Black women, and Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant folks in an affirmative and positive light. Bailey provides various instances of the defensive and generative digital alchemy which serves as a mode of resistance against misogynoir. As she contends, the transformation of misogynoir aims to lessen the online and offline violence against Black women, and, in effect, women of color, Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant people.

I was introduced to Bailey's work in a Feminist Media Studies graduate seminar where we read the first chapter of *Misogynoir Transformed*, titled "Misogynoir is a Drag." The insight in this section provides the groundwork for the analyses offered in the remainder of the book, which are as interesting as they are heartbreaking. Here Bailey delves into the politics behind the filming of and subsequent virality of the physical assault of black women and girls at the hands of police and other authorities. These abuses of power are apparent in the cases of Dajerria Becton, a girl known as "Shakara," and Niya Kenny, all of which are considered in Bailey's analysis of the various instances in which Black women and girls encounter misogynoir in modern media, online spaces, and reality. The term "drag" is used in this chapter to demonstrate its various connotations: drag queen culture, Black vernacular English which implies humiliation, and the verb of physically "dragging." These contemporary understandings resonate throughout the text, which consistently read with ease and contained an admirable intersectional approach.

For instance, Bailey always makes reference to "women of color, Black women, Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant folks" as those who are most often marginalized in digital spaces and modern society (20). The inclusion of this spectrum speaks to her astute analysis of the various ways these groups encounter misogynoir, as "there are masculine-of-center, agender, and nonbinary people who experience the deleterious effects of misogynoir and who may not identify as women or femmes." (20).

In line with this brilliant point, Bailey's insights are often quite nuanced, such as her claim that Black women and Black Feminists are not synonymous since "misogynoir is deployed because of social beliefs about Black women, and those…who are read as Black women…get caught in the crosshairs." (20). Indeed, marginalized people, under patriarchy and white supremacy, can marginalize their own. Internalized racism and misogyny do exist amongst women and women of colour, often appearing in various social contexts. Demonstrating her awareness of this fact, Bailey uses the examples of queer women in the media, such as musical artist Syd joking about hitting women amongst her male colleagues and comedian Lena Waithe writing the viral YouTube video "Shit Black Girls Say" which appeals to masses that tend to perpetuate misogynoir. Bailey's bold observation is essential to understanding that misogynoir can and has been articulated beyond the scope of the white majority. Next, the chapter "Transforming Misogynoir Through Trans Advocacy" provides instances of trans advocacy through the discussion of viral hashtags on Twitter such as #GirlsLikeUs, a source of online upliftment and validation amongst trans women; #TWOC (trans women of color); and #FreeCeCe, an organizational effort to mobilize support for a trans woman (Cece McDonald) imprisoned for defending herself against Neo-Nazis. As Bailey argues, "Black women are repurposing the capitalist tools of social media into tools that allow them to grow community, share resources, and even advocate for each other's safety and health" highlighting the significance of social media platforms in the mobilization of the marginalized (71). This has been most prevalent through the actions of writer and trans advocate Janet Mock, as well as trans actress Laverne Cox, who have both facilitated and participated in these hashtags as a mode of resistance to redefine the "realness" of womanhood. Chapter 3, titled "Web Show Worldbuilding Mitigates Misogynoir," contains close readings of relevant Black queer women's web series, including *Skye's the Limit* (2013), *Between Women* (2011–) and *195 Lewis* (2017). Bailey claims that these shows "both trouble and perpetuate misogynoir," offering insights into the complicated and oftentimes nuanced worldbuilding of queer Black women (105). Her critiques of the works of renowned Black filmmaker Tyler Perry and the plethora of anti-Black media that are often promoted as humorous is essential to understanding the proliferation of misogynoir in entertainment. Stereotypical figures such as the "Jezebel," "Mammy," and "Sapphire" are referenced as damaging portrayals of Black women in film and television that ought to be challenged by viewers. Further, her critical analysis of the so-

cial repercussions of the YouTube video "Shit Black Girls Say" is memorable, as there is certainly a facet of online culture that mocks and utilizes the figure of the Black woman as a means of relatability for those who are not Black. This persists in online spaces even today, and it is essential to question why this is the case. The comparisons made between a viral piece of media such as "Shit Black Girls Say" and the lesser-known web-shows *Skye's the Limit* and *Between Women* (2011–2015) are intriguing, as there seems to be more of a gravitation towards the damaging portrayals of Black women over those that battle misogynoir through honest representation of the very real challenges Black women, Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant folks face. Bailey successfully asks audiences to rethink their consumption of certain media so that they may not continue to contribute to a culture that makes light of these groups instead of uplifting them.

The final chapter of *Misogynoir Transformed*, titled "Alchemists in Action Against Misogynoir" highlights the platform of Tumblr, a blogging site, as a space of digital resistance. As it was most popular in the mid 2010s, it seems to be commonly agreed upon that Tumblr is an irrelevant online space in today's digital milieu. This is an observation that Bailey chooses to disregard in her analysis. With the rise of more prevalent social media platforms, particularly TikTok, that have grown adjacent to the publication of *Misogynoir Transformed*, there is certainly more to be said in Bailey's discussion of online safe spaces and discourse. Nevertheless, she significantly notes the role of Tumblr in the history of preliminary online community-building. After all, the website "kick-started many teenagers' interest in social justice, an interest that pushed many into more meaningful political battles on more mainstream platforms." (Eloise). Bailey is cognizant of the fact that social media plays a large role in digital alchemy, as evidenced by the defensive hashtags on Twitter and the online spaces offered by blogging sites such as Tumblr. She states that, "Twitter and Tumblr are two social media platforms that have facilitated organizing and exchange for Black trans women who might not otherwise be able to connect." (Bailey 102). Her book does not suggest, however, that these platforms are inherently positive, as misogyny is significantly perpetuated throughout the very spaces in which Black women attempt to find solace. Indeed, "Tumblr is a tool, a platform that is helpful until it is not… it can also lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings that make continued use of the platform unsustainable." (167). It is notable that the concept of the 'Tumblr Social Justice Warrior' emerged as backlash against those who attempted to spread awareness of social justice issues on the platform. The people who tend to support this concept also perpetuate ideas that pertain to misogynoir (Eloise). Alternatively, Bailey's discussion with nonbinary femme Danielle "Strugg" Cole includes a section on the "ideal social media platform," which Cole describes as a space of accountability for those who may wander into racist, sexist, and otherwise offensive territory online (Bailey 157). According to Bailey the concept of "calling in" (154) as opposed to calling out these behaviors contributes to a form of trans-

formative justice that radically teaches those who may not understand the extent of social justice issues. Here Bailey and Cole offer a surface level, yet effective, solution to encounters of injustice and misogynoir both online and offline. While Tumblr may not have been successful in its potential for positive collectivity, there seems to be more productive work being proliferated through new platforms.

Bailey successfully provides a captivating glance into Black women's digital and offline resistance in the wake of an array of relevant social justice movements. The book demonstrates that the transformation of misogynoir into collective and effective action is an ongoing process that we can attend to in solidarity with women of color, Black women, and Black non-binary, agender and gender-variant people. The most significant lesson offered by *Misogynoir Transformed* is its insistence that we acknowledge the groundwork laid out by these marginalized groups, who have and continue to set the precedent for digital and offline resistance against hatred.

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Routledge, 2018.

OLIVE ZEYNEP KARTAL

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed considers the spatial aspects of the term sexual *orientation*, adding onto the idea that queer identity has as much to do with space as with sexuality (2008). When looking at queer film, a spatial approach translates to an attention to time and space in representations of queerness, which can then be geographically traced. Such interventions to spatially orientate sexualities return sexual identities their geographical specificity, as well as counter assumptions that queerness must always emerge from the same places in the same ways (Ula 2019). *Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space* arrives at a time when, as the editor Leanne Dawson argues in the introduction, "a queering of Europe" is urgently necessary (196).[1] The five articles by different scholars focus on German (in comparison with American); Croatian; Italian; Swedish; and French-language contexts, and always on moments where European identity is in tension. In some cases, queerness presents a threat to "constructions of nationhood [which] usually involve specific notions of both 'manhood' and 'womanhood'" (209). In others, queer identities are perceived as a disruption to "nation-building processes" and their narratives around the heterosexual family (231). And in others, these border-crossing identities—which cross actual borders as much as dichotomies in the European road movie—present new ways of relating to the nation and forms of queer citizenship (275). Each article offers a different direction towards queer European cinema: from approaches based on queer theory or national discourses, to a focus on genres of pornography or the road movie. The result is a queering of the notion of Europeanness, as well as developments in the understanding of queerness itself. The different methods proposed for the study of queer European film and the information offered in these articles are sure to be useful to those studying queer European cinema.

The introduction, starting from American queer film, offers an impressive guide to queer European film when it moves from German, Turkish,[2] French, Belgian, Swiss, Italian, Spanish, to Swedish queer film. This chapter is an excellent source for those wishing to diversify their queer European film syllabi. It also sets the focus of the book on time and space in queer film, justifying the following articles' spatial and temporal approaches to queer identity.

