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Body of work: everything I wrote while I was supposed to be making films (is actually part of the filmmaking process)

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BODY OF WORK: EVERYTHING I WROTE WHILE I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE
MAKING FILMS (IS ACTUALLY PART OF THE FILMMAKING PROCESS)

by

Anna Lynn Swanson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Film and Video Production in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Michael Gibisser

Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Anna Lynn Swanson

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Film and Video Production at the May 2016 graduation.

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To my parents, who have always supported me,
And to everyone whose self-reflection has been both the etiology and the cure

Never does one open the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter. For the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to emerge, people approach it indirectly by postponing until it matures, by letting it come when it is ready to come. There is no catching, no pushing, no directing, no breaking through, no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes. Time and space are not something entirely exterior to oneself, something that one has, keeps, saves, wastes, or loses.

Trinh T. Minh Ha
Woman, Native, Other

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My progress on this set of films and the written work that accompanies them did not come “right to the heart of the matter,” in the words of Trinh T. Minh-Ha. Rather, it was like my own recovery: nonlinear, seemingly chaotic, full of small triumphs and setbacks, engaged in the dance of three-steps-forward, two-steps-back. And like recovery, it is the kind of thing that you must do for yourself but cannot accomplish alone, and I am honored to share my gratitude with the many people who have supported this endeavor. Thank you to Marit Lysne, and everyone in the Eating Disorder Therapy Group at Carleton College who struggled alongside me in our parallel recoveries, and first heard the budding dream that became this set of films — I hold all of you in my heart and am making this work for you.

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Kate Nash. Jesse McLean gave me new ways to understand the relationship between selves and pop culture (including my own self). I'll always be an amateur at heart! Laska Jimsen's films and mentorship laid a foundation for this work in my undergraduate education that I only fully recognize in hindsight, and for which I am deeply grateful. Special thanks to the members of my committee: Laurie Graham, Lauren Rabinovitz, Mike Gibisser, and especially Jason Livingston, who told me not to read his written thesis (so of course I did), and who has challenged me to both think differently and to shoot, shoot, shoot!

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Thank you to my collaborators, each of whom took the risk of entering into an ethical encounter with me and my camera. I am sure I have made mistakes and for that I apologize, but I have done my best to represent each of you as complex and worthy, and I hope you remain recognizable to yourselves in these films.

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Disciplines arrive at moments of crisis. So do those who labor within and at the margins, intersections, outskirts, and centers of those disciplines. This written thesis draws together these moments of both disciplinary and individual crisis, at the intersection of anthropology, nonfiction filmmaking, and film studies. In response to existential, representational, and ethical anxieties, these writings and videos affirm life, within and between the disciplines, myself, and my collaborators — each of whom has experienced or is recovering from an eating disorder. Through navigating the representation of these experiences, the work interrogates the limits and potentials of representation in nonfiction film and video more broadly, and how it relates to anthropology, activism, and pedagogy. It asks: what is a good (ethical) representation of another individual's experience, especially of something as seemingly private or vulnerable as an eating disorder and the recovery from it? This thesis approaches this question from technological, methodological, ethical, philosophical, and practical perspectives, and in doing so, aims not so much to resolve these disciplinary and personal crises, but to move through and with them, towards a theory and a practice of embodied ethical representation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Written Work

One primary goal of this written thesis is provide context for the set of videos that comprise *Body of Work*, my MFA thesis film project. This will occur through some traditional forms of reflection and notes on process, but also by way of anthologizing a series of formal writings that have deeply shaped both my experience here as a graduate student, and the creation of *Body of Work*.

I came to the University of Iowa, specifically, in order to solidify myself as a filmmaker, one whose work exists in relation to scholarly endeavors.¹ The program has both required and allowed for the scholarly dimension of my practice to grow alongside my moving image work. But at the same time, there has remained some tension (for me, at least) about the relationship between (scholarly) writing and filmmaking, within the rubric of productivity and time.² Thus, this thesis provides a home for some of the writings that I poured myself into during my time here, perhaps seemingly at the expense of making ‘actual’ moving image work at the time of each writing endeavor. However, I would like to suggest, both by the structure of this written thesis and the collection and re-reading of these writings here, that the practice of writing and scholarly inquiry has in

¹ I even specifically described my work as “experimental scholarly creative nonfiction” in my application’s statement of purpose. I abandoned this categorization of my work part-way through the program, but have recently come around to finding it rather useful, again.

² I’ve felt anxious about it, and the affective space of anxiety and doubt has given way, as usual, to inquiry and production. This is true in some way about each of the following chapters, as well as this introduction.

fact laid the necessary foundation for the thesis project itself, and the work that I will continue to do beyond the scope of the MFA.

My filmmaking practice, in which I do not invent so much as synthesize, is positioned at the intersection of the observation, creation, and critique. Here in this backwards glance at process, a synthesis of major moments of thought is also an appropriate reflection of my (intellectual and filmic) practice.

In this way, this text becomes an adjacent space designed to hold, and by holding to validate, the material that has in some way exceeded this body of work — the things that did not fit, but matter still. An anthology of writings, which stand on their own but are also processual with regard to the thesis film project.

This in itself enacts another, perhaps more selfish goal, and that is to reflect on the experience of being here, of navigating the pressures of professionalization and the intellectual crucible that has been my own brand of the Iowa FVP MFA. A written thesis invites this at the same time as it rejects it. In beginning to write in earnest for this piece, I've read many of the previously submitted MFA theses — some written by friends (Remington Smith), some by my mentors (Jason Livingston), some by filmmakers who came long before me in the program and whose work inspired me before I even knew that we shared this lineage (Jen Proctor, Evan Meaney and Hope Tucker, for example). Not all of the written theses in the history of this program set out to be overtly self-reflexive with regard to the program itself, but there are varying degrees of diaristic, journaled, or email-record-making³ impulses, and culminating reflections on the evolution of one's

³ See Hope Tucker's written thesis, which I think is quite brilliant.

filmmaking. My filmmaking, my thinking, my being — all have evolved immensely in the (nearly) three years that I have been here in Iowa City. With this set of archiving, self-reflective, process-oriented impulses in mind, I have the anthologized texts largely unaltered from their original ‘final’ forms (for better or for worse), and kept them in roughly chronological order, to show the stages and process of my interrelating of theory and practice across the last three years. The boldface footnotes indicate additions and comments made during the synthesis of this larger written thesis, allowing me to annotate from the present while preserving some of the temporal gap between each chapter’s first life and its re-presentation here. Footnotes without boldface are ‘original’ to a given chapter’s text.

Finally, I will synthesize how the ethics, methods, literature review, aesthetics, and theory that comprise chapters two through six give rise to the moving image work itself, and lay the groundwork for future filmmaking (and scholarly, and filmmaking-scholarly) endeavors.

Moving Image Work

Body of Work is an open-ended video-making project in which I work directly with collaborators who have experience with eating disorder(s) to record an oral history of that experience.⁴ From the oral history, which I then transcribe and code for thematic elements, I work with the collaborator to come up with a film form for their personal narrative, with the goals of ethical representation⁵ and uniquely responsive

⁴ See Appendix A for the list of questions used to begin each oral history collection. Oral histories spanned one to four sessions of recording, usually averaging an hour and a half per session.

⁵ See Appendix B for a sample of the Creative Commons release form that each collaborator and I would fill out before beginning our work together. My collaborators and I were given the opportunity to alter or amend the form through dialogue before signing.

form-content relationships guiding the work. In addition to navigating its content of eating disorder experience, recovery, body image, and identity, the work is also navigating its own identities and epistemologies as nonfiction and as a form of experimental ethnography.⁶

As of the writing of this chapter, seven oral histories have been collected, and four have already been extended into film collaborations — of those, one is still in process and will be completed in 2017, and one has transformed itself into a different film project that I may pursue separately. The two that are completed comprise the first era of this project, and are the works that make up the moving image portion of this thesis. Here I'll provide some context about each, to frame the contributions of the ensuing chapters in relation to the work they undergird and inspire.

