Par, Muddy, Sibter, Nibling, and Sprog : Languaging a Future for Lovepersons
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For the *Transgender Narratives Anthology*, forthcoming, author's version 2019.

I began with these questions:

If the goal is a queered, nonbinary, plural, "family" or kinship structure, what roadblocks resist this evolution? How must we understand these challenges as functioning on the individual/interpersonal, community, and structural/institutional levels, in order to address and attempt making these changes in our own lives and encouraging others to do the same? How does language reproduce these conditions, but so too how might it be a "soft" opening to facilitating these changes, both on the page and in practice?

To which I offer, as entry:

> A personal and community desire for evolution as well as tendency towards perceived risk is stymied by precarity and fear of alienation -- more specifically avoidance of physical harm, loss of community/support and/or other financial / social insecurity. This, in turn, can be traced to neoliberal social pressures and accompanied stripping of community resources and networks, and even earlier to the shift to protocapital spaces and away from the supports and organic infrastructures of an earlier commons. The space of linguistic adoption and play, both as a personal practice as well as within local / community/ family / child-rearing structures can begin to produce a shift in consciousness without requiring or waiting for the infrastructural/institutional/ideological conditions in which these sorts of changes are "normal," accepted or supported. Speculative and creative spaces have allowed for this imagining both vis-a-vis gender often alongside other necessary evolutionary shifts around resources, scientific advances, cyborg and human+ futures, etc. The potential freedom of the epistolary / page / creation of safe networks for thought experimentation as well as archival documentation and distribution supports this through open source possibilities and wiki / shared intelligence, an underground counterpublic via public, digital means and repositories. U-topic movement in cyberspace and in creative practice is thereby away and across / beyond the strictures of hyper-regulated space.

"*Survival is not an academic skill*"[1] *: Queer Embodiment and the Space of Precarious Possibility*

It might be unexpected to open a conversation about nonbinary / trans+ kinship structures with an investigation into how trauma manifests in the body, but perhaps the problem is *exactly* that this seems like an unlikely direction to take.

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[1] Taken from the quote from Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, (1984), so often shortened and taken out of context: "*Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.*"

Is is not only an interesting footnote but centrally necessary, when we are seeking to make actual change, to recognize the *body* (and our larger collective *body-as-organism*) as the operative laboratory within which our concepts must not only intellectually but *physically* be reproduced. And yet, our contemporary landscape of logic and argument relies on and forwards the erroneous assumption (built on the patriarchal, protocapital seeds of enlightenment thinking) that the mind and body can ever be understood as unique from one another.

Understanding the physical and emotional markers of trauma present in the 'organism-that-persons' (which in turn operates as part of a synthetic, interrelated 'holobiome' with which they are always in conversation) allows us to recognize the necessary steps towards change as not only structural or systemic but in fact as healing, palliative, reparative or recuperative, both at the level of the individual body and the body politic. Here we can begin to reclaim the space of *bare life* as distinct from self-as-political being--recognizing that we have been conditioned to see ourselves as political subjects, holders of a distinctly capital form of biopower, and that herein lies the key to our own evolution: in the recognition and dissolution of the ways in which we have simultaneously lost track of and been controlled by programmatic fear, functioning *biologically*. Here, too, in the neologisms of Arakawa and Gins and others we open another door (which will be discussed at length later): that of language as the carrier and thereby somewhat plastic membrane for our bodies' perception of their conditions (and potentiality). In the creation of new language we begin to fray the edges of our ways of both perceiving and establishing meaning in ourselves and our environment, questioning the terms and definitions we have become not only mentally, but *physically* accustomed to.

So, here: in asking what roadblocks are present in the move towards nonbinary, trans+, plural kinship structures, we must therefore ask: *what keeps us from putting into practice or realizing the changes that are both personally longed for, believed in intellectually, and furthermore which might be potentially beneficial to both our species and the planet on which we reside?* And in asking this question we must perform one critical analytical shift: away from an abstracted, already capital-biopower "people" to person-as-organism, person as animal-body, person as body-in-the-world. So, the question is, actually, "what keeps *the body*" from putting into practice changes in its world / perception / constructed reality.

When the human body believes itself to be in a state of acute danger, or has continuously been exposed to danger, risk, or threat, the way it constructs its set of possibilities and behaves is not, in fact, determined exclusively or even primarily by the brain in the way if that body was in a calm or "rational" state. The vagus nerve is interfacing between your gut and organs and your brain, sending signals as to how the system needs to function, whether "rest and digest" or "fight or flight" is possible.

Human bodies that exhibit patterns of what we now call "C-PTSD," are those who develop bodily responses to their lived experience as a result of "prolonged, repeated experience of interpersonal trauma in a context in which the individual has little or no chance of escape." In these situations, the person-as-animal behaves with the reptilian brain's instinct to physically protect itself from predators superceding the limbic brain's more evolved mammalian capabilities.

"The scared animal returns home, whether home is safe or frightening"

PTSD expert, Bessel Van der Kolk, explains how this instinct drives us to perhaps make decisions that are consistent with the mechanisms driven by trauma, as opposed to those that might seem more in line with our desires or our beliefs, out of a biological instinct that this alternative will, while not preferred, be

safer for us in the long run. The animal returns to its familiar lair even if repeated attacks occur there; the victim of abuse, gaslit into believing their experience is all they can hope for or deserve, stays with an abusive partner or parent.

Sara Ahmed gets us most of the way there, in questioning *what it means for us to be oriented, sexually* vis-a-vis a phenomenological approach that considers a repetition of gesture as creating normalcy or ease as we become accustomed to the modes and expectations of our surroundings.[2] Ahmed posits that becoming straight, and following its mores, is reproduced in a "turning towards" heterosexual culture, and also away from the "objects that take us off that line" and thereby, establish the alternative as not only other but *deviant*. She describes a familiar experience for many LGBTQIA individuals wherein one is presented with the "straight lines" and "accumulated social good" of familial temporal expectations, reproduced by the "directive" performativity of family gatherings as well as the heterosexual objects[3] of the conventional family home.[4] "Bodies become straight," she writes, "by tending towards straight objects."