The first article, written by Dawson, "Passing and policing: Controlling Compassion, Bodies and Boundaries in *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled/Fremde Haut*" analyses the use of trans tropes

in two films with different origins and similar plots. *Boys Don't Cry*, American director Kimberly Peirce's depiction of the real-life murder of Brandon Teena in a small town in Nebraska, is a staple of New Queer Cinema (205). *Unveiled* is German director Angelina Maccarone's fiction film about an Iranian woman, Fariba, who seeks asylum in Germany for their lesbian identity and assumes the identity of another male refugee, Siamak, while working in a small German town (208). Using Butler, Foucault, and Halberstam, Dawson carries out a queer theoretical reading of the two films. Making the link between a highly popular American film that has been extensively studied in American queer studies, and a German film with a similar plot, serves to connect American queer studies to European, inviting scholars of American queer studies to incorporate European cinema. However, such transnational linking does so much more than that; in fact, it is in the act of connecting films with similar plots in different places, that the crucial importance of space in queer films becomes clear. The comparison allows Dawson to acknowledge the role of space in the construction of gender and sexuality (208), by noting that the gender norms Brandon and Fariba/Siamak must perform in each film—to pass in their respective towns—are geographically and culturally distinct (219). Fariba/Siamak's gender expression is highly connected to ethnic and cultural significance, not only because they assume the trans identity in order to pass as a refugee in Germany, but also because their passing becomes possible as they are assumed to be "performing Iranian masculinity" (219). And when they face violence for their gender identity, it is an intersection of "misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia" (208). However, it is not only Fariba/Siamak whose gender intersects with space; Brandon in *Boys Don't Cry* must display a certain geographically specific masculinity, characterized as "poor, rural, Midwestern masculinity," in order "to be accepted by [the] local men" (209). Dawson, using Butler, makes the case for acknowledging space in understandings of gender, as well as in analyses of film, as it is through an attention to space that gender's intersection "with class, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity" is revealed (209). In such comparisons of narratively similar but geographically different films, I believe we can see the one that is more familiar to us anew through the lens of the other—which is exactly the kind of revelation that spatial approaches to queer cinema has to offer.

In "Concealing, Revealing, and Coming Out: Lesbian Visibility in Dalibor Matanić's *Fine Dead Girls* and Dana Budisavljević's *Family Meals*," Sanja Laćan focuses on two Croatian films and how the representation within and the discourses surrounding them display the nation's treatment of homosexuality. Laćan begins with a mention of the Croatian marriage referendum in 2013, an event whose aftermath displayed the tendencies to conflate homosexuality with national anxieties (230). She notes, citing Moss and Simić (2011), that the same tendency surfaces in post-socialist films with the use of the lesbian subject as a "metaphor" for other socio-political issues (231). Dalibor Matanić's *Fine Dead Girls* is one film where the lesbian subject becomes an "empty sig-

nifier" standing in for other national concerns (242), resulting in discursive, as well as actual, violence against the lesbian character (236). However, Laćan makes sure to show, not every Croatian queer film displays this tendency to cast lesbian characters as "metaphors for nationality" (233). Dana Budisavljević's *Family Meals*, which has been titled the most watched documentary in the history of Croatian cinema (239), presents a different relation between national and sexual identities. The filmmaker shows her family discussing her coming out during mealtimes—a time when national and cultural values are taught to children (241)—and reveals the fluidity of social constructions (239). Instead of lesbian becoming a metaphor for national anxieties, here the meals serve as metaphor for something both firmly constructed but also fluid, like European identity itself. As the filmmaker's lesbian identity "uncovers her family's queerness," what sits at the table is a lesbian subject whose identity "reflects not only her own sexuality, but also the values of her community" (240, 242). Laćan's national reading locates how tendencies to conflate LGBTQ+ issues with socio-political concerns translates to Croatian queer film, before extracting a new way of synthesizing queerness and nationality through Budisavljević's film.

"Loose Cannons Unloaded. Popular Music, Space, and Queer Identities in the Films of Ferzan Özpetek" by Elena Boschi makes a strong case for considering aural representations, alongside visual ones, when studying queer European cinema. Boschi argues for what she terms "conditions of the audible," adding onto "conditions of the visible" theorized by Teresa de Lauretis (248), to describe the audibility of queerness in film and the construction of queer spaces through sound (247). She listens to Turkish-Italian director Ferzan Özpetek's films, analysing the interactions between Italian and non-Italian songs in the soundtrack, which culminate in a "revision of Italy" as she argues (248). In Özpetek's *Hamam*, she notes an aural Othering of queerness through Orientalist music during the kissing scene, which she argues complicates the visibility of queerness (248). She notes, however, such a reading is only possible "if we consider *Hamam* an Italian film," before quickly touching upon Turkish perspectives cited in Barış Kılıçbay's "Queer As Turk" (2008) (249). Her own treatment of Özpetek as mostly Italian in this article speaks to the tendency of "audiences and academics" to claim Özpetek as "predominantly Turkish or Italian" that she mentions (247). While bringing up fantastic arguments for the study of sound in queer cinema, the article also brings up questions about the Italian and Turkishness of Özpetek, exemplifying the kind of disruptions that the field of queer European cinema must also consider in its queering of Europe.

Ingrid Ryberg in "The Ethics of Shared Embodiment in Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography" considers the Swedish short film collection *Dirty Diaries: Twelve Shorts of feminist Porn* (2009) which includes her own film, alongside the history of pornography and the feminist movement in Sweden. *Dirty Diaries* began when filmmaker Mia Engberg, after participating in the Stockholm International Film Festival sponsored by Nokia,

where each director made a short using a mobile phone camera, offered the same camera to activists and artists (261). The pornographic short film collection that resulted was partly funded by the Swedish Film Institute, a decision which has received some criticism (261). Ryberg notes that such criticism evokes the historical debates over feminism and pornography, most notably exemplified in the "Sex Wars" of the US, which has been "formative also of the women's movement in Sweden and other European countries" (262, 263). Often, the image that results from the historical accounts following the Sex Wars is a "linear progression of the feminist movement," which as Clare Hemmings (2005) argues, obscures the often more "cyclical" nature of feminist debates (263). What Ryberg does excellently here is to use the disagreements over feminist pornography, and feminist porn as an indeterminate process (264), to theorize an ethics that can allow feminists to come together in "shared embodiment" (266). Ryberg focuses on the use of mobile phone camera to film the shorts and their public screening as inviting a certain "embodied spectatorship," using Vivian Sobchack's term (265). The participants of the collection do not arrive at a fixed definition for feminist pornography, choosing instead to employ different strategies in each short (264). This points to the field of feminist porn as a site of "disagreements and heterogeneity, rather than consensus" which Ryberg argues, translates to the "ethical space…capable of accommodating difference and disagreements" (263, 264).

The final chapter, "Crossing Borders and Queering Identities in French-Language European Road Cinema" is Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt's treatment of the European road movie through three French-language films. The films considered are the French film *Plein sud/Going South* (Lifshitz 2009), Maghrebi-French *Origine contrôlée/Made in France* (Bouchaala and Tahri 2001), and Swiss *Comme des voleurs (à l'est)/Stealth* (Baier 2006)—all characterized as being queer, "border-crossing" road movies (275). The authors characterize French language road film as "a genre that actively reformulates the limits of French identity," and it is in these films' journeys to Spain, Algeria/Switzerland, and Poland, respectively, that "fluid" forms of identity are constructed (275). Besides their subject matter concerning travel, escape, and the nation, the authors note that the genre's formal elements are especially suited to a "queering of borders," an example being the "travel montages" that depict "shifting" belongings and "intermediate spaces that encompass multiple transnational and queer affiliations" (276, 277). Importantly, "citizenship in European road films is reframed as inherently linked to mobility"—exemplified poignantly in *Origine contrôlée*'s final shot of the three characters on a "borrowed scooter" where, as argued, their freedom is an illusion of the act of their "movement," as geographical freedom ultimately seems out of reach for them (276, 283). In fact, European road movies depict both the "rigidity" and "malleability" of borders, as in *Comme des voleurs*' Swiss protagonist's "effortless gliding" across the borders of Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland being contrasted with the undocumented Polish worker he met

back in Switzerland who inspired him to take his journey (286). This film where a Swiss gay man adopts a Polish identity which for most of the film appears "invented" (284) could be seen as taking a "'queer' approach to national and cultural identity," where "national affiliation can be chosen rather than simply inherited" (284). The author's fascinating explorations of the road movie effectively prove the usefulness of the genre in the study of queer European cinema.

Queer European Cinema: Queering Cinematic Time and Space is an exciting book. The conclusions and the different approaches offered in each individual article equip the reader with knowledge and methodologies of approaching queer European cinema, as well as an excitement for the possibilities the field has to offer. By situating sexuality geographically, and locating moments where European identity is in tension in queer films, the authors demonstrate the use of queerness to formulate new notions of citizenship and belonging. Among the different ways of seeing, hearing, and imagining European identity in queer films, what comes into view is a Europe reframed through the lens of queerness.

Notes

1. The articles, as noted in the book, have originally been published in *Studies in European Cinema*, volume 12, issue 3 (2015).
2. Though Turkey is not considered a part of Europe, a summary of queer Turkish cinema is included in the introduction, in a move that both matches the book's aim to question what constructs European identity, and evokes the country's complex relation to Europe. The issue is further exemplified in the third chapter where Ferzan Özpetek is claimed as more of an Italian director than a Turkish one.

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BOOK REVIEWS

General

Colin Jon Mark Crawford. *Netflix's Speculative Fictions: Financializing Platform Television.*

Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020.

TYLER KLATT

In 2007, Netflix launched its streaming service platform that revolutionized the entertainment industry and radically reconfigured viewing habits all around the world. As of 2022, Netflix is the largest platform with over 200 million subscribers, outsizing US market behemoths like Amazon Prime Video and Disney+, as well as overseas competitors such as Tencent Video, headquartered in China (Seligson and Raimonde 2022). The story of Netflix's founding and rise to prominence has captured the attention of scholars across film and television studies. Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski's collection of essays *The Age of Netflix* (2017), Kevin McDonald and Daniel Smith Rowsey's anthology *The Netflix Effect* (2016), and Theo Plothe and Amber M. Buck's volume *Netflix at the Nexus* (2019) offer some of the most comprehensive analyses that document the shift from movie theaters, DVDs, and TV networks to online streaming services. Previous research on Netflix highlights how the platform disrupted film and television from multiple perspectives, by popularizing new viewing practices, such as binge-watching and multimedial viewing, by forging novel aesthetic conventions, and finally, by introducing new business strategies rooted in internet distribution, recommendation algorithms, and data harvesting techniques. Colin Jon Mark Crawford's *Netflix's Speculative Fictions: Financializing Platform TV* (2020) offers an exciting contribution to the emerging field of scholarship on streaming services by exposing the logics of finance that govern the era of platform TV.