“Performing my real truth”

The first piece, titled *“Performing my real truth”*, is a 12-minute single channel version of an endlessly looping three-screen installation⁷ in which three characters played by the same actress (my collaborator) engage in an unraveling game of two truths and a lie, which gives way to a re-performance of her original oral history, and finally, the (seeming) supremacy of the oral history itself as ur-text. In this highly scripted nonfiction piece, the characters enact a split, multiplicitous, and performative self, with the game's

⁶ With regard to the ethical and legal parameters for doing work with human subjects, I should note that I did visit the University of Iowa Office of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to consult about whether IRB would be required for this work. They determined that given its location in oral history and the non-generalizable nature of a film or video, IRB approval was and is not necessary to proceed with such a project.

⁷ See Appendix C for a schematic of the installation version of *“Performing my real truth”*, which was originally mounted in Studio A, Becker Communication Studies Building, as part of the Spring 2015 Media Production Workshop course.

structure providing space for contradiction and uncertainty within each version of the self as well.

My collaborator for this piece is a self-identified performance artist, and this emerged from our oral history as a key way in which she was navigating her experience of her body, her eating disorder(s), and her way of being in the world. In her experience, performativity showed itself to be a daily practice with overlapping and shifting values — a means of surviving and a means of living the disorder, at different moments.

The multi-channel installation version is designed to place more pressure on a viewer to step into the intimate space created by the see-through, rear-projected screens; to sit in one of the three folding chairs at its corners in an almost group-therapy like positioning; to remain on the outside of the conversation surveying the relationship between the three selves; or to move between these spectator positions at will. The installation experience allowed for a variety of different, more individual experiences, with differing levels of engagement.

The single channel version, which is archived with this written thesis, revises this experience to emphasize the moments of direct address in the piece, creating a more aggressively implicating experience for a theatre full of viewers, forced to listen and make repeated, often unblinking eye-contact with the three iterations of the actress herself, projected larger than life.

Both versions of the piece, though, aim to complicate the sense of when and how an eating disorder manifests or does not manifest, and how that is always already a little performance, and how these performances of self interweave with other aspects of one's

life, like my collaborator's relationships with her mother and her best friend, and her exploration of her sexuality across her lifetime.

Show or Tell

The second piece, *Show or Tell*, is a 15-minute single-channel video produced in more traditional documentary modes, blending observational, participatory, and reflexive techniques to document the work of a photographer who hates to have his own photograph taken. Hinging around this central irony, the piece interrogates the mediated experience of the body in the 21st century, while still giving space to the specific story of my collaborator. This is accomplished through a dialogical pairing of observational scenes of his work photographing candidates campaigning throughout the 2016 presidential primary race, with a series of more performative/abstract gestures that connect my collaborator's spoken narrative to the technologies and cultures of looking and seeing that structure his experience of his own body, and the audience's experience of the forced absence of his body from the film.

Together, both pieces begin to flesh out this *Body of Work*, with an eye towards continuing to craft a diverse collection of narratives that explore both the complex range of eating disorder experiences, and the complex range of possibilities for filmic representation of these experiences.

CHAPTER 2

ETHICS

Relationship problems: Practical (Theoretical) Approaches to Ethical Filmmaking Documentation (film/making?)⁸

Section I: Positionality Statement (of a sort)

I went to a liberal arts college in the American Midwest, and am currently a graduate student at the University of Iowa, as a “Master of Fine Arts” candidate in Film and Video Production, but with an eye towards pursuing a concentration in Feminist Anthropology⁹ and/or further graduate study in visual anthropology/ethnography¹⁰.

I identify as queer, an artist/filmmaker, female, white, middle class, Unitarian Universalist, and as someone who has spent a fair amount of time in a long distance relationship and is contemplating at least another 27 months of distance, which (among many other influences) has forced me to think at length about what it means to be “in relation,” and about practical ways of becoming a more flexibly compassionate human being.

I say all this to situate and admit the inherently subjective nature of much of what follows, so that the reader might find these ideas within a larger context of a selfhood that does not pretend to speak for anyone but its Self. That being said, it is precisely the basis of this document that there is a value in approaching and recognizing the selfhood of others, so provided you (may come to) agree with me on a few key philosophical points,

⁸ The main text of this chapter completed December 23, 2013.

⁹ No longer the case exactly, as I am completing the Graduate Certificate in Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies instead.

¹⁰ This interest in ethnography will bear out significantly in this text.

it is I think worthwhile to consider, question, disagree with, challenge, think through for yourself, or even accept any of the suggestions and ideas that I am presenting here.

Section II: A Desire to Be Ethical is a Desire to Ask Questions

Lately I've been struggling through the making of a film, called *Rights of Passage*, which begins with these lines of voice-over, spoken by me:

When I was twenty, I went to Europe on a digital photography study abroad trip. I remember one afternoon my friend Sam and I spent doing street photography. We used long telephoto lenses. For me, the long lenses were a shield against my fear of walking up and asking for permission to photograph other human beings. Six months later, after spending the summer in New York documenting my friends producing this film, Men With Arms, I had decided to become an experimental documentary filmmaker. At the time, I thought this meant being a thief — a hoarder of images and sounds. I put an audio recorder in my backpack, and went to break up with my then-girlfriend. “We’re breaking up either way,” I thought. “Might as well record it.”

The telephoto lens gave me sovereignty, I thought. The self-proclaimed title of “filmmaker” gave me sovereignty, I thought.

In the film, this is immediately followed by a challenge of subject towards apparatus, “participant” towards filmmaker — specifically, my current partner telling me not to film her as she drives from Northfield, Minnesota towards Minneapolis. And so, my authorial presence continues: “This is the story of the (long distance) relationship that is making that happen.”

First of all, I would like to note the tense — the indication that *this is still happening*, an ongoing process. The following written document, I hope, will be both

part of that process, and tell the story of that process — how the real emotional *felt* human actions of doubt and inquiry run through it yet continue beyond it (into this writing, into the Flesh of the world).

As a (self-proclaimed, MFA-corroborated) filmmaker, why am I struggling to make a film? I think in essence, it is because (one of) my primary concern(s) is to be able to step back from the work that I have made, and ask whether I have done all that I can to make it as ethically as possible, and be able to answer something akin to “yes.” I don’t think I can consider complete or be happy with a film that I consider unethical.

And ultimately, my idealists’ dream for the world of humanity is that we might all have the resources with which to step back from our work, or step towards the work of others — and here as “work” I would include the daily interactions that make up our relations with one another, with ourselves — and be able to find it ethical, by being able to, as filmmakers and spectators and humans, ask the very question: “*Is this ethical?* How? Why? Why not? If not, what do I do? If so, what do I do?”

Section III: What is the Cinematic Ethical Task, and Who Holds It?

As a working filmmaker primarily engaged in what some people call “documentary,” I am first and foremost concerned with grasping my own ethical responsibilities in the apprehension of image and sound. As I say in the opening to *Rights of Passage*, there was a time (not so long ago!) when I thought that my role as filmmaker meant that this ‘responsibility’ simply entailed a sovereign right to be “a thief, a hoarder of images and sounds.” But this is something that I am moving beyond, evening in the act of writing these sentences. This movement may take some theoretical maneuvers, but ultimately, I want to approach the question of ethics from a practical perspective. Perhaps

this is, in part, why I felt compelled into a process that was a practical exploration of that question — through *making*, through my film. With this practical perspective will proceed a personal, perhaps political, hopefully philosophical one as well.

While I consider myself more easily categorized within a nonfictional (again, lest we say “documentary”) mode, I believe that the considerations that follow broadly constitute a set of necessary questions for all modes of visual production, including narrative fiction feature films. While the scope of this paper does not allow for a serious comparison of how ‘universal’ ethical standards apply to fiction versus nonfiction, I would like to plant in the reader’s mind the idea that its application to both narrative fiction and documentary nonfiction (and all gradations between) can do much to inform how we understand each of those modes, through one another. Perhaps “fiction” can even serve as an interesting, albeit often problematic, foil against which to reflect on the primary questions of *consent*, *power*, and *privilege* which particularly affect the act of documenting, but ultimately inflect all relational human interactions, filmic or otherwise.