Moreover, these objects "measure sociality in terms of the heterosexual gift," demanding a return by "embracing such objects as embodiments of our own histories," wherein both the less tangible currencies of familial love and affection intertwine with more practical realities of inheritance along a continuous straight *line*: where questions of financial and interpersonal, structural, support -- a safety net -- start to lead us back to the body and its sense of safety (or lack thereof).

While Ahmed does go on to address the re-orientation of the body that is necessary to queer it against the straight line, and suggests a conscious consideration of a "politics of disorientation" (as well as noting that disorientation should and can never be "an obligation or responsibility for those who identify as queer," and that this deviation "is not psychically or materially possible or sustainable for many), the analysis remains in what I might describe as the *mind's consideration of the body*, as opposed to addressing or questioning the physical condition of the body itself at it faces whether or not a dis-orientation away from expectations is sustainable for that organism.

In considering the range of possibilities available to not only the queer "person" but the queer *body*, it's helpful to therefore take an analysis like Ahmed's, perhaps alongside a more spatial consideration like Elizabeth Grosz in *Bodies-Cities*[5], stressing the relationship of the psychic, social, sexual, discursive, a

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[2] *"We could say that history 'happens' in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their dispositions or tendencies. We might note here that the labor of such repetition disappears through labor: if we work hard at something, then it seems "effortless." This paradox—with effort it becomes effortless—is precisely what makes history disappear in the moment of its enactment. The repetition of work is what makes the signs of work disappear. It is important that we think not only about what is repeated, but also about how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions. We are also orienting ourselves toward some objects more than others, including physical objects,...but also objects of though, feeling and judgement, and objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives. ...The object we aim for comes into our view through being held in place...the action searches for identity as the mark of attainment. Bodies hence acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others, as actions that have certain objects in view. ...The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: it is not just that I find them there, like that. Bodies tend some some objects more than others, given their tendencies."* - Sara Ahmed, in "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology", 2006

[3] Consideration of heterosexual objects, in Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," 1990.

[4] P 557, Ahmed.

[5] *"(T)he body is psychically, socially, sexually, and discursively or representationally produced, and... in turn, bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto their sociocultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interests of the body. The relation of interjections and projections involves a complex feedback relation in which neither the body nor its environment can be assumed to form an organically unified ecosystem. ... The body and its environment, rather, produce*

representational production of the body--and add to these both an awareness of the body's behavior in times of stress and trauma, as well as an analysis of the institutional apparatus (both ideological and corporal) that determine the relative precariousness of that body vis-a-vis its most basic needs.

Moving this very hypothetical recommendation into real, experiential analysis looks a lot like this: *in assessing available possibility for their (visible) lifestyle choices, how much does a queer person, in considering the potential loss of familial or other community support, have the ability to continue to have access to housing, food, healthcare, and other resources?,* a question whose stakes get raised exponentially when factors of race, gender-non-conformity, disability, citizenship, etc are added to the mix.

The question of precarity is always already present for queer and trans bodies, for whom negotiating trauma and risk has often been central simply in being "out" in our communities, with our families, at work and at school, negotiating legality, etc., every day. Many of our bodies carry the imprint of immediate danger, abuse, or other experiences both past and present, with trauma's programming barely beneath the surface; which means that when we ask the above, we're asking whether it can be safe for an already precarious person to ramp up the degree of possible discord by seemingly endangering the cultural sacred cows of family and home, replete with a strong dose of sexual conservatism.

Critically, then, when considering not only possibilities for *queer love*, or *queer marriage*, but plural, non-binary, fluid kinship structures, our proposal exists at the intersection of multiple types of perceived cultural / social "deviance": gender roles and divisions in the home and in labor, sexual freedom and pleasure, and also a move away from the atomized movements of capital through the institution of family, in regards to private property, resource use, taxation, etc.

I posit, then, that what is working most actively against our evolution into queer, plural kinship structures is primarily systems of neoliberal power, capital accumulation, distribution, labor, and the trickling down of its enforcement via ideological control -- as well as an interpenetration of these interests with judeo-christian indoctrination / rhetoric, and the ways in which this systemic shift has all but eliminated any efforts at a sustainable commons wherein which communities are able to independently control their own resources, information, mutual support, or care.

The history of the witch hunt, according to Silvia Federici, is in fact the history of proto-capitalist control, "instrumental to the construction of a new patriarchal order where women's bodies, their labor, their sexual and reproductive powers were placed under the control of the state and transformed into economic resources." These early capitalists, seeking loyalty from multifarious factions of pre-European groups, still largely associated by local cultures and traditions, effectively waged a psychological campaign, instilling widespread "fear and repulsion" not only of women but of much associated with this gender and their traditional labor/sphere: "the communal forms of life that had been typical of pre-capitalist Europe."[6]

The move to a proto-capitalism in rural Europe and the forced erasure of cultural signifiers through colonial rule sought to rewrite more than labor and property ownership rights, but also pass judgement on human relationship to nature. Here, the intelligence of folk and plant medicine, often held in matriarchal

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each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the (place) is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn is transformed." - Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies-Cities", in *Sexuality and Space*, 1992

[6] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004. *p.168-74*

lineage and passed down through oral tradition (and/or associated with non-neo-European conceptual lineages[7], bodies, or beliefs) becomes conveniently linked to the "witch" narrative—penalized, scapegoated, and held up as opposite to rigorously, conveniently edited forms of Christianity painted as devoid of the rich mystic traditions from which it emerged, as well as the pagan/nature-based practices with which it remained intertwined for many centuries.[8]