In *Netflix's Speculative Fictions*, Crawford positions Netflix between the tech, entertainment, and finance industries. In this insightful analysis of Netflix's corporate history, Crawford examines the "meta-narrative of value" across the company's financial literature, including press releases, financial reports, CEO letters, and executive interviews, that drive investment on the stock market and secure subscribers (9). Crawford traces Netflix's "corporate communications" across three acts in the company's history: (1) as a DVD rental service, (2) as a Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) platform, and (3) as a global film and television service and producer of original content. By close reading Netflix's corporate literature, Crawford argues that the company's growth has hinged upon its ability to create powerful narratives of future value for investors.

In the introduction, Crawford sets up his theoretical framework by introducing the concept of "speculative fictions" (2). The term "speculative fic-

tions" represents both a genre of literature and potent metaphor for Netflix's corporate communications. Building on Nick Srnicek's foundational text *Platform Capitalism* (2017), Crawford highlights the centrality of financialization in the business of platforms. Stories of Netflix's staggering debt to maintain its content library dominate narratives in the popular press and highlight the company's reliance on investment. In 2020, Netflix had a reported debt of $16 billion (Seligson and Raimonde 2022). The degree to which Netflix's success always remains uncertain, with no guarantee of returns for investors, emphasizes the importance of "speculation" within platform economies where Netflix must always work to "bring into being the value they describe and project" (3). As Crawford makes clear, what is particularly "fictitious" about Netflix's business model is the way the company shifts the calculus of value from the world of production to the world of finance. For Netflix and other platform companies, it is the stock market rather than production (e.g., the release of original content) that determines the company's value. As Crawford argues, Netflix's speculative fictions forge powerful narratives of potential value for investors that privilege market dominance and scaled growth over immediate profits. The way Netflix's corporate communications rely on literary devices, such as characters, conflict, story arcs, and "happily ever afters," make the genre of financial literature ripe for textual analysis. In his book, Crawford offers a close reading of Netflix's speculative fictions across the twenty-plus years of its corporate history that inspire capital investment and forge the "investor lore" that constructs Netflix as valuable (4).

In Act I, "What is Past is Prologue (1997–2007), Crawford focuses on Netflix's origins as an online DVD rental service. This chapter examines how Netflix realized the world of online DVD rental, taking down retail giant Blockbuster through the company's growth over profit model. The title of this chapter highlights how Netflix's early corporate communications became the prologue to the contemporary framing of the company as the model "delivered-to-you" movie service. Here, Crawford brings together a discussion of varied materials, including interviews with founders Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph, press releases, and financial reports, such as the company's S-1 form to demonstrate how Netflix's financial literature positioned the corporation as an "investment-worthy company" through promises of plenitude (32). As Crawford astutely summarizes, "the greater investor lore is at mobilizing investment capital, the easier it is for a company to realize its performative promises, futures, and worlds" (38). In this section, Crawford demonstrates how the investor lore from this early period worked to brand the new DVD distribution service and its logics of media convergence as innovative and disruptive (29). As Crawford demonstrates, Netflix's insistent identification as a tech company helped them tap into the Silicon Valley ethos of "disruption" to legitimate the novel online DVD distribution website, Netflix.com. Crawford's guided tour of Netflix's early investor lore highlights how Netflix strategically branded the media convergence between the internet

and film and television as innovation. Certainly, Netflix disrupted the entertainment industry, listening and viewing habits, and conventions of film and television. What this chapter does is remind the reader of the way Netflix's narrative of disruption also remains a carefully crafted speculative fiction to attract investors and subscribers.

In Act II, "Hope Streams Eternal (2007–2011)," Crawford analyzes the investor lore surrounding the launch of Netflix's streaming platform. The title of this chapter comments on the "perceived infinitude" of Netflix's streaming service and the company's capitalist fantasy of endless expansion (69). Like the previous chapter, Crawford zeroes in on Netflix's corporate communications, this time with a focus on annual reports, letters to shareholders, and the Netflix Media Blog. In this chapter, Crawford shows how Netflix was able to draw upon its success as an online DVD rental service to foster growth for its emerging streaming ecosystem. Corporate communications from this period emphasize the consumer advantages of streaming, including convenience, affordability, and plentitude. Curiously, while Netflix had grown into a multi-billion-dollar corporation, the company continued to position itself as the "underdog" fighting "against the odds"—a reminder that investor lore is a work of well-crafted fiction (58). The significant contribution of this chapter is in the way it shows Netflix translated its increased subscriber growth into a source of potential value in the investor literature. Many scholars have identified the way flows of user time, attention, and data were being channeled to improve the Netflix user experience (see Kevin McDonald and Smith-Rowsey 2016). Crawford expands this argument to show how Netflix harnessed subscriber growth and user data to persuade investing actors of the platform's value. Crawford defines this operation as the "financializability of the user" (58). As Crawford points out, increased subscriber growth generates more user data that improves the platform and increases investor faith in the value of Netflix as a service and stock. While Crawford is right to point out that Netflix's narratives of value involve a great deal of uncertainty and faith, we should not underestimate the predictive capabilities of big data economies. The emphasis on the word "faith" throughout the book potentially underestimates the precision of data metrics, whereby Netflix and other platform companies harness massive amounts of datafied human behavior to make highly accurate market predictions.

Act III, "Networking the 'Global Original' (2011–)," traces Netflix's twin expansion into global markets and original content production. The focus of Act III remains on corporate communications but this time with a concentration on how original programming "evolved into a central pillar of the company's projections of value" (72). In this chapter, Crawford argues that successful original TV series such as *House of Cards* (2013–2018) and *Orange is the New Black* (2013–2019) remain integral to the Netflix brand. By analyzing shareholder letters from the early 2010s, Crawford illustrates how Netflix began to rebrand its image from an online distributor to a producer of original television content as a "platform-studio" (85). In the com-

pany's early history, Netflix sought to lean into its discursive identity as a "Big Tech" company. From 2011 onward, as Crawford argues, Netflix's investor lore takes a decided turn showcasing the platform's challenge to Hollywood's TV industry. As Ted Sarandos, Netflix's co-chief executive, explains in an interview for GQ, "the goal is to become HBO faster than HBO can become us" (as quoted in Crawford 76). In the second part of this chapter, Crawford turns his attention to Netflix's international expansion, focusing his analysis on CEO Reed Hastings famous keynote address at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in 2016. In his speech, Hastings articulates his transnational utopian vision for the Netflix streaming platform, announcing the company's "switch-on" in nearly every country around the world (89). For Crawford, Netflix's transnational ambitions represent a site of potential value in its investor lore. As Crawford theorizes, Netflix global ambitions highlight a fantasy within platform capitalism of "perpetual scaling" (95). In order to continue to secure investors, Netflix must continually scale or expand its operations through rapid innovation, providing new products, services, and experiences in order to capture Walls Street's faith in the company. As competition from Hollywood and Silicon Valley heats up within the streaming market, Netflix may be forced to rethink its narratives of value. As Crawford points out, Netflix's pursuit of endless growth raises disturbing questions about the next frontier of platform capitalism and the sustainability of the "gambling effect" of finance writ large (101). What frontier of untapped value lies beyond the horizon of global data harvesting for Netflix and its competitors is an important unanswered question in the era of platform TV.

Crawford concludes *Netflix's Speculative Fictions* with a brief coda where he draws a link between platform economics and monopoly capitalism. While platform companies like Netflix rely on fictions to grow profits, platform capitalism has had very real effects on the world. As Crawford argues, Netflix's repetitious cycle of debt, investment, and scaling is inherently monopolistic, exacerbating existing class divisions and unequal concentrations of capital and power. For Crawford, platform capitalism's dependency on users and their data presents an opportunity for resistance that he terms "user consciousness": a revision of the Marxian concept of class consciousness in the digital age (65). As Crawford summarizes, "The flipside of platform capitalism's expanded and multisided project of financializing every aspect of everyday life offers users the opportunity to gain leverage, withhold, and redirect their increasingly valuable datafied behavior as a potentially counteractive or perhaps even creative, generative new politic" (65). While "user consciousness" might reveal possible tactics for revisiting the extractive technologies of platform companies, it risks reproducing neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility that shift the onus of social change from governments and societies to individuals. The sheer size of Netflix demands that change occurs on a structural level that addresses head on the technological, economic, and legal geographies that afford Netflix its power.

To conclude, Crawford's book offers a powerful illustration of the way Netflix maintains its market dominance through speculative narratives of future value that drive investment in the company and secure subscribers. *Netflix's Speculative Fictions* reveals how the company's corporate communications can be just as interesting as its library of film and television. This book is a must-read for anyone seeking to learn about Netflix and the impact of the financializing logics of platform capitalism on the entertainment industry. As the platform becomes the model of distribution in the streaming age, scholars across film and television studies must contend with the way that not only Netflix, but also the movies and TV episodes that are the focus of our writing, are increasingly sustained by speculative fictions.