Thus, my hopes for this paper are several. First, before venturing into the specific territory of filmmakers and spectators, I want to attempt a model of the ethical task as applied to human beings. Second, I want to prove useful to both other working filmmakers in thinking about the way we inscribe responsibility into representations of (a certain) reality; and to a wider swath of the (increasingly global) community, where the transition into the age of digital cinema is changing the economy of image-”making”, making *everyone* who is a viewer/user, at once also a filmmaker. Third, I want to reassure myself and the reader of the worthwhile (read: *necessary*) nature of pursuing ethical acts of documentation, through a productive questioning on that very possibility. I want to

advocate for documentary film's potential to be, rather than one of the more problematic lightning rods for ethical issues in the fine arts/mass arts, uniquely ethically generative.

Perhaps this second point — that everyone is both filmmaker and spectator — appears dangerous, because in order to advance some of these arguments, I must dethrone myself from a privileged position with regard to (moving) images. I must acknowledge from the outset that my 'career', my chosen field, and any requisite 'success' in that realm, still yet may function in a supply-side situation where active exclusion of Others strengthens my position within this pantheon. (Or, as an emerging artist, my *potential to find* a position within a pantheon.) Of course by suggesting this and negating it at once, I am betraying both a willingness towards and a resistance of such repositioning of the artist or filmmaker within a dynamics of power. Then, this very dynamic between willingness and resistance is itself a signal which I will heed — that of the complexity of this philosophical-practical-personal move. I will come back to this dethronement, though, because even within its gestural quality lie, I believe, the underpinnings of the ethical stance I would like to propose through this writing.

But, in another gesture of self-assurance, I will suggest that while we are 'all' writers (in a variety of very practical ways), still yet Norman Mailer made a career; or we are 'all' musicians, still Yo-yo Ma releases countless solo albums. There is a definitional distinction in these uses of labels that shifts along a spectrum of amateur to professional — yet my hope is to show that the concerns of the ethical that relate to our topics of cultural production may *look* slightly different along that spectrum, they share an underlying ethical structure, which is not unique to film but is made more apparent and yet more complicated by it.

More pertinent than Mailer or Ma is the comparison of the filmmaker to the film theorist or critic — when I say we are all filmmakers, I want also to follow this up with the assertion that we are all film scholars, in a way. I want to refresh the tired complaint that “everyone’s a critic” and suggest that it may hold insight — rather, perhaps we should *hope* for this state of the world, where everyone maintains a considered relationship to representations of reality. Much of my hope lies in a belief that the new ethical task might be realized through critique, in a few different varieties.

This may appear, at first blush, to place the burden of discernment upon the spectator. A responsibility to creativity and agency. And it does — but if we accept (as I will subsequently explore in more detail) that the filmmaker can also be figured as a spectator, just as the spectator is now potentially a filmmaker, this by no means suggests that the filmmaker is relieved of the ethical burden. (To be relieved of the ethical task is a terrifying prospect, I think — a divorce from an essential aspect of the human experience.)

These roles, these sites in which the ethical tasks exist, are thus not mutually exclusive — the realization of the ethical task through critique, and through the creative possibility or agency, are fundamentally similar, and have in their union an empowering ethical potential.

So, it is the meta-ethical task of this paper to work towards examining the ethical task of the filmmaker, in a stricter, more ‘professional’ sense. I will begin with a broader consideration of what this “ethical task” even entails, for all humans. From there, an expanded sense of ‘filmmaker’ will bolster the universality of the ethical task, by challenging the perceived difference between the individuals who occupy the positions of

“spectator” and “filmmaker”. Then, given that we are all (potentially) both filmmakers and spectators, and are all subject to certain human ethical concerns — these, which are perhaps summed up in the word ‘compassion’, apply to the ways we make film and the ways we watch (which are interconnected in a variety of shifting ways). Given that compassion is *relational*, and given the relational capacity of technologies, film(making) is both necessarily a site of the exercise of these human ethics, and a potential means of *expanding* this potential for compassionate relationality. However, it is not easy to simply do these things automatically — they take more than theory, they take practice, quite literally.

Section IV: Defining “The Ethical Task”

What do I mean by “the ethical task”? I mean that insofar as we each know our Self to be a Self, we are constituted in a matrix of Others, each of whom knows themselves to be a Self — that humans exist relationally, and an ideal ethical stance is that which rests upon a commitment to treating everyone as if they are human, as if they are another Self, and in treating your Self as human, as Self.

Practically enacted, these ethical relations involve such things as compassion, flexibility, active listening, being able to ask for and give consent, awareness of privilege, awareness of difference, discretion with regard to power (not abusing one’s power, not using one’s lack of power as an excuse for violence as opposed to responsibility), and something commonly known as the golden rule. (And possibly other things about which I have not yet been enlightened — the beauty and potential of the ever-continuing process.)

Derived from an amalgam of Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Buber, Buddhism, very liberal (Unitarian Universalist) sex education, post-structural

anthropological theory, and my own experiences as a human being in relationship, my ethical model seems to entail a real depth of relation. I would argue that it is rather more accurately the *potential* for depth, and that such a philosophy does not mean that we must devote huge reserves of emotional resources to every other Self that we encounter, but that to be in the practice of this ethical stance will itself allow for a flexibility, accommodating a variety of depths of relation. I believe one can still be ethical and compassionate ‘in passing’, to someone you will never see again, as well as to your lover or your mother or your friend.

As Kate Nash explores at length in “Documentary-for-the-Other: Relationships, Ethics and (Observational) Documentary”, Levinas’ moral philosophy is particularly applicable to documentary ethics, and to ethics more broadly speaking. His is an ethic steeped in the relation, where relationships themselves serve as the foundational ethical encounters through which we are constituted as selves. In encountering the face of the other, we are also faced with a choice between responsibility and violence, such that this constant encounter of choice puts us into a questioning stance, which is *ethics* as Levinas sees it. (Nash, 230, quoting Levinas, 1969, p. 43)

If we attempt to face Levinas’ foundational ethical encounter with the face of the other in a compassionate way — if we inflect the questioning stance of ethics with the compassionate stance of humanism or Buddhism or Martin Buber’s I-Thou models of relation — the choice of responsibility over violence feels almost obvious. Other aspects of the Levinasian encounter — a willingness to *listen* to the Other, and a willingness to make oneself *vulnerable*, seem necessarily to follow within this choice to engage responsibly rather than violently.

With regard to Levinas' sense of 'violence,' it is interesting to note that "violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves" (Nash, 231, quoting Levinas, 1969, p. 21) — a conception of a violent encounter with another Self that has distinct implications for the question of documentary representation, and in some sense for the act of recording itself as well.

Which leads me to the consideration of *consent*. Speaking specifically to the ethics of obtaining and giving consent, I am faced with the question: what makes consent necessary? An admission of one's lack of sovereignty with regard to anything but one's own Self — an agreement to preserve the alterity of the Other (also a Levinasian idea) as another independent Self that is never fully open to our comprehension of containment — a phenomenologically-based argument that would be well at home amongst Merleau-Ponty's writings on the visible and the invisible as well. From the legacy of sexual-assault prevention/sex-positivity promotion comes a practical approach to consent, in which a respect for the rights of the Other, their rights to their Self and their body, means that you *ask* permission, not just once, but every time you initiate contact (sexually or more metaphorically with, say, a recording device). Consent is in itself a part of the responsible choice in the face of the Other, but it is also a means of establishing and continuing the trust or compassionate that underlies the relational aspect of our human interactions, of our documentary-making practices.

It has crossed my mind that this paper could be summed up in two words: "*be compassionate,*" and that everything else stated here is merely a melange of exegesis on that tiny aphoristic piece of "scripture". But in this call to be humane, I recall that we are

all *human*, and so it is much more complicated — many of the key aspects of the ethical encounter, like listening, recognizing difference, vulnerability, the choice between responsibility and violence, the ability to give and ask for consent — these are not things that even the most ‘compassionate’ of us (filmmakers and humans alike) do automatically and consistently with each encounter. Thrown into the practical flow of life’s material challenges, I think there is a value in reminding and elaborating how and why these modes of being towards the Other should, and must, be *practiced*, in both the sense of requiring study and repetition to learn them, and in the sense that they should be *put into practice*.