What we see in this precedent are histories of widespread, officially vetted propaganda built to normalize social, cultural, and other institutional damnation of not only the female body, but of any and all practices and traditions associated with the non-hetero-normative, patriarchal, male-gaze-oriented body/role, that are deemed a threat to the production and maintenance of a cohesive, capitalist statehood.[9]

Permission for exploration into alternative healing modalities and narratives around the body and its experience emerges in parallel, primarily, to the norm, and is often mostly accessible to those who risk the least by and through experimentation. There is, too, some dystopic shadow cast by the virtual, corporate keeping and sharing of medical records, linked to shared ancestry data[10], regulated shots and tests, and the texts I get from my insurance company, to whom I am only and always 'female,' reminding me I need to get a pap smear—the suggestion that at some point my *off the grid* process of self-healing and "experimental" treatments might not only be the laughable impetus for the standard shaming but also financially dangerous, linked to making oneself ineligible for insurance or care by having, as it were, *broken the contract* of expected behaviors, in the same way as building your own solar panels and removing dependency on fossil fuels is now widely punishable by law.

When the body is told that it is an imposter, when the mind is trained to disbelieve its own perceptions, when the rhetoric and *science* of the day tells one that it is frail, crazy, less-than—and when maintaining the illusion of *going-along-with* this is, perhaps, vital to one's survival, how does one carve out a space of sanity? Of, if possible, an alternative? And even if one is to develop alternative theories, how does one maintain stability under constant attack?[11]

The position of precarity from which we consider our possibilities must be considered palimpsestically: not only on the surface, considering only the social and personal ramifications of the potential loss of family support or other access to resources, but also recognizing the multiple layers of institutional, political-economic operation that establish "family" as the primary vein through which one's ability to

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[7] I'm thinking here of the "invented" neo-national "identity" mythologies present in particular in modern Europe in contrast to its tribal, indigenous, pagan roots, as theorized in Ernest Renan's "What is a Nation?" from 1882, then later in Benedict Anderson's 1991 *Imagined Communities*, and elsewhere.

[8] I posed to Federici the question of the interweaving specifically of witchhunting with attacks on nonbinary, queer, and other nonnormative / sexually "deviant" persons or populations, but she admitted this wasn't part of her analysis and encouraged me to investigate that avenue; I didn't have time to do so before completing this paper.

[9] To the previous point about documentation as a radical feminist practice being not as much 'female' as non-cis-het, we can draw parallels to the spaces of assertion this of course can be seen as parallel to other "scientific" claims about other bodies: from phrenology to eugenics / social darwinism, etc.

[10] Though this issue has only recently entered a more widespread public awareness, there have been growing concern about abuses of customer privacy and anonymity for some years now as nearly every commercial genetic testing companies have revealed selling genetic information to third parties, to ends we are only beginning to understand the ramifications of. See "Another Personal Genetics Company is Sharing Client Data," Katie M. Palmer, *Wired Magazine*, July 2015; in 2017 the FTC issued an advisory statement on the services, and in July 2018, new guidelines were drawn for Privacy Best Practices by the Future of Privacy Forum, with some preliminary agreement of adherence from the services. Time will tell.

[11] Section from "And I in the Middle Ground Found: Documentation as Feminist Practice," by the author, forthcoming as part of *Matters of Feminist Practice*. Belladonna* Collaborative, 2019.

support oneself over the course of one's life is gauged.[12] To give a snapshot of the time in which I'm writing, as of 2018, the Human Rights Council was presented with a report from Special Rapporteur Philip Alston on extreme poverty and human rights in the US, determining poverty -- with current policies described by Alston as seemingly "deliberately designed to remove basic protections from the poorest, punish those who are not in employment and make even basic health care into a privilege to be earned rather than a right of citizenship."[13]

It is specifically within the context of the last, the threat to basic health care, that is perhaps most apt for an embedded, political-economic asking of our question, at least in the United States of 2018: now, the question becomes, *if your ability to know that you and whatever children you may have are already at great risk due to the precariousness of your relationship to the state as an out queer person, and that your financial situation is also precarious, with no reliable social programs for housing or basic needs to rely on, (and often facing staggering student debt), if other than in your choice of gender for your partner, if choosing to follow otherwise "straight", normative lines of behavior will be the best way to assure that **you and/or your children are more likely to be able to get health care in times of need or crisis**, are you willing to take that risk?[14]*

If we return to the human body, now, as the carrying medium within which this potentiality is weighed, we must understand that body to be one that, in the United States of 2018, understands itself to have its safety and well being, as well as that of its offspring, to be in immediate danger.[15] The *body* of this moment persists within, and gauges through, the lens of trauma.

Even a consideration of "queer spaces," within which one might hope to find sanctuary and more support in the building of nontraditional kinship structures -- associated as they are with, specifically, the intentional creation of queer "family" (see ahmed again, towards end), often masks deeply regulated, pressurized, if not heterosexual modes of acceptable presentation and behavior.

Nico Dacumos, in "All Mixed Up With No Place to Go: Inhabiting Mixed Consciousness on the Margins,"[16] refers to this pressure as "the tyranny of identity," with transgender, in his experience, "fail[ing] all butches, AG's/aggressives, and studs who find themselves facing the same issues of state and interpersonal violence that FTMs or genderqueers face, minus the academic and political hype," an issue that is markedly "tied to race and class." The precarity specific to these groups, he argues, might make the choice to be a stud or butch more viable than the more radical, often medically-defined categorization afforded "officially" transgender or genderqueer persons, with resultant widespread erasure both in academic and medical / mental health documentation.