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AGUSTÍN RUGIERO BADER

China has recently been the object of a considerable amount of scholarship addressing logistics, human rights, governance, and the implementation of new technologies—to name a few. It has emerged as a place of both anxiety and alterity, qualities being bestowed upon it as the echoes of the collapse of the Soviet Union seem to finally dwindle. Despite the West's attempts to entrench an "End of History" narrative—one where Western liberal democracies mark the endpoint of human evolution (Fukuyama 1992)—China has remained a notable point of opposition for this self-trumpeted teleology, a towering other, a new inscrutable contender. As Erin Y. Huang puts it, "the common rhetoric used to describe China's state capitalism, authoritarian capitalism or state neoliberalism indicates not adequate frameworks or proper names but a shadow archive of conceptual proximities that capture the difficulty of remapping an emergent power structure after the collapse of existing geopolitical imaginaries in the Post-Cold War world" (Huang 2020, 19). In her latest book, *Urban Horror: Neoliberal Post-Socialism and the Limits of Visibility*, Huang attempts to reckon with some of China's complex sociocultural realities through the logic of the "post-," approaching the nation and its dominant cultural narratives through a dissection of its own anxieties and fears.

Grounding her work in China's film industry—comprised of films made within the PRC as well as in the many countries and zones of exception around it—Huang proposes a reconceptualization of horror through the framework of the "post-." The "post-" is characterized by Huang as "a perpetually extended present that renders the categories of past, present, and future obsolete;" it is "an active cultural field that is continuously remade to rehearse the desires and anxieties of an era" (Huang 2020, 15). In the often muddled discussion of Sino-politics, the post- serves as "a sliding signifier that mediates the relationship between China's past and future, while both are subject to infinite reconstructions" (Huang 2020, 16).

In the search for a way of conceptualizing these ever-shifting anxieties, Huang discovers in horror, as both an affective mode and as a genre, a particularly fruitful point of departure. Her specific interpretation of horror is borrowed from Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* where, struck by the incomprehensible speed and violence with which Manchester mutated before his eyes, he wrote: "Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the *industrial epoch*" (Engels 2009, 65). To

Huang, horror is not just an emotional reaction but an affect that opens up "a phenomenological channel of perception that introduces the body as a perceptive surface where the external conditions of capitalist abstraction are producing a new kind of human sensation, appearing whenever a gap is opened between one's imagined interior reality and the perceived external world" (Huang 2020, 9). This phenomenological approach to rapidly mutating landscapes and the way they touch upon the body as a surface places Huang's work at the crossroads between the work of Henri Lefebvre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, both of whom feature heavily in her book. The ever-shifting reality of the "post-" finds an ideal setting in the deployment of what Huang terms "economic and political zones of exception (e.g., special economic zones and special administrative regions)" (Huang 2020, 19) where urban horror emerges as a reactive affect. *Urban Horror*, therefore, does not confine itself to mainland China, thriving also in places like Taiwan and Hong Kong, the latter being central in Huang's commentary on the Umbrella Movement's 2014 protests detailed in the book's introduction.

The book is divided into five chapters plus an epilogue, each analyzing different configurations of horror that encapsulate the dissonance between these inner personal realities and the external world. Although Huang does not conceptualize horror exclusively as a set of artistic conventions and themes, but rather as an affect that negotiates between this interior and exterior, some genre staples are present across the films cited: ruined and abandoned buildings, dispossession, pandemics, ghosts, corpses, and self-mutilation.

Chapter One, "Cartographies of Socialism and Post-Socialism: The Factory Gate and the Threshold of the Visible World" considers the shift in regimes of visuality of the factory from the Lumières's *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (*Workers Living the Lumière Factory*, 1895) to Zhang Meng's *Gang de qin* (*The Piano in a Factory*, 2010). In her discussion, she utilizes Harun Farocki's analysis of the Lumières's film to trace how the camera has travelled from the outside of the factory to its insides. While in the former the workers, in a perpetual state of fugue from the factory, evoke "an unapproachable site of industrial horror," and are thus framed exclusively from the outside; in the latter, the camera's "entrance through the factory gate frames the perception of a landscape composed of workers' deteriorating bodies, which provides the medium for seeing post-socialism." (35). Thus, with the camera's penetration of factory space, "socialism recedes into spectral nostalgia for an anticipated industrial modernity that was never complete in the first place" (35). In lieu of the lost futures of the Chinese industrial revolution, Huang's commentary on *The Piano in a Factory*, Jia Zhangke's *Ershisi cheng ji* (*24 City*, 2008), and Wang Bing's *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks* (2003) highlights the way the factory and the factory gate—a mediator between what is seen and what is left unseen—affords a historically grounded perspective on Foucault and Lefebvre's differing definitions of heterotopia and its potentialities.

Chapter Two, "Intimate Dystopias: Post-Socialist Femininity and the

Marxist-Feminist Interior" offers a discussion of female dispossession in Li Shaohong's *Lian'ai zhong de baobei* (*Baober in Love*, 2004), a film that playfully—and darkly—subverts the success of *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (*Amelie*, 2001). Through Li's authorial figure, Huang draws connections between the accelerating mutations of pre- and post-2008 Olympics Beijing, and the impact they have in the precarization of women's livelihood in this urban setting. The inseparability of horror and the female body enables the appearance of what Huang calls gendered urban horror: "a new affect that is discovered at the moment when the new logic of post-socialist Chinese urbanism abruptly arrives, leaving no time and space for ruminating the evolved structure of gender violence" (81, emphasis original). The inside-outside horror dynamic of *Baober in Love* finds its urban replica in the gendered dynamics of interior decoration, which Huang dissects through Li's 2007 film *Men* (*The Door*). Ultimately, her discussion of ordinary intimacy reflects on how bodies mediate the creation of "the current iteration of a market-oriented world" (100).

Chapter Three, "The Post- as Media Time: Documentary Experiments and the Rhetoric of Ruin Gazing" tackles one of the central issues of the book: how the different times of the post- are "produced and transmitted in the era of hypermediality" (101). Her analysis prioritizes documentaries because of the genre's desire for reality, which "generates a wide variety of technologically mediated temporalities wherein exist the heterogenous relationships and attitudes toward the rationalized time of capital" (102). She departs from textual analysis of Chantal Ackerman's *D'Est* (*From the East*, 1993) and its formal experimentation with time into the pervasiveness of "ruin gazing" in contemporary Chinese independent documentary cinema. She writes that "the sights of ruination, gentrification, disappearance, and destruction create screen events of time that are displayed with different velocities, durations and rhythms" (115). Because ruins are privileged by mediatic representations of time, Huang's work through the post- foregrounds them as a productive site for the encounter of Paul Virilio's "eternalized present" and Mary Ann Doane's "real time." Through the image of ruin-in-reverse—"a technique of reversing the linear progression of the event that creates the effect of turning back time" (131)—Huang attempts to rethink the relationship between temporality, destruction, and disappearance. Her discussion of Cong Feng's *Di ceng 1: lai ke* (*Stratum 1: The Visitors*, 2012) and Huang Weikai's *Xianshi shi guoqu de weilai* (*Disorder*, 2009) positions ruin gazing in the context of post-socialist China's urbanization and its ungraspable temporalities. In her approach to ruin films through the post-, Huang's "multilayered and multimediated concept of time" serves as an injunction to think about "new methods of spatio-temporal critique" (145).

Chapter Four, "Post-Socialism in Hong Kong: Zone Urbanism and Marxist Phenomenology" returns to the special administrative region through the work of Fruit Chan and Ann Hui. In Huang's Marxist-tinged analysis of the former, Hong Kong emerges as an eternally mutating non-place (Marc Augé's term), where human bodies constantly run the risk of disappearing, or being

left behind. In *Na ye lingchen, wo zuoshangle Wang Jiao kai wang Dapu de hong van* (*The Midnight After*, 2014), the main characters are confronted with an inexplicable pandemic that makes bodies explode into thin air. As Huang puts it, "in a city that has lost its human inhabitants, new relationships between bodies and cities are formed" (147). The chapter then commits itself to the collection of "images, people, temporalities, and spaces that are associated with the production of the affect of horror . . . that appears when transcontinental urban transformations are taking place under the flexible interpretation of the post- in post-socialism" (149). This includes all those cast away by the systematically deployed zones of exception—not a way of adapting but "a governing strategy" per se (152). Huang discusses the "city without bodies" which "exerts a haunting presence in post-handover Hong Kong cinema, bringing into focus the emergent tension between the politics of dispossession and strategies of repossession" (156). It is through the positioning of the emergent landscape of "bodies-spaces" associated with "an affective mode of excess" as forms of resistance that Huang calls for a repossession of disembodied urban spaces (183). Often effaced human corporality comes to the fore in non-normative configurations to remind spectators of their own bodily existence and the space it occupies in societies of the "post-."

Finally, in Chapter Five, "The Ethics of Representing Precarity: Film in the Era of Global Complicity" Huang approaches Malaysian Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-lian's work through the optics of urban horror. She argues for a view of his work that highlights how aesthetics of precarity—ruin, poverty, dereliction—are put forward to address widespread issues of dispossession, and how they are commodified for consumption. According to Huang, when film penetrates conservation spaces such as museums, it "probes a new web of relations between collaborating neoliberal institutions that are interested in producing feelings as commodifiable experiences and image-making as a practice of resistance" (185). Tsai's work reckons with dispossession, producing "prolonged and intensive looks at objects, scenery, and human bodies and faces that, through the camera's mediation, lose their prefigured signification and transform into a sight that is not yet thinkable" (192). The depiction of the trivial and the futile emerges in Huang's view as a criticism of the desire to represent the less privileged (194), which becomes an inscrutable on-screen presence, a "crypt—a kernel of knowledge that remains incommunicable through language" that begs for yet defies interpretation (209).