Section V: The Chiasmus

The title of this section is (perhaps pretentiously) borrowed from Merleau-Ponty’s unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which he writes: “the idea of chiasm, that is: every relation with being is simultaneously a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is inscribed and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of”(Merleau-Ponty, 266).

Given that we are embedded in a relational existence (which Merleau-Ponty might call the Flesh of the world, and for whom this relational existence has a special relation to what he calls the visible), I would like to suggest that image-making/image-consuming is a case of “every relation with being” which is also “simultaneously a taking and a being taken” — a giving and a receiving, in this case of *image* (or voice or essence - let’s play it safe and define this broadly). The filmmaker receives (records) with the camera, and the spectator receives with the eye, the ear, the body. But as Merleau-Ponty suggests, there is a simultaneity to this, and that which is ‘the visible’ to one Self (say, the spectator) is ‘invisible’ to another Self (say, this Filmmaker), the conduit between them

finding particularly heightened presence “through the respective mediation of camera and projector...the filmmaker and spectator are brought into indirect perceptual engagement with each other, and into direct engagement with a world that is their *mutual intentional object*. They are brought also into perceptual engagement with each other’s perceptive and expressive acts.”(173 Sobchack)

There also exists a historical paradigm in which the camera confers power, the (documentary) filmmaker is privileged with regard to his (yes, *his*) subjects, and consent is too often assumed or goes unconsidered entirely. Much of this comes from a specialness, an aura, a rareness of the camera, conferring specialness on the filmmaker. As I suggested in the first section, I am dethroning myself in order to open the playing field and push back against that perception of ‘specialness.’

Or, as Levinas might say, I am calling into question my own spontaneity: “The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.” (Levinas, 1969, p. 43 quoted in Nash, 230)

Using the powerful tool of the thought experiment, I would like to place all our Selves into the presence of the Others (remembering that each of us is both Self and Other simultaneously), to challenge that paradigm of specialness or sovereignty of the Filmmaker (or the Ego, the Self). In a continuation of my personal dethronement, I suggest:

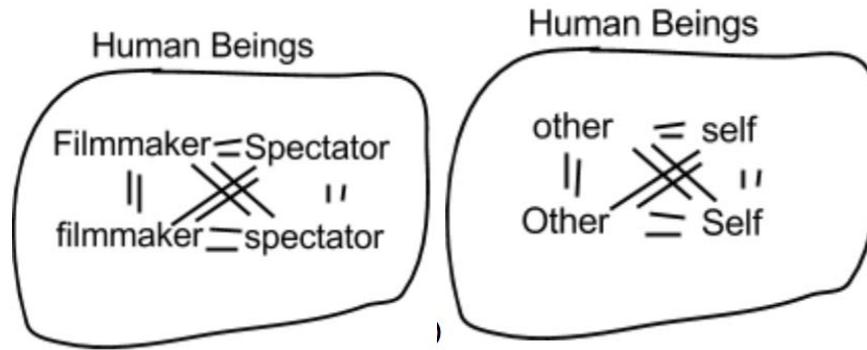


Figure A. The deconstructive move. Figure B. The ethical move?

Imagine that each quadrant ‘title’ of Figure A contains within it a Figure B, but also that Figure A is a ‘condition’ of the ‘modern world’ that constantly reminds us of Figure B as we are resituated within the filmmaker-spectator model over and over.

(See, all the Selves are in the presence of the Others, finding themselves thrown into Being by a deconstructionist challenge to their ontologies!) One is not necessarily only a filmmaker, only a spectator. The filmmaker relies on the spectator for their existence, in the way that the spectator relies on the filmmaker for their existence, in the way in which humans rely on one another through relation to constitute themselves *as* Selves. Recognizing that I am simultaneously filmmaker and spectator is part of the same necessary realization that I can be both Self and Other.

So: It is possible to think of everyone as both filmmaker and spectator simultaneously. How does this happen? Human beings in the modern first world are constituted as subjects of perhaps an Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus composed of ‘apparati’ in the literal sense — that is, technology, and specifically technology of ‘indexically’-charged image and sound.

Everyone is always already implicated as both a filmmaker and a spectator — and a critic. That is — everyone can be empowered to create, to observe, and to critique, a set of conditions that is often conflated with or confused for a sovereign right to pass judgment, but which is not.

That being said, it seems that when we think of this “everyone is a filmmaker-spectator” idea more generously as “everyone is potentially a creator/documenter and an observer”, it is not so much that 21st century technologies have changed the economy of attention or power, so much as made it visible to us through the proliferation of recording and viewing technologies. For example, my cellphone has the capacity to capture 1080p HD video, matrices of screens structure public spaces, and there is a growing cultural assumption (at least in the United States) that everyone carries a camera that can capture moving images — this modern situation allows us to see the ways in which we have all always already been potential documentarians, and in which we are all forced into the role of spectator by the very regime of the visible.

For those who do actually carry these technologies, it also means that we must recognize that to be practically able to document entails a kind of privileged position, whether as the possessor of a smartphone or a bearer of the ‘official’ title of Filmmaker. This privilege historically entails power, which historically (says Spiderman) entails “great responsibility”. I agree that privilege leads to responsibility, but not, as in Spiderman’s case, to *save* anyone or anything — rather, to recognize and question the power (and its often arbitrary origins) that anyone of us is exercising — to throw into question, as Levinas says, our own spontaneity. (I quote Spiderman in the company of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas because as a mass cultural text it carries an importantly

popular sense of responsibility, the cultural specificity of which is still nonetheless something that affects the way that this thinking plays out here in the United States and in other parts of the western world. Perhaps Spiderman could be thought of as placing the Levinisian encounter into popular culture, facing Peter Parker with the choice between violence and responsibility?)

So, to the filmmaker-spectator assertion: I can hear the challenges — that's not true! What about you, the reader, who may not self-identify as any of these things? Is there still any value or validity in my pointing at you and saying "you are all of these — you are a human!" I suppose anyone who wishes to not identify as human can be excused from this assertion, and should perhaps excuse themselves from the further perusal of this paper. (That is fine, I will not be offended! I am all for recognizing and affirming difference and cultural relativism.) Thus, everyone *could* be, but it is certainly not the case that everyone *believes themselves to be* — yet still for our purposes it is a useful hypothetical.

Or perhaps you are thinking: isn't this argument highly specific to Western/first-world subjects? What about places without the same kind of pervasive internet culture and moving-image media, like developing or third world countries? The people in these other locations are equally human subjects, are they not?

For those who do not carry these technologies, this argument is differently relevant — in fact, its relevance to *any* specific country or situation or individual undoubtedly has a unique valence. But as a thought-experiment, we can bracket these obvious major exceptions and still find the exercise useful, if it is working to remind us

of the utter non-specialness of Filmmakers, and of the perceptual and creative and critical capacities of all humans.

The goal of this deconstructive move is to reinforce, to “prove” from another angle, that everyone is human, and the same ethical standards should apply to humans, and that everyone involved in filmmaking is human (other than the apparati...), and therefore universal human ethical standards (see Section III) should apply to filmmaking, as a sort of underlying philosophy that guides the specific surface structures of ethical inquiry and decision making that make up the various stages of producing and viewing a film.

Not only is everyone human, but everyone is potentially filmmaker-spectator, caught up in a web of technological relations that will be misused, struggled against, etc. if not given the same sort of compassionate stance we ideally offer to ourselves and others *as humans*.

Every filmmaker/spectator/human is subject to the same ethical concerns, embedded in this relational flesh of the world, a flesh which is increasingly made visible through digital or technological apparati and spaces in ways that we cannot dismiss as ‘not real life’. Real life, real relation, still exists *in the act*, and in the experience; and this experience is, I think, potentially generative.

Perhaps all this is probably not that radical or necessary, if you accept that everyone is human and should be treated as such in the filmmaking world (which I would argue is potentially the entire world). But given a historical obstinance with regard to the power and privilege afforded to he (and yes, it is often “*he*”) who holds the camera, why not ask a controversial question? There is something daring and obviously wrong about

the statement “everyone is both a filmmaker and a spectator simultaneously”, and to consider the possibility of its truths, and the probability of its falsities, hopefully puts one (puts me!) into a questioning stance of ethics.