Throughout *Nobody Passes* as well as certainly in our own daily lives we are shown a litany of ways in which the queer community sometimes has the unfortunate tendency to eat its own, with the familiar stories of *no fats, no femmes* and other rampant misogyny in the cis-male homosexual community, with

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[12] US centric, but it's important note how this might be different in Europe, or worse elsewhere, etc

[13] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/06/an-explosive-un-report-shows-americas-safety-net-was-failing-before-trumps-election/?utm_term=.db05d1651bc2,

[14] Note: this is a question that can be applied to any other potentially alienating choices; in the "Building Interpersonal Infrastructures" workshop I developed and led in 2017-18 I began to explore and help others explore the invisible strictures based on systems of expectation, control, support, and access to resources, often at the root of a rift presenting between behavior and inclination / desire. It ran, among other manifestations, as part of SOHO20's "Rethinking Feminisms" series. http://soho20gallery.com/building-interpersonal-infrastructures/

[15] Everybody? Even the 1%? ….

[16] In *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity.* Mattilda (aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore), ed. Seal Press, 2006.

the lack of acceptance for queer and transgender folk who have evolved their gender or sexual preference over time, or with others who fail to fit into the alternative models more specific queer "communities" require one to perform.

Rocko Bulldagger's list of 'top ten people most excluded from your genderqueer scene' includes:

> *1) people of color, 2) femmes, 3) transwomen and others who insist on continuing to use female pronouns in this day and age, 4) people who do not wear the uniform, 5) people over twenty-seven, unless they have contributed to your top surgery fund, 6) people who express hetero actions, 7) people who do not speak the latest activist lingo, 8) people who aren't kissing your ass right now, 9) transsexuals who have "fully" transitioned, however you define that today, and 10) cross-dressers.[17]*

Rocko's concern is familiar: that in place of becoming united, and exploring expansive possibility together, the trans and genderqueer community ends up reproducing the "tyranny of identity," creating a parallel respectability politics wherein the threat of precarity returns anew.

This story is an all too familiar one. In "Outside In: the Failings of Alternative Communities,"[18] Kim Nicolini writes that "instead of offering solutions to [her] problem of outsiderness and alienation," that what she found was "enforced stereotypes, classism, and a structure that nurtures a society of the elite," and which was much more interested in "maintaining its own version of the status quo than in actually promoting an alternative to mainstream society."

Especially for those who have put themselves in a position of insecurity or risk in order to take certain steps of their journey towards a queer public identity and presence, the risk of alienating oneself from a queer community or family, now a place of refuge, can seem too great. For the queer body negotiating danger, with the past traumas already informing its sense of "logical" and "safe" decision making, moves toward radical possibility that upset the functional order of things can thereby appear to be off the table. And therefore, unfortunately, most folks are left waiting for a precedent to be set by those who have more plasticity in their condition before they are willing to upset the precarious, often weaker links of DIY kinship networks.

As we consider the role that trends towards heteronormativity and "family values" played in the establishment and reproduction of both straight and queer caste and performance social and cultural sphere, with media as a driving force, it is critically important to not divorce this analysis from the political-economics of the body as a site of capital accumulation. With precarity on the line, and with the queer body in the absence of normative resource and structural support, the body understanding itself within a system of *value* as conditioned within a capital economy seeks an accumulation of worth and "wealth" even if not in monetary form; the social capital systems of the queer economy of acceptance and belonging can be seen as functioning very much along these lines, both in terms of access as well as vis-a-vis translation into physical resources by means of successful negotiations within these networks. Looking at Weber we might find an analysis that suggests that even in rejecting the norm, the capitalist bodies within queer communities cannot but ultimately reproduce precisely what they have been kept

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[17] pp 146-7, from "The End of Genderqueer, in *Nobody Passes.*

[18] pp 164. Kim Nicolini, "Outside in: the Failings of Alternative Communities." In *Collective Action: A Bad Subjects Anthology*. Pluto Press, 2004.

from, at times with even greater stricture, perceiving this erroneously as a sort of poetic justice while unconsciously undermining any freedom or move away from the norm by so doing.

From Silence=Death to 'Modern Family'

The LGBTQ movements of the 60's-90's that have become so iconic in the story of sexual liberation and Gay Rights mythology (at least in the US) might have foretold a future/present quite different from the space in which we find ourselves, vis-a-vis not only the right to marry, but more explicitly in having challenged both homophobia and heteronormativity, as well as troubling the relationships between normative expectations and intersections of race, gender, class, ability, and legality/nationality.

Where these movements sought structural change and collective re-imagining, a shift to neoliberal capital in not only socio-political function but especially in cultural ideology served to reframe the focus onto the rights of the individual / citizen, which then in turn becomes the concern and rallying cry of the collective. Here, the dangers of what Lauren Berlant refers to as the *intimate public sphere*[19] start to ossify, with the queer community as somewhat unwitting carrier: conformity is reproduced by the very agents who may, personally and privately, wish to confound and break out of normative kinship structures as they are encouraged to form publicly visible bonds of constituency around what is perceived and performed as a "commonly lived" history. For the queer person in the world both wishing to "resist" by participating in protests against the very real abuse of rights as well as wishing to "belong" and "support" the strength and capacities of the closest thing to an operative queer "public," it can be not only challenging but feel like an act of sedition to remove oneself from public narratives of both emotional and embodied life that become synonymous with "conventions of belonging."

In breaking down the rhetoric and function of Jodie Foster's "coming out" speech at the 2013 Golden Globes, Julia Johnson and Kimberlee Pérez illustrate the ways in which Foster and other public figures attempt to play into a nonnormative collective sentiment, at the same time reinforcing a "narrative… constrained by neoliberal conditions," but still wherein her race and class privilege afford her the "right" to a publicly understood and appreciated private life, under the umbrella of the normative social trope of *protecting the (genetic, household, private) family*.[20]

Like those in *Nobody Passes* which tell us what *type* of queer we can be when and where, even while the "queer family" or "chosen family" concept remains narratively beloved, the nuclear family / cis-gender-role social trope is powerful: played out across media and canonized via our own words and actions, via post and tweet and participation in social and political spheres wherein *belonging* feels very much at stake (to our minds, and, as we've established, our bodies).