The epilogue offers a final thought on how the conceptual constellation Huang has brought forward can be used as a framework for further study of "elsewhere, nowhere, and nonplaces" as strategies of governance (221). The diverse corpus of films discussed foreground different ways of understanding the disjunction between the ever-changing, ever-present logics of the "post-" and their perception by lagging, confused human beings. Through this framework, Huang makes a compelling attempt at diagramming a universal malaise that seems to be intensified by the contin-

gent nature of the various Chinese geographies visited by her work. In spite of its locality, her lucid reconceptualization of horror as a term invites new ways of thinking about how researchers might approach the surge of generational anxieties expressed in global image productions. These tools, grounded in Marxist phenomenology, embodiment, and affect, can be richly repurposed to think about the post- in a way that untangles the labyrinth of contingencies, exceptions, and spectralities that shape contemporary images. It is in this ever-returning affect, this echo that rings louder every time, that *Urban Horror* offers a new way of listening and seeing through the collapse of the frontiers of present, future, and past.

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William Brown and David H. Fleming. *The Squid Cinema From Hell: Kinoteuthis Infernalis and the Emergence of Chthulumedia.*

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

GENEVEIVE NEWMAN

William Brown and David H. Flaming's *The Squid Cinema from Hell* is an eight-chapter collaborative exploration of the tentacular nature of media as told from the perspective of ecocritical media studies. The most convincing sections of the generally strong text's argument are those in which ecology, biology, and those fields most invested in the viscous and slippery intersect. The text's authors tend to struggle as they do the very necessary work of addressing how these already-messy areas interact with the political stakes of media in terms of sexual violence, capitalist exploitation, and racial and imperial subjugation. That said, these parts of the text are messy out of necessity: to present a "clean," smooth, or otherwise *dry* approach to topics like tentacular rape or Lovecraft's racist legacy would, arguably, be disingenuous at best. That is to say that, even with its drawbacks, the element of *Squid Cinema* that is both most impressive and most daunting, is the way in which the form of the writing, method, and organization themselves mirror the topic or content. That is, for a text about cephalopods, *Squid Cinema* is decidedly tentacular.

Brown and Fleming draw on a number of theorists and scholars doing work related to, in conversation with, and just to the side of, cephalopods, media, and their inherent interconnections. While it might be tempting to assume or even interpret the text as a catalogue of movies about and/or starring octopi and squid, Brown and Fleming quickly move away from this model—there is some listing in the introduction, but it is more necessary and foundational than rote—and towards the kind of work that other ecocritical theorists like Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, and perhaps Karen Barrad and Jane Bennet set forth in their respective texts. That is, the project here is not one of media historiography or even an accounting of cephalopods through the ages. Rather, it is to think cephalopod-*ically*, to consider media in particular, and from there our onto-epistemological interactions with the world, through tentacular modalities. Where its most analogous counterpart, Haraway's *Making Kin in the Chthulucene* outright rejects the Lovecraftian approach to the tentacular by returning to the chthonic rather than to Cthulhu, *Squid Cinema* leaves open the possibility of engaging both primary meanings. Tentacles are a method, a mode, a theme; they are beastly and terrifying, and absolutely indispensable. This does

tend towards an early question as to the political stakes of the project (Haraway's rejection of Lovecraft establishes hers early on), but, ultimately, *Squid Cinema*'s project necessitates the openness that including otherwise-problematic material allows. That is to say that the question of politics may be posed in the introduction, but it is swiftly addressed as the text develops.

The text eases the reader into tentacular thinking with a background on the theories in anthropocentrism and the chthulucene. *Squid Cinema* additionally gives a good gloss and history of these subfields. In so doing, they trace a slightly different lineage of the chthulucene than Donna Haraway does. That is to say, beginning from media and the digital as tentacular, cephalopodic forms, and from there move to the world and onto-epistemological phenomenology more broadly, as opposed to working from the world and considering the digital/technological as one aspect of it. While the primary concrete metaphor in the text is the cephalopod, another apt structure that they open the text with is the diffusion of ink in (digital) water. Here, media and technology can be thought as having no distinct originary point, or that the moment of origin is somewhat beside the point of the project. The project, then, of thinking and *understanding* media/the world tentacularly, is itself a diffuse project that the authors move through and with fluidly. In this way, their note early in the introduction that the very language with which we understand the world is itself constructed, rigid, dichotomous, is well-taken as a critique of non- or anti-rhizomatic structures of thought.

The concepts of diffusion and the cephalopod-as-metaphor-and-method hold up best with the premise of Chapter Five, "The Erotic Ecstasy of Cthulhu." The chapter grapples specifically with tentacular pornography in something of a return to Linda Williams' conception of body genres as horror, porn, and weepies. In clear connections oft overlooked within theoretical approaches to media studies, here the notion that media is somehow, for all of its dry rigidity, always varying degrees of soft, squishy, *wet* when it interacts with human bodies holds up as a clear linkage between the genres addressed in the book.

Beyond discussions of the wet and the slimy in *Squid Cinema*'s fifth chapter there are interesting inroads explored into the links between (bi/homo)sexuality, octopi, and the erotic, for example. This line of thinking, that is, thinking sexual attraction (and its intersections with gender identity) through cephalopods opens up tentacular approaches that far exceed the scope of this book's project. There may be significant utility, for example, to conceptualizing the erotic, specifically the oppressed and political erotic, *with* and *through* slimy, slippery, multivalent cephalopods.

Chapter Six, "Cosmic Light, Cosmic Darkness," like Chapter Two ("Pulp Fiction and the Media Archaeology of Space"), prioritizes a concept of the world as hyperobject in Tim Morton's sense of the term, in which hyperobjects are necessarily *sticky* (to return to the viscosity of the previous chapter). "Cosmic Light" begins from a biophilosophical rumination on the building blocks of the human species (human DNA, RNA, and their intersections with mollusks), and the authors quickly move into a cogent analysis of films whose content addresses the notion of perpetuity in the human genome. Be-

ginning with the films *Spring* (2014), *Évolution* (2015), and *Life* (2017), they usher the reader from the outskirts of space and the cephalopodic iterations therein to the volatility and viscosity of the corporeal body. After moving through a roughly sketched section on the connections between RNA editing and capital (in which a brief reference to *Altered Carbon* [2002, 2018-2020] makes an appearance), the chapter establishes its primary media texts or case studies. Both *Demonlover* (2002) and *Elle* (2016) center violation/sexual violence (especially rape) in ways that the authors link to hentai vis-a-vis what they subtitle "Digital Cthulhu." This argument, which incorporates a nuanced understanding of how rape is always already about patriarchal power, rather than eroticism or *enjoyment*, is less stable in its incorporation of a critique of capital into its critique of patriarchy. This is not to say that the two are not intimately linked, but rather that these links are not sufficiently drawn out in the chapter.

Brown and Fleming begin Chapter Seven, "The Backwash of Becoming Cthulhu, Or, L∞py, Tentacular Time," by positing the Earth itself as an interstitial space, a desert and a shore, between the lapping waves of the abyssal ocean, and the cosmic universe. From here, they engage with science fiction as a genre, primarily and originarily through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and its later offspring in *Metropolis* (1927), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *Solaris* (1972) to name a few films addressed. After spending some time on both direct Lovecraftian adaptations and related works (such as the offspring of Edgar Allen Poe and 1990s iterations of both *Dracula* [1897; 1992] and *Frankenstein* [1818; 1994]) the chapter pivots to a singular consideration of *Arrival* (2015).

Utilizing a theoretical framework that includes Eugene Thacker for its Lovecraftan analysis and Deleuze, Bergson, Derrida, and Fermat among others for its temporal analysis, Brown and Fleming posit as third-synthesis cinema, C series cinema, and representative of 3C time. For the first of these, the authors turn to Patricia Pisters' use of Deleuzian temporal theory to outline the ways in which *Arrival* in particular represents a cinematic time of eternal return. From there, they move to a consideration of *Arrival* as operating in McTaggart's C series time, or time that is ordered but directionless. Finally, Brown and Fleming posit that, by taking the film on its own terms, *Arrival* moves towards the emergence of an amalgamated temporality that takes both Deleuzian (via Pisters) and McTaggartian concepts of time seriously as integrated concepts. The most pressing subsection of the chapter, however, comes roughly in the middle of the chapter with an exploration of political interpretations of temporality. This brief analysis works with and through Deleuze and Foucault, and includes minor references to the work of Donna Haraway and Thomas Elsaesser.

Altogether, on a brief flip through *Squid Cinema* it is possible to get the impression that the text is a collection of films and theories that loosely connect to cephalopods strung together. Nothing could be further from the truth. While the text does have drawbacks (its handling of representations of rape in Chapter Six leaves much to be desired)[1] it is, altogether an excellent framework for how to look at cinema through a

cephalopodic lens *without* giving in to the fetishizing impulse that the authors see as endemic to many fields dealing in the hybridization of human/object/animal theories. That is to say, rather than imbue the cephalopod with characteristics of humanity or imagined inner worlds based on our own, the authors quite deftly deploy tentacular thinking to an analysis of cinema that always keeps an eye towards the political implications of cultural production. In this way, this text is especially useful in establishing an imaginative map of how to approach or engage with media in the winter of 2022, as the globe is deluged, over and over, with world-historic events that destabilize reality. Put differently, this is perhaps the best time for a text that destabilizes how we think of squid, cinema, time, being, and erotics to help imagine futures in an increasingly unstable world.