So, although I don’t think that this is actually “true” — I do think it is “good to think with”, as Levi-Strauss would say. And I *do* think is true is that to be reminded that we are not special, we Filmmakers, is a pretty good idea.

Section VI: The Ethics of Production, or “Productive Ethics?”

Of course to speak of the ethical task of the cinema is in fact to speak of ethical tasks. The multiple sites of meaning-making that construct the progress of a film towards ‘completion’ each entail a nuanced approach to the underlying ethical task of empathic relationality.

The specific ethics of the film reside in three primary sites of meaning-making — the ethics of the producer in production, the ethics of the product produced, and the ethics of the product received. Thus three bodies: filmmaker, film/apparatus, spectator — each of which can begin, or be part of, a larger chain of cycles of production and consumption of filmic objects or experiences. (This chain of cycles can be thought of directly as part of the filmmaker-spectator paradigm from the previous section — for example, curating a playlist on YouTube or even reprogramming the chapter markers on a Blu-Ray are ways in which modern [first world] subjects enact a movement from spectator to filmmaker, but remain spectators all the while.)

For this paper, I will bracket the latter two sites of ethical consideration and focus my attention on the first: an ethics brought into question by the future (which may be the

product produced) and which becomes the past implicated in the film. This is the ethics of the producer in production.

So far, too, I have spoken broadly of “cinema” and “filmmaking”, and then slightly narrowed to (observational) documentary, as a mode. Now I will divide (observational documentary) filmmaking into smaller segments: documentation, and representation. Questions of representation are of huge importance — again, Levinas says that to portray someone in a way that they would not recognize themselves is itself an act of violence. But with our focus now on the act of the recording, I will stress the distinction between documentation and representation, and hope to keep our considerations, for now, to the former: the ethics of documentation.

Section VII: What Does It Mean to Document? What Does It Mean to Observe? What Does It Mean to Critique?

Now I have offered an ‘ideal’ ethical model, and a thought experiment which hopefully allows Filmmakers and other humans to enter into a questioning stance of ethics, to dethrone themselves from sovereignty through the entertainment of the possible but unknowable sameness of all human-filmmaker-spectators. Next I would like to reflect more directly upon how this ethic and its facilitating dethronement apply to the act of documenting, towards a creative and empowering potential.

So: what are the ethical problems and potentials posed by *the act of recording*? Kate Nash offers “consent, duty of care, [and] rights (to both free speech and privacy)”(Nash 224) — to which I would amend the issue of *power dynamics* which is its own issue but also inflects the others.

To consider these problems, I will ask: what does the ideal ethical documenting process look like? It involves obtaining consent, ideally every time you turn on the camera or the recording device — then, not treating that consent as a complete signing over of rights to those images, but returning to them eventually in a way that strives for accurate, human representation. A willingness to share the images and sounds you have captured with your participants is not a bad idea — it is yet another small practice of dethroning yourself by not taking the images offered consensually by others and then treating them as yours exclusively to watch. This raises another example of how the roles of filmmaker and spectator slip into one another, as you the Documentarian re-watch your footage with your subject, or you the ‘filmmaker’ with the smartphone can take a video of your friend and replay it immediately together. In such instances, these images *may* make their way into some cultural product such as a “film” (in which case the problem of representation becomes more ethically pertinent), but regardless of that future of ‘destiny’, they have value as actions, communications, and relational documents doing empathic work in the present tense. Making, watching, communicating, and interacting via recorded images and sounds is a (new) way of being in the world, and not a false connection with “reality” as skeptics and luddites might proclaim — to record to participate in reality, increasingly so.

Duty of care is complicated — posed as a question, it leads to other questions about the goals of the act of recording (which ultimately leads to questions of representation), and in the presence of capitalist economies it regrettably opens up questions of a different sort of “value” — questions of compensation and duration of relation and commitment. A particularly complicated and oft-debated example is the

documentary *Paris is Burning*, which profiles the Ball scene in New York City in the 1970s-80s, and which (surprisingly for a documentary) made money. Many of the film's participants, many of whom were suffering from HIV/AIDS, came forward and demanded that the filmmaker, Jennie Livingston, provide them with financial support or compensation years after the making of the film, because the film had achieved its success through the use and (re)presentation of their images and lives.

I don't have an answer for that situation — Livingston did, I believe, but that answer can't be prescribed to other situations. With duty of care in particular I think that one cannot answer that 'question' once and for all, but can at best respond with an openness and a flexibility to applying the critical stance of ethics to the situation as it presents itself. But as I "conclude" (tentatively, of course — always in a questioning stance of ethics) in *Rights of Passage*, in general I would say that "my obligation is to the *participants* and not to the film — the film is obligated to the participants, because it depends upon them for its existence". So acts of recording are in some ways independent of later acts of representation — that is, they need not lead to them.

Another powerful thing about recognizing that filmmaker-spectator potential rests in each human vessel is that for a Filmmaker, it challenges one of the most historically unethical aspects of the process (of documentation) — power dynamics that favor the one who holds the camera. Introducing a little existential angst into every Filmmaker/filmmaker might go a long way towards keeping this power dynamic *dynamic*. Practically speaking, it is a logical prerequisite to a willingness to relinquish physical control over the recording device itself, through establishing dialogical practices such as "passing the camera" — which empowers spectators/participants into active

filmmakers roles, and vice versa. (A filmmaker is a spectator — an observer — who directs their observational gaze through a mediating technology of the camera.)

Committing this physical act of passing the camera, and committing to the philosophy beneath it, means that for me, when I go out into the world as Filmmaker, and keep in mind that all the other participants, subjects, selves that I encounter also have the power or potential to be filmmaker (or Filmmaker), I am forced again to ask: “Why am I special?” And more and more, the answer that I return is “I don’t know — I guess I’m not.” I am just a humble filmmaker. (Lower-case “f”.)

That being said, I do think I am special insofar as I have devoted so much consideration and effort to remaining aware of my utter un-specialness. When one sees others acting (by my ken) as if they are sovereign, is there a danger posed to oneself in becoming ‘sovereign’ again through the work to recognize one’s own lack of sovereignty? I hope not. I think perhaps the key is to keep questioning. A maintenance of doubt, Heideggerian angst almost, is perhaps the only thing that keeps me going as a filmmaker attempting the ethical. As a human attempting the ethical.

Section VIII: The Intersection of Observation and Documentation in the Camera

In the process of writing this paper, I am struck by the question — do the other arts exist plagued by these questions of ethics the way that (documentary) filmmaking does? Not as consistently, I think. Other arts certainly face questions of ethics, but often more of the second or third site (see earlier section) — that of the object itself or of its reception. Film, photography, representational painting — these are particularly prone to facing an ethics of process because of its tendency to involve human subjects. It is an

ethics inflected by realism — but not just any realism, a broadly-defined realism that turns the gaze (literally, figuratively) of one human towards another. A relational realism that must share its ethic with a empathic mode of being-in-the-world.

Film is uniquely demonstrative, makes plain, the human condition, by reminding us through the existence and deployment of apparatus of the ways we interact relationally as human beings. One of my partner's objections (and I think this is perhaps true of others as well) is that being documented changes how she feels or what she is experiencing, how she is experiencing. But in a day and age where documentation is so pervasive (with a certain level of privilege, of course), it is still on some level a form of spectation — observation, a directing of attention. The camera is simply a reminder that we do direct our attention, all of the time, and insofar as we do so in a way that privileges constant requesting/giving of consent and an awareness of/effort to minimize power imbalances, the camera is a potential conduit, a positive apparatus for highlighting and establishing relationality.

Julia Haslett, filmmaker and faculty member here at the University of Iowa¹¹, has a film, *An Encounter with Simone Weil*, that is constructed around this quotation:

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” — Simone Weil.

There are kinds of ‘attention’ that are far from generous; but the compassionate, relationally-embedded, responsibility-choosing questioning stance of the ethics I am investigating is a way towards making our attentions generous, and a way towards practicing that generous directing of attention is through the creative, observational, and critique powers of the thoughtfully deployed (or withheld) camera.

¹¹ No longer the case, but true at the time of this chapter's first writing.