Annalee Newitz considers the space of filmic unrequited love across heterosexual and homosexual characters that might appear to, at the surface, cross into an expansive public conversation about the plasticity of desire and the possibilities of partnership and/or householding, but which instead "offer audiences a new form of sexual conservatism in which your orientation matters less than whether you

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[19] *pp viii*. Berlant, Lauren *The Female Complaint*. Duke University Press, 2008.

[20] Julia Johnson and Kimberlee Pérez, "Queerness May Have Dodged a Bullet: Jodie Foster's Neoliberal "Coming-Out" Rhetoric and the Politics of Visibility," in *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking.* Vol 1, No. 1. Spring 2014, pp 199-208.

choose to form a family, become monogamous, and procreate."[21]

It is critically important to note here that of course, queer "family" and/or nonnormative household and social formations remain essential in particular for at-risk groups, but so too is this a conversation about trauma, safety, risk, and privilege more than it is one of active, intentional system reimagining: reliance on and establishment of nonnormative household structures, those that in Ahmed's framework *queer* the norm i.e. by *disorienting* structurally or interpersonally from cultural or social expectations remain primarily a space of refuge from acute danger, a way to share resources and mimic or reproduce supports that are otherwise absent. The titular Houses that provided (and in some cases continue to provide) safety and companionship to runaway queer youth with no family or systemic support that came into the public eye in *Paris is Burning* (1990) and now which we see in shows like *Pose*[22] are not entirely dissimilar to spaces where a community leader, grandparent or other relative, and/or friend opens their home to children whose parents are incarcerated, deported, or who have died as the result of other systemically reinforced dangers that unequally affect the less privileged: lack of access to medical care, gang violence, addiction, etc.

It bears noting that within these visible "alternative" families, both in many Houses depicted in these media representations or the latter, while there is deep appreciation for the rescue of the DIY infrastructure, the norm often remains idealized and dreamed for, a space of aspiration that is firmly positioned as a goal. While celebrating the strength and resiliency of the families and community established in and around Ball culture in the 1980's, in *Pose* we watch Indya Moore's character, Angel, pine for the "normal," partnered life she seems to near realizing with her on-again, off-again lover, finance executive Stan Bowes (Evan Peters); his repressed fetishizing of his attraction to a transgender woman he meets as a sex-worker starkly out of sync with the feelings he clearly begins to develop for her as a *person*, as well as with the unexpectedly "normal" dreams she makes clear she aspires to that look a lot more like the life he seeks to escape from through her difference. So too, we see House Mother Elektra Abundance (Dominique Jackson) forced out of her long-term financially supportive relationship (which in turn allows her to maintain the House) with another privileged white male executive when she decides to have the gender reassignment surgery she has so long dreamed of -- it is clear that she believes (or has told herself) that their relationship has value beyond the fetish, and yet when she makes a decision to come into her identity as fully embodied she is cast out and stripped of access to her former lover and his graces (and resources) without a second thought. While there are, of course, redeeming narratives of coming together against these egregious slights and disgraces, ultimately what persists is a not unfamiliar myth of strength-under-fire--not the suggestion that were there widespread acceptance and normalizing of transgender and queer bodies / persons within and into more traditional narratives and spaces of "family", that alternative kinship networks like these would continue to persist, be chosen, or even be desirable. Of course, *Pose* is set in the 1980's, but as Newitz and others have established, what has followed both in media representation *and, circularly, in the lived experience that mirrors and sometimes aspires to it) is a nonnormativity which has become more readily *consumable* and *visible*, giving new meaning to commodity fetish, with that same public sphere's manipulated intimacies moving us away from radical sexualities, partnerships, and intentional kinship formations.

At the same time, we can chart television and other media's effect on a public consciousness in which

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[21] pp 204. Newitz, Annalee. "Heterosexual Love," in *Collective Action: A Bad Subjects Anthology.* Pluto Press, 2004.

[22] *Pose*, on FX. 2018-, "Set in the 1980s, Pose looks at the juxtaposition of several segments of life and society in New York: the rise of the luxury Trump-era universe, the downtown social and literary scene and the ball culture world."

"the friends-as-family idea is [widely held as] both comforting and pragmatic,"[23] with a litany of syndicated shows boasting both friend-groups with both hetero and homosexual characters as core members. However, these familiar narratives again appear more as a stopgap solution to the financial and social challenges of survival in the late 20th c/early 21st c socio-economic milieu of the US than of any true representation, much less clear approval of alternative models. Not to mention that central storylines of any of these shows lean heavily on the peaks and valleys of their characters' quests *to partner*, reverting back out of any makeshift "kinship" structure into a more traditional model as soon as possible.

We begin to see glimmers of possibility for less traditional pairings, subversion of gender roles, and an active questioning of the confines of kinship in a show like *Transparent* (especially in its minor characters and storylines), but then too is this show a, mostly, unflinching illustration of the privileges afforded to the upper classes, and how the institution of family, dysfunctional or no, maintains its hold on individuals through the binds of ongoing financial support into adulthood. The wealthy family, with its ability to reframe and remake itself, with the ability to make things go away, with its capacity to "fix" the indiscretions and mistakes of its offspring, with the very real capacity to provide housing and/or other basic needs, is a unique and separate universe: a space within which exploration and "experimentation" is exceptionally possible, but which expects tribute of a sort which, too, has long term effects on mind and body in the establishment of a fully formed identity, and perception of possibility vs. loss/risk.

The question of agency in the formation of queer kinship networks as it relates to both financial freedom and radical non-normative householding is one that is well served by considering the growth and formation (and/or failure to launch) of alternative communities in general -- as well as in recognizing the critical shifts currently taking place in the corporate re-imaginings of commons-based models. This is a topic that deserves much more exploration, but as it has the capacity to derail the task at hand, let us at least lay the groundwork: the radical queer intersectional movements of the 1960's - 90's took place in a shifting economic landscape, to be sure, but throughout there was a significant Venn overlap with other alternative configurings of living situation, distribution sharing, community education, radical politics, homesteading, permaculture/agriculture, ecological sustainability, holistic healing and a return to plant medicine, and so on.