Notes

1. In brief, Brown and Fleming tend towards an abstracted analysis of rape in cinema. Certainly, the pieces they chose for this section are complicated and ambiguous about the topic already, but the authors fail to consider the socio-political consequences of the very real trauma associated with sexual violence. They additionally somewhat neglect a gender analysis of rape and sexual violence that, while not strictly necessary for their argument, would greatly benefit the project as a whole.

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FESTIVAL REVIEWS

Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal, 2021

JAKE PITRE

It's easy to argue that the defining characteristic of our moment is that of alienation. Certainly taking in some of what the 24th annual Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal (RIDM) had on offer would give such an indelible impression of the present as we experience it, unavoidably and inevitably in a mid-pandemic context of isolation and ennui. Only a few films engaged directly with COVID-19, but our experience of them couldn't help but be touched by the transformative effects of the pandemic on both the festival's practicalities (films screened both in-person and virtually) and the films' thematic and aesthetic reception.

All this, though, is likewise in the face of endless technological changes and so-called innovations, a perennial topic of interest for documentary filmmakers intent on highlighting what is new, fresh, never-before-seen, revealing to the audience something they couldn't have imagined was real and happening somewhere in the world, perhaps on its way to them as they watch it unfold. These two confluent factors, technological change and pandemic-accelerated isolation, defined my experience of the festival, as film after film, to varying degrees of success, depicted and narrated the strong feeling of alienation that permeates and pervades our culture. I was left with the recognition that documentary cinema, in all its breadth, can offer a way to navigate these pulsating sensations that otherwise seem insurmountably abstract or inexact.

All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace

If I sound a little paranoid, the series of films screened by RIDM would suggest that I am not paranoid enough. Surveillance technology offers a lot to documentary filmmakers as a theme, an issue to examine, a new source of footage. Shengze Zhu's *A River Runs, Turns, Erases, Replaces* (2021, 87 mins) is her follow-up to *Present.Perfect.* (2019, 124 mins), which collected clips from countless livestreamers in China, a pointed compilation of our shifting understanding of what it means to connect or be intimate. Her new film confronts the pandemic by showing footage from a surveillance camera in Wuhan as it charts the rapid decline in the presence of people, followed by an eventual slow return (with workers doing their jobs throughout). It is a far more pensive and melancholic film than *Present.Perfect.*, which seemed to emphasize the chaotic fragments of online life. Here, we're placed into a distanced grieving, a mournful static perspective on the missing bodies caused by the virus, alongside text taken from letters addressed to lost loved

ones. These juxtapositions of landscape film and textual intimacy offer a surprisingly stirring reminder that a place is ultimately very little without people to make it sway, flow, and move.

Surveillance footage is put to more pointed use in the short film *NAYA* (Sebastian Mulder, 2020, 25 mins) which chronicles the journey of the first female wolf to be spotted in Belgium in over a century through surveillance cameras, news footage, hunter's cameras, and more. Here, the notion of being surveilled is tied to the natural world as the film begins with a German hunter's expression: "Der Wald hat tausend Augen": "In the wild, you are never alone. One pair of eyes stares into the forest, a thousand eyes stare back at you." Of course, in this case those eyes are cameras, tracking the wolf from Germany into Belgium, as it kills livestock and causes a measure of chaos and media and citizen frenzy. This technology has encroached into the wild, the short seems to argue, becoming an omnipresence without limit, because we simply *must* see and know all—when the wolf isn't spotted for days on end, the anxiety is palpable: *where is she*?

Similarly, Haig Aivazian's *All of Your Stars Are but Dust on My Shoes* (2021, 17 mins) illustrates, using found footage and other clips, how light itself is an oppressive force in a world defined by cameras and images, always illuminating to keep control over a population (whether would-be criminals or she-wolves). As a cinematic exercise, it's a probing examination of the gaze, for of course it is only due to the screen's light hitting our retinas that we are able to take in the images Aivazian has collected for us. To see and be seen are fundamental elements of the medium, a technological feat that is reflected back to us when the camera captures us being captured.

These concerns over privacy, visibility, and technology are of great significance to a theorist like Shoshana Zuboff, who has mainstreamed her concept of surveillance capitalism, which emphasizes the commoditization of personal data in a digital economy with the power of behavioral modification (2019). As Jathan Sadowski explains, "When targeted at people's attributes and actions, the ability for smart tech to home in on a specific factor and excise it from the surrounding context turns us into what Deleuze calls *dividuals*, or divided individuals: beings able to be divided into any number of pieces that are separated, surveilled, and scrutinized." (2020, 45). This describes our everyday milieu, alienated dividuals being constantly looked over and profited from, enforced into an existence that delimits the boundaries of human connection and interaction. Aivazian, Mulder, and Zhu's films have wildly different approaches to disparate aspects of this phenomenon, yet taken together they nevertheless instill an uneasy feeling about our collective desire *to see* and *to know*, and the increasingly strict separation between those with the power to surveil effectively, and those without. As the late bell hooks memorably reminded us, "Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency [....] One learns to look a certain way in order to resist." (1992, 116). In her analysis of the black female gaze, hooks unt-

angles the politics of visibility, of being visible, revealing the dominating logic of the look while maintaining hope for an alternative. Aivazian's film in particular speaks to this tender dissonance, homed in on the repressive power of being visible in the world throughout history, while drawing out unexpected connections between phenomena, desperately searching for that mutual tissue among the despair of modern systems of domination.

Exploitation Films

A parallel theme among this year's roster was that of exploitation, specifically that of labour in the modern world. The clearest example of this is *The Gig Is Up* (Shannon Walsh, 2021, 88 mins), which highlights the many challenges faced by gig workers around the world: drivers for Uber, delivery bicyclists for DoorDash, mini-task completers for Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Unlike most popular documentaries of its type, Walsh, a Canadian director, chooses to focus almost entirely on the workers themselves, which is to the film's great advantage as we learn what conditions they work under, what incentives drew them in the first place, and how they see themselves and the industry in general. Getting to know a white worker for MTurk who masquerades on the platform as a Republican black man to game the system since it has so much interest in that demographic's interests, we learn what these workers are trained to do in order to succeed even marginally (every cent counts). Moreover, a small montage of MTurk workers describing their jobs gets so much across simply by showing a successive run of heavy bags under eyes. Even most journalism on the subject fails to feature actual workers to the degree that this film does, and we're also given a proper global perspective as gig work exists in the US, China, France, Nigeria, India, and elsewhere. While the film avoids getting into the nitty-gritty of how digital capitalism has upended the social contract in numerous ways, it nevertheless points to the wave of fights over labour protections, employee status, and other rights around the world. Aided by insight from scholars like Nick Srnicek (author of *Platform Capitalism*) and Mary L. Gray (co-author of *Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass*), *The Gig Is Up* is perhaps the clearest and strongest mainstream effort to document the gig work struggle yet, even if it nevertheless only scratches the surface.

The best film I saw was Salomé Jashi's *Taming the Garden* (2021, 92 mins), a somewhat more abstract approach to the exploitation that not only people but also the planet suffers as a direct result of the ultra-wealthy's absurd whims. This is a particularly eccentric version of that story, as we follow the arduous journey of several century-old trees as they are meticulously dug up and transported, often by private boat, to a billionaire's private garden where he obsessively collects them. The billionaire is Bidzina Ivanishvili, former prime minister of Georgia, and there is something humbling as we watch countless labourers undertake such a monumental, nature-defying task. These are massive, gargantuan trees, which means that in many cases, the land and the people in the surrounding area have no choice but to relocate, an altogether unique

form of forced migration that follows a long historic pattern of the poor and the nature both having to change their own existences for the austere benefit of the rich. These cascading and rippling consequences of one man's obsession (we never see the man himself in the film) go beyond metaphor, simply depicting the ways in which the world is run, melancholically and patiently observing how one man's Rosebud, in this case a giant 150-year-old tree, demands all organic life to adapt to its trivial disruption.

A number of other films touch on the theme of exploitation, from the behaviour-modifying grip social media and dating apps have over young people in *Love-Moi* (Romane Garant Chartrand, 2021, 23 mins), to the consequences of climbing the social ladder in China as depicted in *Ascension* (Jessica Kingdon, 2021, 97 mins). The latter provides a wide-ranging survey of consumer culture in China, examining the latest technology, e-sports gamers, live-streaming empires, crypto mining, and much more, but with a particular focus on service industries and the changing landscape of wealth and status in the country. On the other hand, *Minimal Sway While Starting My Way Up* (Stéphanie Lagarde, 2021, 16 mins) combines techniques as old as Eisensteinian montage with the latest technology amid deep urban alienation to draw out the more hidden architectures of exploitation in our society. It emphasizes how the resources taken from below are used to create the penthouses way up in the sky, and the extractive profiteering therein, but visually and formally the film operates on an atmospheric level, rarely showing its hand too pointedly.

Taken collectively, these films serve as confirmation of the alienation and dissociation that suffocates our present condition, inevitably tinged by the transformations still underway thanks to the pandemic. No single documentary, or even series of films, can be asked to provide answers, or alternative pathways to this problem, or glimpses of something else. Yet not once are there gestures made in this direction, as each film considers it sufficient to provide a diagnosis of the condition, whether as flies on the wall or through talking heads. Still, what this communicates is less their individual lack of imagination but instead the embeddedness and intrinsic power of the problem. If our present swallows it all, what can those that look hope to reveal?

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The State of the Nation at the 50th FNC, 2021

MAX HOLZBERG

Flowing east from the headwaters of Lake Ontario, *The Fleuve* moves mightily across Quebec and its storied shores. Modern metropolitans, provincial towns, pastoral villages, and bucolic fields all sit atop inlets, isles, and bays, hugging the riverbanks that house its inhabitance. Thickly wooded forests, grassy knolls, sandy dunes, rocky cliffs roll in to towering mountains forming the topography of its embankments. As the current moves east, the St. Lawrence becomes wider and wider until so wide that at the rocky bluffs of Gaspésie it lets into the North Atlantic sea.