Section IX: “Conclusions” – The Humanity of the Filmmaker-Spectator

There are different practical ethics at different stages of the documentary-making process, and there are different practical ethics entailed in different “modes” of production. However, I strongly suspect that a comparative study of these different ethics, as put into practice, would yield a fundamental set of theoretical ethics for both filmmaking in general, and living life in a human world. This theory is not icing on the cake of practice — not something that scholars merely ‘put on’ to actualities or real objects or recording actions or crafted films — but a necessary means of making sense of the ethical weight of these practices, of the ethical imperative that our Being in modernity entails.

I began by working from my own filmmaking process and experiences towards a set of ethical standards which center on recognizing compassion, communication, and consent as the responsibilities entailed in the encounter with another Self. By entertaining the chiasmatic concept that “everyone is a filmmaker/spectator/critic” — not in the sense of Filmmaker, but insofar as the proliferation of recording, viewing, and remixing technologies in the 21st century make us particularly aware of the *potential* that each human has to be both a filmmaker/spectator simultaneously — by entertaining this, I hope to have offered one (of many possible) avenue(s) by which to dethrone the special sovereign Self, or throw one’s spontaneity into question — actions which constitute a (Levinisian) ethic in themselves. Thus, offering the first metaphor (spectator/filmmaker) forces a critique, especially auto-critique by the Filmmaker, who is forced to recognize their own unspecialness insofar as all other Selves are also Selves that see themselves as special, such that sovereignty is a sort of false ideal.

An awareness of this metaphor also redirects our attention to the human capacity to observe and the capacity to create. These potentials and the ethical standard that precede them, combined with the capacity to critique (especially auto-critique, textual critique, critique of others in the sense that you must really listen to even *offer* critique), intersect in the act of documenting, image and sound, in a way that has a power to redeem such actions as sites in which to exercise our ethical potential. Putting the first half of this metaphor — “everyone is a filmmaker” — into wider practice, and into this more ethical relational practice, makes film (especially documentary or other forms of realism) uniquely representative among the arts as a site of ethical engagement in process, as it is so often a relation between human subjects (behind the camera and before the camera). Thus, the camera directs our attention to the fact that we are always already directing our attention, and this can be a powerfully positive tool for practicing how to be in the world in an ethical way, to relate to one another ethically.

Section X: Postscript — Towards Representation and Hybridity

Where my film *Rights of Passage* left off — or rather, where it took a processual turning point — was with a sort-of closure of the question of consent and documentation, and an opening up of the question of consent in representation. The film was constructed around an evolution of my ability and willingness to dethrone my Filmmaker self, to ask my partner for consent to film, to offer her the camera, and I really believe that in practice this process has been serving as a means of communication, relation, and ethical exercise for myself (and hopefully for my partner). But when I showed her a cut of the film that had, at the end, a great deal of me talking to myself about our relationship (and documentation), her discomfort was something that surprised me. It surprised me in the

way that her first admonition against being recorded surprised me — these moments of surprise as clearer encounters with her Self (as an Other to my Self), putting me into this questioning stance of ethics, and choosing responsibility (and from that growing in my ability to be productively self-critical and ethical, I think).

Documentation and representation, in film, can seem causal, or like two sides of the same coin, certainly related, but *not* the same, and to return briefly to the question of *consent*, it is again something that should be obtained and freely given both during the act of recording and with regard to the representations and images that we proceed to construct from those recordings. Given primary participants “power of veto” over sections of a film-product is not a bad idea. Documentation is valuable in itself, but to then possess those documents confers yet another responsibility, a stewardship of another series of ethical questions.

When we recognize all humans as human, all humans as filmmakers/spectators, we restore to all humans these powers to observe and the power to create. The intersection of these potentials with inquiry and critique is empowering not just the Self but more importantly Others, and to affirm these possibilities is part of the shift towards a productive ethical stance.

In a practical sense, what modes or forms lies at the intersection of the powers of observation, creation, and critique? Self-reflexive hybrid forms. One of the new frontiers of filmmaking, or perhaps more appropriately ‘the new frontier of realism’ is found in the evolving melange of works that fall into the categories of docufiction, ethnofiction, or my personal brand of (experimental scholarly) creative nonfiction. This moves us towards that sticky category of *representation* for which we do not have sufficient scope —

though documentation is affected by our forward thinking to the possibility of representation (especially in the case of hybrid forms, where the documentation *becomes* representation, in a way, or at least complicates and tightens the relationship between the two).

More and more as we move towards the question of representation, bracketing documentation as a potential for compassionate relationality, I am intrigued by the potentially productive ethical stance of these hybrid forms and the creative potential for self-determination through collaboration. Hybrid forms are perhaps the realization of another version of the chiasmatic metaphor, that of the filmmaker-participant.

I will end by saying that *Rights of Passage* is still a work-in-progress, though I have screened it. It is perhaps a film that I will return to throughout my lifetime, itself an open question, and this seems appropriate, for I think the essence of ethical inquiry is the inquiry itself, and a refusal to *stop* inquiring — to stay always in a questioning stance is to fulfill, but never complete, the ethical task, of cinema and of humanity.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODS

To “desire a deeper relationship”: Approaching Community at the Senior Center Gay-Straight Alliance¹²

Expecting to find 'communities', the prophecy fulfilled itself and communities were found.

— Alan Macfarlane

Introduction

Carl has told me many times the narrative of how he came to run the Gay-Straight Alliance screening series at the Johnson County Senior Center, and he seems to never tire of telling it. It begins with how he was uncertain about moving back to Iowa from his metropolitan life in Minneapolis, but when he found out about the already-existent screening series, he felt a surge of hope: “To open up a magazine about a center for the aging, and they had – a gay? Movie? Series?? That helped me decide to come here to Iowa City.”

Carl is about 70 years old, a self-identified “obese gay man” with a penchant for brightly-colored polos, and a loud but lilting voice. After Dorothy, who founded the series in 2010, got sick and could no longer run things, as his narrative goes, Carl asked if he could take it over, and petitioned the Center to change it from a monthly series to a weekly one. Now every Sunday at 1pm he brings his brown leather briefcase to Room 208 in the Center and pulls out his carefully selected DVD, waiting for the two rows of stackable chairs to fill with movie-goers.

¹² The main text of this chapter completed June 18, 2014.

His feeling of hope was not unlike what I felt, as a first-time fieldworker feeling tentative about my own identity as an “anthropologist” and myself new to Iowa City, when I came across an article in *The Gazette*, entitled “Movie series in Iowa City breaks down barriers for LGBT senior citizens”(Gowans 2013). It described Dorothy’s tenacious efforts as an activist for aging LGBT folks in Iowa City, including her founding of the series in 2010 (Gowans 2013). As a self-identified queer filmmaker moonlighting as anthropologist, in search of a site in which to practice ethnographic field methods, it seemed to me, in its co-mingling of queerness and moving images, the “perfect” fieldsite.

Beginning without a singular research question, over time I oriented towards the interaction of identity and language, the terms and labels used among the series’ members to reference both selves and others. This interest was fueled by a sense of ideological generational difference between myself and the senior citizens in the group — committed to locating “members’ meanings” instead of imposing my own, I noted the instructive possibilities of recognizing my own emotional reactions as a marker of where such members’ meanings might lie, at the sites of my own personal chafing.

With this research focus in mind, one method that I employed was a week-long time diary intended to elicit members’ self-designations by asking them to reflect daily, with the following instructions: “Below, please describe three (3) instances or interactions which involved your identity or a part of your identity. What happened? How did you see your identity as salient? Answer in whatever way you wish; feel free to use the back of this sheet if you would like additional space.”

These time diaries provided some of the richest qualitative data for my research, but also clued me in to what is now the central concern of this mini-ethnography — a

tension epitomized in what Carl wrote in his diary on the Sunday I handed them out: “I lead the Gay-Straight Alliance Movies but I feel isolated. I show the movies but desire a deeper relationship.”