There persist several hundred intentional communities (alternatively: cooperative community, ecovillage, etc) in the United States, and more around the world, with some intersection with religious or spiritual community formation or self-identification. You might not be surprised to know that despite an effort across the mission statements of these organizations to have no obstructions to joining based on race, gender, sexuality, class, or so on, that despite cooperative finance and land-ownership models in fact having very real, radical potential for especially persons of lesser means, that by and large the visible face of these communities is white, and that there is an often an association of privilege with the members of these communities, vis-a-vis there having been a *choice* to move away from mainstream society, risking alienation at times both familial and socio-cultural, as well as establishing a notably *other* type of belonging as distinct from the popular narratives we considered earlier as functioning in Berlant's analysis.

Running numbers on these communities or diving more deeply into the Fellowship for Intentional Community's "Queer in Community"[24] archives might present a more deeply intersectional presence than is apparent on the surface: I imagined most people are unfamiliar with Alkebulan, a Muslim-run, interfaith

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[23] Newitz.

[24] https://www.ic.org/wiki/queer-community/

community in Bartow, Georgia, or a slate of more than 100 "'wimmin' run," lesbian-centric "communities and gathering spaces" (mostly in the US, as well as in Canada, Scotland, France, Australia, Sweden, West Wales, and New Zealand), or the Radical Faerie, solely gay & queer male space known as "The Land aka Amber Fox" in Eastern Ontario. But the point is not that these communities do not persist or even thrive, or that there aren't actively spaces being carved out and explored by and for creative, radical queerness that have intersectional concerns at heart, but rather that these communities stay accessible to a very small percentage of the population, by means of the way in which they are firmly ensconced in a type of privilege that is less about purely financial capacity and more about social mobility, education, and access to highly localized, often highly personal networks of information. Standard media tropes around the out-of-touch, defensive, usually white ally associated with new age movements and intentional communities and/or festival culture -- whether in the form of the old hippie / bohemian, the tech-money-bro-who-found-himself, or the clueless kale-smoothie upper class blonde yoga rat--are as powerful in their negative reinforcement for spaces and identity-signifiers to avoid as the conventions of belonging are in telling us who and what we should (or, presumably, already) be, wear, do, say, and associate with.

Where intentional community formation and alternative models are concerned, then, we again see perception and popular narrative, and fear of alienation / lack of safety / loss of belonging, functioning on the mind and body at the level of performance and acceptability politics. In actuality, however, a consideration of viable living alternatives that is more logic or system driven might in fact begin to offer both intersectional marginalized communities at large, and in turn, those interested in radical queer kinship building the resources and interpersonal infrastructures necessary to combat the precariousness which makes it so often an impossibility -- according to the mind and the body. Successful redistribution of resources and protocol for housing, care, education, nutrition, as well as other spiritual and emotional resources could begin to repair the traumatized systems our bodies bring to this effort, offering an model that aspires to independence, growth, and healing. It is critical to note that such an alternative is diametrically opposed to that of dependence on allopathic modalities of healing trauma, attached as it is to a western medical model that continues to treat mind and body as distinct entities, with specialists unprepared and unable to address the queer body as a site of conflict that doesn't desire a normative reintegration or reprogramming.[25]

A controversial take on the queer "family" as kinship network in contrast to the norm is proffered by Lee Edelman in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*[26], which takes the notion that queer body, queer space, and queer community has no desire to be reprogrammed and/or to fit a hetero-normative or family-values centered social structure to a more radical end: he suggests that it is *precisely* the lack of the ability to procreate in homosexual pairings that has led queer culture to "embrace the negative," allowing for a uniquely formed political agency unencumbered by familial trappings. Edelman focuses on the release of "reproductive futurism," against which he positions queerness as a space of possibility carved out specifically in relation to an accepted and somewhat celebrated end game.

The book continues to be highly polemic but perhaps can be helpful here in recognizing the current landscape wherein queer bodies, perhaps especially those who wish to engage in procreation, parenting, and care networks perhaps are disinclined to align themselves with "outsider" narratives, establishing queerness as anti-normative and even aggressive in their disdain for the goals and values of family,

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[25] For more on this, I cannot recommend *The Remedy: Queer and Trans Voices on Health and Health Care,* edited by Zena Sharman, highly enough. (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016.)

[26] Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.

home, and domesticity. The polarizing of the politically radical, and often intellectually subversive (as well as highly educated) rhetoric of the queer, bohemian, left can indeed feel like a space of negation and criticism of straightness, childrearing, and even of different modes of queerness, leaving many returning full circle to the comforts of a more populist, shared experience that supercedes specifically LGBTQ affinities--and perhaps, this doesn't have to be cause for alarm.

If we understand the legacy of the sort of reactionary exceptionalism that Edelman might propose (which at worst smacks of a rather privileged patriarchal system of self-and-community-valuation) and inquire of it where and how it might imagine itself re-configured within a feminist context, a ecologically sound context, a culturally and socially intersectional context, with bodies of diverse ability, and as resistant, in particular, to the neoliberal capital structures (that would love nothing better than for us to burn, bright and readily consumable, until our demise), what might this look like? Where can we look for models of potentially viable, radical, queer kinship structures that both break with sexual and gender norms, as well as institutional structural standards? In the same place where we've imagined countless revolutionary, seemingly "impossible" futures of discovery, and change: in speculative fiction.