At present day, these shores are claimed by the Quebecois, descendants of French settlers who "first discovered" terra infima nearly 500 years ago. After hard-fought battles atop the Plains of Abraham, the Franco-colony succumbed to British control. At one point known as the Province of Lower Canada, the colony, and its Anglo-counterparts folded into confederation— that was some 150 odd years ago. Well before confederation, questions of sovereignty for a culturally and linguistically distinct society arose. Today they remain unmoored: national insecurities cycle in and out just like these very tides at the mouth of *The Fleuve*: tongue-tied language laws, constitutional wars fought in parliamentary halls, xenophobic immigration laws, radical separatist militia, independent pensions and tax agencies, uni-culturalism over multi-culturalism, and two referendums whose seismic activities rocked the federation to its core. Hit by a Tsunami, the federation is still left flailing in its wake—national unity fragmented and dispersed into the floe.

Well before the "discovery" of Quebec and the founding of so-called "Canada," the First Nations inhabited *The Fleuve*. Huron-wendat, Iroquois, Mohawk, Innu, Mi'kmaq and Beothuk– each culture with a distinct way of life systematically erased through state-sponsored genocide in collusion with the catholic church: The Indian Act, land dispossession, residential schools, '60s scoop, the child welfare system and more. Purposefully redacted from the record of official history, rightful quests towards Indigenous sovereignty have been viewed by settler powers as an existential threat to Quebec. Recently a new wave of separatist agenda has swept over the province, this time in fresh clothes: federalist-nationalism, a populist paranoia which has filled the ballot boxes of *The Fleuve*'s rural shores. The story is different for the progressive island of Montréal, one home to federalists, nationalists, and separatists alike. The metropolis is a bigger tent open to multi-culturalism and lacklustre

attempts towards Indigenous reconciliation. Modern Quebec is a society at odds with itself and what it wants to be, all the while part of a larger settler colonial project. This summary is of course a far too simplistic assessment of a complex history and not meant be comprehensive, but one that reflects the legacies that the opening and closing films of the 50th Festival du Nouveau Cinema contend with.

Settler Stories on the Silver Screen

"Tu N'existe Pas, Tu n'existe pas": this phrase is threatening to Quebec sovereigntists who work to assert Quebec's nationhood and attempt independence on their so-called territory, and one repeated throughout Felix Dufor-Laperrière's latest animated feature *Archipel* (2021). Chosen as the closing feature for the 50th FNC, *Archipel* is a delicate expression of national pride that romanticizes settler colonial history and a poetic love letter to the many islands in the stream.

A lush pastiche of animated styles, archival imagery, illustrations, and contemporary photographs, *Archipel* is a dreamy universe, that projects a vision of Quebec located somewhere between the imagined and the real. Narrated through a conversation between an unnamed man and a woman, the man who doubts the existence of Quebec's history and perhaps its sovereignty, is invited by the woman to journey with her along the Saint Lawrence River. The narrator's travelogue is loose and lyrical, a piece-meal construction of excerpted political speeches, letters, and recordings of Innu poet Josephine Bacon reading her work. The inclusion of Bacon attempts to pay homage to Innu culture, but with the film overwhelmingly asserting settler history, the poetry sits uncomfortably out of place. Perhaps Bacon's words are tokenized by the filmmaker to excuse any guilt for a romanticized colonial history, or to suggest that First Peoples and Quebecois have reached cultural harmony—something far from the truth. Despite its shortcomings, the romanticism is deeply seductive, something which this writer certainly fell for.

Although each of these styles, stories, and histories could exist on their own, they are brought together to form an ethereal cinematic archipelago. This film's voyage is a survey of the culture and people who inhabit the St. Lawrence's topography, suggesting that Quebec, its many regions, and distinct local cultures form an archipelago. The stylistic diversity and the archipelago metaphor are curious to consider when the film engages with an ideology that has typically promoted a uni-cultural society (Paquette and Beauregard, 2021). *Archipel*'s efforts to showcase Quebec's "diversity" is simply an illustration of regional dissimilarity. Except for Montréal, these places are predominately white, francophone, and catholic. Save for Bacon's brief cameo, the film does not focus on ethnic, racial, linguistic, or religious diversity. Despite these glaring flaws, *Archipel* does seem to ambiguously participate in a shift towards a more inclusive nationalist Quebecois ideology, which is also espoused by the festival's curatorial frames.

Festival and Folklore, Islands in the Stream?

As the closing film proposes Quebec as a geographical, social, and cul-

tural archipelago, how might FNC reflect this national folklore and how does it take shape? Consider *this* festival as body of water, one whose pool is home to a series of islands: events, screenings, talks, and parties, occurring in multiple locations—sometimes online, sometimes in person, with festival programming grouping them together, floating in the same stream.

In typical years, these islands may be grouped together by an environmental, political, or social theme, but for the 50th edition those concerns were put aside to instead shine a light on FNC's cultural achievements and impact on Quebec, Canada, and the world.[1] This curatorial angle is in keeping with Festival du Nouveau Cinema's identity as a generalist event dedicated to showcasing independent auteur cinema, art film, experimental work, and new media always through a Quebecois lens—making it a central figure in the local and national scene.

This year's edition did not shy away from its typical formula, with selections including buzz-worthy indie darlings such as *The Power of the Dog* (Jane Campion, 2021), Berlin Golden Bear Winner *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* (Radu Jude, 2021), and several local short and feature films by Quebecois filmmakers, along with an array of contemporary Canadian releases. Like the closer, the opening film was homegrown, featuring the Indigenous French language production *Bootlegger* (Caroline Monnet, 2021). *Bootlegger*, directed by Algonquin and Montreal based artist and filmmaker Caroline Monnet, tells the story of an urban Indigenous law student, Mani, who travels back to her family's northern reserve and unexpectedly becomes a political actor caught in a thorny public debate—something I will touch more upon later.

With COVID under control (at least at the time), the 2021 edition hosted in-person screenings over the course of 11-days between October 6th–17th. I was fortunate to attend some and noticed that the return to near-normal created a palpable excitement. Due to its popularity and convenience as a newly established format, FNC also screened many of its feature and short films on a tailored online platform where titles were made available up until the end of October. The experience of an online festival still leaves much to be desired; it is hollow, isolated, and devoid of human life. There were also issues around certain distribution rights for titles such as Almodovar's anticipated *Parallel Mothers* (2021) or Danis Goulet's dystopian Indigenous allegory *Night Raiders* (2021) which were only screened in-person. Despite the tradeoffs, the opportunity to watch a newly released festival film from home was worth it.

Although the festival was marketed as a hybrid event, the *FNC: Forum* was still online. Festival du Nouveau Cinema is a small isle, lacking notoriety to host large film markets like Berlin, Cannes, or Toronto, FNC instead focuses its commercial interests on professional development for Quebec and Canadian filmmakers. This year, equity and inclusion were a central concern for *The FNC Forum*, running events specifically for BIPOC and gender diverse filmmakers, as well as below-the-line crewmembers and technicians. Some such highlights include: Indigenous Pitch Sessions, Intellectual Property that centres equity and diver-

sity, and a female film technicians networking event. Although *The Forum*'s activities are framed around neo-liberal filmmaking activities, which have systemically harmed these groups, the EDI focus attempts to challenge the status quo. In the grand scheme of things, when the current Premier denies the existence of systemic racism in Quebec yet often falsely equates criticism of Quebec as the same, *The Forum*'s imperfect efforts holds weight.

Glaring, yet confusing signs of FNC's stance on nationality were seen in *The Forum*'s co-production focus which extended beyond Quebec's imagined borders. During this year's edition, the festival launched their first ever international treaty co-productions panel which informed filmmakers about a Pan-Canadian industrial framework that has been a cornerstone in Canadian independent filmmaking, casting national industry into the global sea (Wagman 2019). This specific co-production event acknowledges the economic reliance that Quebec's national industry has on Canada, which could also mean that FNC does not see Quebec as separate.

Quebec or Canada? Canada or Quebec? Quebec and Canada?

Another island in the stream with complicated national underpinnings is *FNC's National Competition* program, whose curatorial framing is marred by contradictions. *The National Competition* program is comprised of film selections from across Canada, and up until 2019, it was called *Focus Quebec/Canada*. When known as Focus Quebec/Canada, the festival literature and program name implied a difference between the two national cinemas. However, the relatively new name, *National Competition* suggests less distinctions than its predecessor. In the 2021 programming press-release, the overview of festival history repeated FNC's contributions to Canadian cinema. The release also described specific screenings and experiences at 2021 festival edition as unique to Canada.[2] Yet in other parts of the release, such as the description of *The National Competition*, it states that the program is comprised of both Quebecois and Canadian films.[3] The differentiation is also noticeable on the website write-up for Marché du Nouveau Cinema, as it refers to Quebecois and Canadian producers. In these instances, FNC creates a confusing binary: at times they collapse distinctions between Quebec and Canada, at others asserting Quebec's distinct place. The festival takes a position that wades into murky waters.

These discrepancies beg the question: does FNC's unclear stance on Quebec identity represent a fractured organization? Can Quebecois national identity work in harmony with Canada while remaining culturally separate? Or is it one that is a part of Canadian culture and at times chooses to be different? Perhaps FNC's image of Nationalism is dualistic or even multi-faceted, suggesting there is less of a binary between Canada and Quebec. Are spotlights on diversity and inclusion in deliberate opposition to dominant Quebecois ideology, or simply opportunistic and merely for the sake of good optics?