This sense is echoed in the other time diaries: “I sometimes wish there was more discussion afterward!” I was not able to query every (regular) member of group about their sense of community or desire for connection, as I did not come to understand the centrality of this theme until in the process reviewing my data. However, this handful of written asides gave me a framework through which to look back yet again at my fieldnotes, as well as my extended life history interview with Carl, and begin to pick out the constellations of yearnings and possible contributing factors.

So, though my hope surged like Carl’s to know that this space existed — defined in its own title as a Gay-Straight Alliance — the negotiating of this ethnography has been a process of weighing the at-times incommensurability of hope, of utopian ideals, and lived experiences, practical outcomes in the space of interaction that is beyond our individual interiorities. In some ways, it is perhaps a case study that gestures towards (and is based in) the appeal of a social constructionist epistemology.

The existence of the Alliance movie series is a triumph, to be sure. It fits into an ongoing and laudable larger project of the Johnson County Senior Center to become certified by SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders), as described to me by the community outreach coordinator at the center. For her, the prominent display of the movie series in the Center’s program guide is meant to both hail potential LGBT members, and to let *all* members know that the center’s policy is one of acceptance and non-discrimination. This rhetoric was echoed in her quotes in the original article about

Dorothy: “It’s really important to us that people know the Senior Center is open and welcoming to all,” [she] said. “We hope this sends that message.” (Gowans 2013)

And Carl’s narrative about the succession of leadership, under first Dorothy and then himself, displays an individual dedication that is apparent in its very persistence, a belief in the value of such a community’s basic existence. However, beyond a core few (including the ethnographer), attendance proves far from consistent, though Carl keeps track on an official Center-provided attendance sheet with a column of names and rows of dates for each successive Sunday. Discussions after the movies, described on program materials and in the Center guidebook as “informal”(Johnson County Senior Center 2014), are in fact often perfunctory and disband quickly, or at times drag on with more of a sense of obligation than engagement.

This paper begins with essentially one question to answer, but in doing so I expect to open up a series of other questions (and answers) of an ethnographic nature: why does the (constructed) community at the GSA Screening Series fail to produce a sense of community sought by (some of) its members?

To ask why something has failed is to ask a question that is impossible to answer, but this is good to think with. It opens up to a consideration of the difference between interpreting culture as lived, and interpreting the ideal of culture as desired. This leads in turn to a questioning of whether (sense of) community is in fact what they are hoping to achieve.

Methodology

My research took place across February 2014 through May 2014, and consisted of weekly participant observation on Sunday afternoons between 1pm and usually 4pm (end

time varied depending on the length of the film and how long members hung around afterwards to talk or otherwise) as well as a few weekday visits to the space to see how it was used when not for the series, and how it fit in the larger life of the center; time diaries filled out by three of the regular members; and interviews with the group leader and the Center's community outreach specialist, which I transcribed and coded as part of the writing and reflecting process that has produced this ethnography.

As mentioned above, I am new to the practice of anthropology, which has infused my process with both a certain enthusiasm and a certain doubtfulness — eager to do it 'right' and ever concerned that I might be doing it 'wrong'. I do not believe in the objectivity of the researcher, but rather that a laying out of my own subjectivity (as far as it is knowable) creates a clearer condition under which both the reader and the ethnographer might be able to identify otherwise elided biases, and to see how my specific subjectivity might give access to different pieces of knowledge and ways of knowing — both the disadvantages and privileges of the specific history that has led me, as ethnographer, to this moment of inscribing culture and self in the same breath.

Thus, I consider it important to include some autobiographical notes or statement of positionality, which I am bracketing off for the interested reader to read, and for the disinterested reader (wary of an overindulgence in self-reflection) to skip over.

(Positionality, as stated at the outset of research endeavor)

“I have no doubt that my queer identity in particular will impact my fieldwork process; already this information (in part) is known to some members of the community, and I am interested in making it openly known to others. I am unsure as yet whether to do an “official” coming out, or to simply be ready to respond to anymore questions — I

hope to speak individually with members about their own choices in terms of identification/sexual orientation, so in those instances I plan to share my own identity, in keeping with Walter Williams' advice about how being openly [queer] can be beneficial in a fieldwork community that is specifically 'about' or related to queerness (though of course I won't follow in Williams' footsteps in other ways...).

My history in film studies and identification as a filmmaker is also a lens that I carry with me into this particular space, and can result in my viewing the films and the subsequent conversations about them in different terms, which is something I would hope to keep from obscuring my view of the social relations at work. For example, during my first visit to the site, we watched a *really* badly-edited, fairly mediocre documentary, and it can be a bit of challenge to keep myself from wanting to discuss the film from a perspective that can evaluate them as constructed documents/art pieces with technical or aesthetic or rhetorical merit, and then finding myself frustrated by members' evaluations of the films on entirely different terms, such as pure content, and lauding films that I would not. Remaining aware of these frustrations, though, will hopefully allow me to pay attention to the *different* ways in which films are mobilized in community settings, how they are read differently, how others are orienting identity toward and around these cultural texts in ways that both coincide and at times clash with or work on different levels from how I myself engage this particular medium.

Another primary factor of my positionality that will come into play here is age (and with it a host of other things that I am still identifying - don't want to put the cart before the horse!). Already I am noticing differences in the way that I think about language and identity, and some of ways that language is used around "LGBT" issues in

this space — for example, I have yet to actually hear the term “queer” here, so as I pursue members’ meanings, my youth and my experience in younger/newer *queer* communities positions me differently than many of my interlocutors here in how we speak about ourselves and others. I suspect that there are many deeply layered and complicated aspects of this language-identity complex, beyond age (race, gender identity, class, origins, politics, religion, etc...) that I hope will begin to emerge as I spend more time among, and hopefully conduct interviews with, this community.

As a queer-identified individual myself, I’m interested in working with communities within or related to the LGBTQIAAetc spectrum, though I have been primarily focused on what it is to be young and [queer], exploring these ideas of identity and community formation through art practices. These personal essay films fall into a category/set of categories that I deem “experimental scholarly creative nonfiction”, and could also be thought of as autoethnographic films, though my research goals going forward hinge upon a desire to expand this practice into something collaborative and longitudinal that combines traditional fieldwork with this ‘experimental scholarly creative nonfiction’ (which can and, I hope, *will* include ethnographic film, and specifically, ethnofiction).”

Post-Positionality // Methodology Continued

Methodologically speaking, I would say there is a lot that I did ‘wrong’ — or rather, my beginning ideal of the fieldworker-fieldsite interaction was quite different from the reality of my experience, trying to ‘do it right’.

Even in the process of combing back through fieldnotes, time dairies, and interview transcripts, I find an inordinate amount of attention paid to the leader of the

movie series. He and I conducted a nearly six-hour life history interview, which I diligently transcribed and kept running memos about as I transcribed, and for a while in this writing process that consumed my attention. If this were an oral history project, I would be squared away with just that, but as I am claiming, for the purposes of this course and my vague future aspirations, to be engaged in anthropological fieldwork, in the writing of *ethnography*, my interest is in mildly generalizable findings, not one singular story. (Though his story is certainly singular. He remains high on my call-list for future documentary subjects.)

This is not a theory to advance, per se, but I do want to suggest that my own acute awareness of the moments where I felt that my research did not ‘come off’ as well as I had hoped, or, to be honest, was less engaging than I expected — these moments can offer insight, or at least mark some interesting parallels, with what I would say are my actual findings. Essentially, my insecurity has become a way of knowing, an embodied, personal version of my sense of the dynamics at work in the space; my own “failure” as a key to a community’s “failure”.

While this is not an overtly feminist ethnography, I am epistemologically grounded in both a personal feminism, and consequently an academic feminism, and like the authors of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, my worldview and academic approach have been shaped by a social constructionist orientation. That is to say, I came into this site with the framework that groups collaboratively construct meaning and knowledge through social interaction, and one is always learning how to be in a culture by being in it, and there is a consequent exchange between forces shaping the individual through

cultural knowledge, and the interaction of individuals exerting forces on the meanings and cultures in which they are participating.

I am interested in an anthropology that not only contributes to our understanding of human cultures and meaning-making, but through its learning can offer something back to its own source of knowledge, the real individuals of its studied community. To that end, I have oriented my thinking and analysis in a somewhat more diagnostic sense, running the risk of proving too speculative, but hopefully at the benefit of being a bit more useful to my intended readers.