Seedplanting with Speculative Narratives and Neologisms: Making Oddkin[27]

As both writer and reader (or viewer, etc) of speculative fiction and fantasy, the human imagination is presented with possibilities within the scope of our senses, but beyond our experiences; these narratives, their imagined geographies, and their characters have allowed humans to reframe their own lives within expansive pasts and futures of their own devising, whether what is imagined there presents the best, or worst, of our potential. But so too, here, can we find freedom beyond the confines of whatever limitations the politics, religion, science, or "common sense" of the time in which one lives--which is why creative production and access to it is so highly controlled in fascist regimes.

In her poem "Rant", Diane DiPrima writes that "the only war that matters is the war against the imagination," in which "all other wars are subsumed," which I've always taken not as a dismissal of the gravity of other human struggles but rather that it is in the space of the imagination that freedom persists under the greatest of repressions. We should count ourselves lucky if we are among those who have been allowed access to the sorts of banned books and other narratives wherein radical imaginings of gender, class, race, ability, and sexuality (as well as religion and other institutional structures) have been explored.

And so it follows that it is not in the _world_, as of yet, but in the space of the imagination that we find our most productive models of potential future constructions of gender, kinship, and social structure. It is in speculative and science fiction, too, that we often see cross-pollination with pre-modern, indigenous social and kinship models, unsurprisingly spaces in which the relationship between power, gender, and sexuality functions quite differently from those oriented around a capitalist intelligence.

If we look at Victor Turner's social drama theory, we can recognize a superstructure of performative institutional response to "resistance" which encompasses and manipulates a public's outrage with standard, ritual stages of breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration[28] that helps us see at a metacognitive level how fruitless certain institutionally-oriented efforts of even the most logical, reasonable arguments can be. Throughout my life, in attempting to affect radical change both personally and within my

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[27] In Haraway, Donna. _Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene,_ Duke University Press, 2016.

[28] Turner, Victor. from _The Anthropology of Performance_, 1987, PAJ Publications, New York.

community I find myself again and again landing on Buckminster Fuller's adage that "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete," which takes on an urgency when paired with Turner, or Hakim Bey, who writes of an 'up-rising' or bootstrap operation that is most possible in the liminal spaces existing concurrently with a repressive or otherwise normative state: a *temporary autonomous zone*[29] arising "out of critique of revolution," not necessarily in anger or speaking ill of previous efforts, but recognizing their futility and establishing, in alternative spaces that are either conceptually, actually, or digitally "off the grid" in someway, an imaginative realm wherein possibilities might flourish, enough to take ground in the mind.

In the *TAZ*, one of the first darlings to go is the nuclear family, which Bey concludes is the "base unit of consensus society," a response to imposed scarcity and hierarchy. He considers, instead, the *band*, or an open group that exists as part of a "horizontal pattern of custom, extended kinship, contract and alliance, spiritual affinities, etc.," recognizing even as early as 1991 the seemingly boundless potential for free network associations and re-distribution of resources, and alternative establishment of anti-hierarchical modes of self-identification that the internet offered.[30]

The space of speculative narrative, itself a type of autonomous zone, has long been a workshop for utopian mental experimentation, which continues to take to task the failures of institutional power structures and the standardized roles around which they operate and on which their maintenance relies.

Utopian and queer reimaginings of social structure, hierarchy, and gender (as well as conceptions of genderless, or gender-transformative characters) are central to the science fiction of well known writers like Samuel Delaney and Ursula K. LeGuin, as well as countless others who are more familiar to readers of the genre--or of graphic novels, like Neil Gaiman's popular *Sandman* series, known for gender fluid and variant characterizations.

Donna Haraway's recent collection, *Staying with the Trouble*, includes a speculative effort she calls "The Camille Stories," where she imagines five generations of "Camilles" as human-animal symbionts born to the Communities of Compost, envisioned as children born "in the context of community decision making" to horizontally formed human systems intentionally designed to "mutate the apparatuses of kin making and to reduce radically the burdens of human numbers across the earth," and wherein "every new child must have at least three parents, who may or may not practice new or old genders."[31]

Both in theory like Bey's or Haraway's and in speculative narrative, the creation and use of the neologism becomes a linguistic safe space where expansive conceptions can begin to become concretized. Haraway writes of how Camille "gives" her the adage "Make Kin, Not Babies," which she explains "joins a litter of symbiogentic and sympoetic provocations that lure [her] writing," here especially troubling the word "kin" and its fraught relationship to anthropology -- she stresses that imagining a new possibility for kin making requires that our *words* be "resignified, repopulated, and reinhabited."[32]

Haraway herself stresses the necessity of Science Fiction in this essential reimagining, with reconfigurations and invention of language as an essential tool, nodding to her own indebtedness with the

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[29] Hakim Bey (Peter Lamborn Wilson). *Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Autonomedia, NY. 1991.

[30] Of course we've now seen the institutional backlash to the earlier heyday of the internet's free culture, with repression, regulation, and restricted access on the rise.

[31] Haraway, 139.

[32] Haraway, 216.

help of indigenous writer and advocate Daniel Heath Justice's gender-expansive *Kynship Chronicles*[33] and work towards, as Justice puts it, "imagining otherwise."

Usage of variant gender and sexuality terminology and imagination has long been a pattern in a wide variety of autonomous zones wherein this freedom beyond the confines of normative social mores is possible, as exemplified by the persistence of the Spivak pronouns on the early text-based Multi-User virtual world LamdbaMOO, where they were added as an optional "gender setting" in 1991, leading to a standardized adoption of Spivak gender neutral pronouns in online forums, help texts and in the rulesets of nomic games. In addition, MUD[34]'s and MOO's have long had *masculine, feminine, neuter, either, both, "splat" (asterisk), plural, egotistical, royal,* and *2nd* as gender options. If we counter the regulations and strictures, as well as precarities of the socio-cultural landscape, even the earliest, low tech versions of multiplayer online environments[35] can be understood as an accessible speculative world wherein chosen gender identity and presentation has, for going on 3 decades, been an active space of exploratory freedom.