***Bootlegger*: The Undoing of Canada and Quebec**

Festival du Nouveau Cinema's attempt towards diversity and inclusion

coupled with an expanded vision of national cinema is evident in the selection of the opener and *National Competition* film: *Bootlegger*. This selection signifies the festival's desire to honour Indigenous cultures, stories, and identities—yet fails to fully realize this as it is programmed within colonial constructs. Although *Bootlegger* is technically a "Canadian" film, and FNC providing Indigenous cinema this platform is a further step towards reconciliation, the way it is programmed with colonial methods elides over larger questions of Indigenous sovereignty. This programming blunder is a disservice to *Bootlegger*'s decolonial narrative and speaks to the unclear stance that Festival du Nouveau Cinema has with regard to questions of nationality.

During the final winter of her graduate degree, Mani, an Indigenous law student living in Montréal, returns to her family reserve in northern Quebec for the first time since childhood. Mani journeys home to complete dissertation research on how the Indian Act impacts substance abuse among Indigenous communities. Upon arrival, Mani's presence is met with mixed emotions—in part because of a past departure under dubious circumstances, and her colonial education. After a happy reunion with her grandparents, Mani's grandmother asks her to attend a band-council meeting on the family's behalf. At the gathering, Mani witnesses a fierce debate about the reserve's prohibition law and band-council corruption which inspires her to join a public debate to untangle antiquated prohibition laws.

Despite it being "dry," substance abuse in the community runs amok due to the efforts of a well-connected white bootlegger who works round-the-clock to smuggle past police controls. After putting the pieces of the puzzle together and with her research in mind, Mani begins a public campaign to repeal the prohibition law in the hopes of providing Indigenous people the right to choose how they want to consume. Mani's quest is met with public outcry due to long-standing taboos, fears of widespread alcohol abuse (despite ongoing underground consumption), and loss of economic prosperity for the bootleggers who collude with the reserve's governance structure. This battle is fought all the while Mani reconciles with her own traumatic family history. *Bootlegger* stars Mohawk actor Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs, legendary Quebec actress Pascal Bussiers and celebrated poet Josephine Bacon—who was lucky enough to have appearances in both this film and through her poetry in *Archipel*.

Bootlegger arguably depicts tropes of on-reserve life for Indigenous people: a corrupt society riddled with drug abuse, crime, and lost culture. These age-old stereotypes have long been the sole and reductive representation of Indigenous peoples in Canadian and Quebecois moving-image media. However, in *Bootlegger* their function is subversive, especially because the film is told through the lens of an Indigenous director. In an interview published by FNC, Monnet explained how *Bootlegger* is an example of why an Indigenous filmmaker should tell a story on their own terms. In Monnet's case, when she started writing the film, she wanted to interrogate settler-colonial constructs that many Indigenous people live with. To do so, Monnet and her

co-writer Daniel Watchorn, started their process by researching the Indian Act and interweaving it with Monnet's own experiences which directly influenced the film's characters and the places.

One such example is seen through Mani. Mani's arc, as a young Indigenous person interrogating the harmful impacts of settler-colonialism, positions her as a symbol of self-determined decolonization—and a creative way for Monnet to present research and personal-knowledge. Although she is working within colonial institutions, something which she recognizes, Mani aims to dismantle systems and laws from within. Her research on the Indian Act gives Mani the tools to identify the issues on her reserve and the ways to resolve them, which allows the film to perform a critical commentary on the violent conditions the Indian Act creates. Mani foils the false and racist notion that Indigenous people have themselves to blame for substance abuse, rather rightfully placing blame on the system and its impacts on her people. Instead of Mani succumbing to these conditions, she is depicted with intense strength and will for her people's self-determination, something Monnet deliberately does to "break the cycle of victimization" (Monnet, 29).

Monnet also brings personal knowledge towards her characterization of the land. As described by Monnet, the land is a background figure whose role shapes *Bootlegger*'s characters while grounding them in their community and identity. Monnet achieves this through stunning drone shots that fly slowly over densely wooded forests filled with snowcapped trees and low-lying frozen rivers. Depictions of the land are hauntingly beautiful: at times welcoming, magical, and homely, and at others isolated and inhospitable—perhaps to reflect Mani's interiority. Although she states that she shot the film on Algonquin territory, Monnet mentions that *Bootlegger*'s reserve is an imagined place that could resemble any reserve in northern Quebec, acting as an entry point to tackle larger questions of colonization.

Settler Cinema and Stolen Land

Land is a central focal point of the opening and closing film's programming, which Festival du Nouveau Cinema frames as a shared quality between *Archipel* and *Bootlegger*. The programming around the theme of land is expressed in the interview I have been referencing, which is in fact a conversation between Monnet and Dufor-Laprierre. When Monnet asks Dufor-Laperrière about land and place, he admits that some of the islands featured in *Archipel* sprouted from his imagination. Yet unlike Monnet, Dufor-Laprierre is a settler, projecting his idea of Quebec that is inherently a vision of a settler-colonial nation, and one that perpetuates the ideology of a colonial project. Much like Monnet, Dufor-Laprierre uses land to create his cinematic universe, the key difference here is that Dufor-Laprierre is a settler creating a vision of a nation on a stolen land, while Monnet creates a vision of a society Indigenous to its land.

In the interview between the two directors, Festival Du Nouveau Cinema states that *Bootlegger* and *Archipel* were part of a series of selections that were "rich, bold reflections on our identities, memory and territories."

Yes, it is true that they both reflect "Quebec" and "its" "territories," yet the perspectives on them are different not the same. Indeed, placing the two opening and closing films in dialogue with one another could present rich critical tensions, yet this programming choice misses the opportunity to be generative. The lack of critique around the power structures and dynamics that inform these films fails to acknowledge how romanticized land ownership and Quebecois society in *Archipel* came to be through violent dispossession and settler-governments, a legacy that *Bootlegger* actively fights against. Moreover, throughout the entirety of the interview, *Archipel* and its settler-colonial entanglements are not acknowledged. Why is it that the festival is acknowledging the identity of non-white and non-settler filmmakers, yet not applying the same qualifiers to those that hold dominant place in society? Without this acknowledgement, the festival positions white settler culture as the default and overriding culture in Quebec, meaning that the tent is not fully open to non-dominant groups and diluting FNC's efforts towards diversity and inclusion.

I'm not suggesting that *Archipel* cannot reflect on Quebec, but that the way it is programmed should reflect the conditions and perspectives in which it emerged from. This could be done by simply contextualizing its settler undertones in the program notes, posing interview questions that more clearly probe this, or even hosting events that unpack settler positionality in Quebecois cinema and its depiction of landscape. These curatorial suggestions are not meant to imply that the film should not have been screened, it is a stunningly beautiful work of local cinema—a feat within itself certainly deserving of the silver screen. Instead, I am suggesting that Archipel and similar titles require an interrogation of their un-questioned ideology and place in dominant society, especially when so called marginalized voices are brought into the fold.

What I suggest cannot be resolved overnight, finding appropriate remedies take time and I'd be weary as to how open mainstream Quebecois audiences would be towards interrogating their dominance in society. Despite this, the festival's undertaking at expanding national frames, promotion of Indigenous work, and 50 years of championing Quebec cinema is deserving of applause. Indeed, this year's festival did present a unique vision of Quebec, one that was at times complicated and unsure of its place within Canada, but also one open to supporting underrepresented voices. The festival made attempts to do away with paternalistic ideas of language and uni-culturalism and to present ethno-cultural debates. This is, more than anything, a testament to the existence of a multi-faceted archipelago, an ambivalent ecosystem attempting to be many things to many peoples. Perhaps in the next 50 years these will be better teased out, and there will be more meaningful steps towards reconciliation and decolonization. I am certain there will be much more to critique, but hopefully also much more to celebrate. Let's see how this plays out.

Notes

1. Executive Director Nicolas Girard Deltruc and Programming director Zoé Protat both reference the aims

of the 2021 festival as a celebration of the event and its place within Quebec and international cinema in their official festival statements: https://nouveaucinema.ca/en/50th-edition/a-word-from-the-direction

2. In the article "Unveiling of the Program," the National Competition is described as one that is comprised of both Quebecois and Canadian Films: https://nouveaucinema.ca/en/articles/unveiling-of-the-program-and-opening-of-the-ticketing.
3. See media release for 14/09/2020 Quebec/Canada Titles Premiering at the FNC: https://nouveaucinema.ca/en/50th-edition/medias.

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Kellie Lu is a game designer and writer who examines social problems using speculative settings, with a particular fascination with the morality of "ugly" emotions. She indulges in twisted experimentation on genre and format. In her spare time, you can find her enjoying a museum, finding worldbuilding inspiration in nature, or practicing the introspective martial art of Ki-Aikido.

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Jess Stewart-Lee is an MA student at Concordia University working on her SSHRC-funded thesis project, which seeks to explore the intersection of marginalized identity, temporality, and memory—themes which she often explores in her creative work outside of the academy. She also works as a research assistant with the Archive/Counter-Archive Network to study the use of archival footage in autobiographical films by Chinese filmmakers.

Rai Terry is a Black queer visual scholar, audiovisual archivist and multimedia artist. They are a 2nd year master's student in the Public Humanities program at Brown University and Fellow at the Center for Slavery and Justice. They have a decade of experience in photography and filmmaking and earned their Bachelor of Arts in African and African American studies with a concentration in Arts from Brandeis University. Recently they have held a fellowship with the Association of Moving Image Archivists and practicums in the Audio-Visual Archives at the Rhode Island Historical Society and the South Side Home Movie Project. They are interested in engaging and preserving spaces of Black Queer agency and joy within and outside of the archive and utilizing alternative ways of history making toward a truer public education.