Taking the idea of the speculative off of the page and into daily practice, I posit that the space of linguistic adoption and play, both as a personal practice as well as within local / community/ family / child-rearing structures can begin to produce a shift in consciousness without requiring or waiting for the infrastructural/institutional/ideological conditions in which these sorts of changes are "normal," accepted or supported. Where speculative and creative spaces have allowed for this imagining both vis-a-vis gender often alongside other necessary evolutionary shifts around resources, scientific advances, cyborg and human+ futures, etc., giving ourselves and others permission to "play," and in so doing work on rewriting our own stories.

Understanding embodied cognition, and returning to think about the body as the actionable landscape within which our ideas play out, it can be productive to consider language as a permeable membrane as well as medium by which this knowledge and embodied being in the world is translated and established, with linguistic nods back to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis[36], as well as the metaphorical structure underlying embodied thought, as per Lakoff and Johnson.[37]

How does language, especially that we learn and normalize behavior around as children, shape our abilities to imagine our identities, our potential kinship networks, and the world? How does exposure to a limited landscape of "family tree" crafts, with standardized binary cis-gender roles, pronouns, and titles, delimit the imagination and undermine the seemingly available options for self, community, kinship, and household formation? As someone inclined towards speculative fiction, as well as traditional forms of healing and witchcraft, from early childhood my interior narrative was deeply influenced by imaginative landscapes and language, something that I am convinced has continued to encourage a certain plasticity of possibility in my capacity for personal speculation vis-a-vis my own identity, as well as the kinship structures I see potential for in my life and in the world at large.

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[33] Daniel Heath Justice*, The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles*. University of New Mexico Press, 2011.

[34] a *MUD*, or Multi-User Dungeon / Dimension / Domain, is a multiplayer real-time virtual world, usually text-based. A *MOO*, like *LambdaMOO* is an object-oriented variant of a MUD. (Note: The verbal similarity to Lamdba Lit and Legal is coincidental, LamdbaMOO wasn't exclusively a queer virtual space despite its gender-language fluidity.)

[35] a forerunner of *Second Life*, and a social precursor to the social media sites and forums that are now so universal

[36] Although an overarching theory of linguistic determinism is now outmoded, it has been well established that language usage and conceptual structure influences thought and decision making.

[37] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, 1999.

As a nonbinary, poly, pansexual queer person who uses they/them pronouns, but who also is *par*, or, "Mama Lynne" to an AFAB "daughter" with two gay fathers, and also as someone cohabitating with a queer, demi, femme-leaning, cis-male, platonic domestic partner, and *especially* as someone who has been working for nearly two decades to reimagine both built and social kinship structures and landscapes, as an anthropologist, urban planner, and as a creative person in the world, questions of how I language myself are never far from view (and are, I imagine, never "resolved", insofar as I see myself as not desirous of fixity). However, so rarely have I heard even a suggestion of their use, even I had to go searching online for alternative, non binary, terms that might be circulating as substitution for familial roles, leading me to the genderqueeries tumblr[38] list of Gender Neutral/Queer Titles, where I found those in the place of parent (par), mommy/daddy (muddy), sister / brother (sibter), niece/nephew (nibling), and daughter/son (sprog), which I used in the title of this paper, as well as replacements for other conventional terms we use without thinking.

With my own intentions to subvert and expand the possibilities of "motherhood" but also in deference to my sprog's fathers' desire to have (her) know me as her "mother," we came up with "Mama Lynne" during my pregnancy, which mostly I have liked and felt comfortable with, despite and during my own shifting towards a name change to ELÆ in response to dissociation and a desire to reclaim as well as in conversation with my very public position as a nonbinary person -- the "Mama Lynne" is entirely contextual, a string of syllables out of the mouth of my offspring and it has become its own sound. But were I to do it again might I language something newer? Perhaps. And has it been remarkable to note her comfort in the movement between three parents and an expansive kinship structure of both chosen and blood relations? Wherein she has known already at 8 for some years that a nonbinary gender is available to her? Absolutely. Can I imagine how access to and common usage of alternative languaging would change perception of "how the world works" even more radically, both for her and for others navigating the normalizing peer culture of school, as the meeting ground for institutional norms around obedience and presentation (she already cannot wear a tanktop) as well as in the face of the strictures of other more traditional families? Certainly I can. As an adult, the movement in and through language I used to define myself has been an important part of my journey, though perhaps none quite as important as my own neologism, through the use of the Portuguese nonbinary pronoun as a "name" for myself, which I see as much as an object or representative statement for myself, around the impossibility of narrow capture, as anything else.

Critically, this space of play need not be relegated to the "artist" or "writer" as understood as "exceptional," again a function of ideological, institutional definition; however, it can be helpful to any of us to look to a history of artists and writers for critical and actual examples of how the potential freedom of the epistolary / page / art / creation was also at times linked to a local (and/or now, virtual/global) establishment of alternative safe networks for thought experimentation, as well as archival documentation and distribution supports this through open source possibilities and wiki / shared intelligence.

Beyond the personal, familial, imaginary, playful adoption of new language as a space of meaningful, actionable resistance in one's own *perception* of possibility for the self and others, I urge those seeking alternative versions of resistance to remember that there persists beyond appearance, always, palimpsestic underground counterpublics, that persist in their worlding, that welcome their joining, and which are always open to their building. Hyper-regulated spaces, whether real or cyber, are nothing new, nor are the fascist / dictator types who would rail against public health support for or even NEA support for the art of the nonnormative *other*, out of their own fear. If we can understand all our bodies, even those of

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[38] http://genderqueeries.tumblr.com/titles

those whose beliefs challenge or reject our own, as those facing the same challenges of trauma, risk, and alienation, we can begin to seek modalities of communication that do not ignore the base human instincts controlling so much of our seemingly "cognitive" arguments; in the meantime, I implore you to keep rewriting and imagining *oddkin*, in the interest of a queered and sustainable future.