And, as my intended audience for this work is no wider than the community of study and a circumscribed group of my academic advisors/peers, I would like to note that though I am using different names for many of my participants, the size of the community and the publicly-known nature of its leadership will likely render some participants recognizable. I have done my best to keep my critical lenses in check and to stay my sovereign writerly hand from committing any Levinasian violence of unrecognizable representation. Rather, though I name the participants by other names, it is my hope that they would prove recognizable to themselves as I have represented them.

In cases where I am not quoting directly from a participant, I will refer to a category of non-strictly-heterosexual individuals with the term “LGBT”; the umbrella term ‘queer’ that is common in academic and younger-generational spaces, though most often invoked in my own daily proceedings, feels inaccurate in the context of this fieldwork, given that this community is largely comprised of older adults for whom the term ‘queer’ carries heavier, derogatory connotations, and that I never once heard it applied to any of these individuals by themselves. That being said, I do conceive of this

being relevant to queer studies and queer theory and anthropology, though it is noteworthy and, in itself a valuable finding, that this term which is now in vogue with my generation and with the academy is *not* used here — and is often actively rejected.

Defining ‘Community’

In using the word ‘community’ I am considering its meaning to be twofold: in the most basic definitional sense, a group of people having some characteristic in common; and in a methodological sense, a group defined as such by the researcher by the very scope of their research, in order to mark off a meaningful and analyzable space of culture.

Thus, there is a community here, because I have designated it a space of meaningful scope of study, a collection of individuals with something in common, even if at the bare minimum that is their occasional presence simultaneously at this event. But this case bears out the fact that an anthropologically circumscribed ‘community’ is not commensurate with a psychological *sense* of community. Thus, when Carl says in his time diary that he “show[s] the movies but desires a deeper relationship” he is capturing quite beautifully and succinctly the gap between these two definitional approaches to community, which in common parlance are often interchanged. But here, ‘community’ is real because he and I have both said so, and is the necessary condition for the other, a contingency waiting to be put into practice more effectively, if members of the ‘community’ wanted to cultivate a ‘*sense* of community’. Turning to a psychological definition for framing what ‘sense of community’ entails, we can locate this feeling in the interaction between four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of

needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis 1986). Shared emotional connection is the one on which I will focus the most, in later sections.

Observation: What is Actually Happening

While I have set out to “think with” the original question of ‘failure’, I want to also reframe it to ask: how does this community relate, in practice? With the basic assumption that to achieve a ‘sense of belonging’ would be a success, as has been expressed by members in their desire for deeper connection, I’ll begin with some stories of the series’ ‘successes’.

I had the opportunity to observe regular attendees (those that came more than twice during my fieldwork) at the series, and to both experience and observe the introduction of new people into the community.

On my first visit, a group was already assembled in the room, even though it wasn’t quite 1pm yet, and I could hear them talking about the film as I walked down the hallway. Carl said “Oh! Hello!” and commented on the fact that he had never seen me before, so I introduced myself and the five people present (four of whom turned out to be regulars) introduced themselves to me as well. After that day’s movie, Carl and George stayed after asking me questions about myself and my studies, even eliciting a sort of quasi-coming out (the gender of my partner). This first visit actually resulted in the longest post-screening discussion that I was part of during my fieldwork, staying until almost 5pm. A similar extension of discussion happened when my parents came to visit during Spring Break and came to the screening series with me, as did the dynamic one-time visit of a self-identified “San Francisco radical lesbian actor and activist” named Melissa in March.

In general, more group members tended to stay longer on days when a new person entered the space, chatting and querying them about themselves. This welcoming attitude is reflected in the text heading the series' posters and in the program guide for the spring quarter: "Each month this quarter we focus on a different topic affecting people of all backgrounds. We invite everyone to come, watch each movie, and then join in a group discussion. No registration required." This text also echoes the members' time diary *desires* for discussion and shared emotional connection, and extends an inclusivity in both its call for everyone and anyone to attend, and in its addressing themes of "topic[s] affecting people *of all backgrounds*" (my emphasis), which played out in the reality of the welcome that I received as a new member, and the excitement of the group at a swell in numbers due to unexpected visits.

Another observed factor that is important to note is that while members may desire a greater sense of community within this particular, commonality-and-researcher-delineated community, each member is in fact embedded in a myriad of communities (and identities), which shift situationally for each individual. For example, throughout the time diary that Jennifer carefully and prolifically provided for me, she categorizes herself amongst an extensive and interlocking list of communities, including but not limited to:

"Christian/church member/attender/not-Episcopalian;
part of the LGBT community/lesbian or bisexual;
part of a choir/lesbian or GLBT member;
VA employee/member of little group of coworkers;
scientist/biologist/botanist by training;
rower/former rower;
"I'm a reader and a librarian"; librarian against censorship!;
seminary grad/not a pastor but training is part of identity;
mother/sister/family member;
introvert!; someone who likes to journal."

As the site of an extrasectonality of its members' many identities, it is one community linking chains and webs of communities that its members are a part of, and in which they express senses of community that might not yet be present in the screening series room. The relative 'success' of individual members' sensing community outside of this group — as part of the Center's Voices of Experience chorus, the Quire (Eastern Iowa LGBT Chorus), in workplaces, online at ChristianGays.com, or working at Senior Center TV — is both proof of possibility and perhaps a direction to look, for the members or the researcher if given more time, for 'successful' practices and factors allowing for sense of community to develop. That is, if one goal of the community might be to grow more relational or increase its collective sense of community, I would suggest that there are practices that members already put in place in other communities that might be co-opted to inspire belonging that is exchanged directly between members and not just mediated by a shared spectatorship, within the space of *this* community.

Speculation: Reasons Why Senses of Community Might Not Be Happening

In the case of the Johnson County Senior Center, it seems that existence as a defined community, even a space with a welcoming and inclusive intent, is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for fostering sense of community. This brings me now towards the realm of speculation, on factors that might be inhibiting the development of more shared emotional connection, as a set of jumping-off points from which the members might begin to intentionally shape their group dynamics.

Attendance and Programming

The theme of attendance came up repeatedly in both my interview with Carl and my own fieldnotes, with repeated correlative relationships drawn between an individual's choice to attend and either what movie is showing on a given Sunday, or the on-going question of scheduling for the series. It was typical that pre-movie and post-movie discussion, often guided by Carl, would refer back to previously programmed films, or advertise at length for what Carl might be thinking of showing in the future. For example, there was one film, called *Red without Blue*, that Carl described in strikingly similar language to those of us present every week for over four weeks up until we actually watched it. And, on learning that I was involved in social science during my first visit, he insisted that I would be very interested in his upcoming immigration series, proceeding to read the synopses of all four planned immigration films out loud to me and George, who was also present.

This demonstrates how programming goals are content-oriented, in an earnest but perhaps misguided attempt to meet a perceived (but not actually assessed) need on the part of community members. In fact, the perceived need is increasingly less of one, as many of the films shown are available online or at the public library, and many of the community members have regular access to both the internet and the local library.

The focus on thematic programming and attendance continually put more emphasis on the individual's case-by-case motivation to participate in an activity, and a somewhat non-interactive one at that (watching a particular movie), than it did on motivating individuals to be present because they felt shared emotional connection, or influential in and/or influenced by the community.

Part of this emphasis on programming might be coming from an institutional level, given that Carl's attendance records are ultimately destined to defend the existence of the series, should it come under attack in terms of receiving time or space from the Center, which has hundreds of programs and is forced to juggle scheduling questions with the meeting of needs of a wide swath of membership (not "just" the LGBT folks).

As Carl described in his interview, another example of an institutional pressure to increase attendance came with the suggestion of 'themes' for the series, from the Visibility Action Committee, a committee at the Senior Center on which he also serves:

Carl: For a while I was following a pattern of a gay, a straight movie, a transgender movie, and – a documentary of some kind. And - you look back in the first year and a half of my running, you'd see that pattern, everywhere. Someone then said to me, why don't you do a theme?

Anna: Do you know who said that to you?

Carl: Uh, actually it was the – um – the visibility action committee.

Anna: Okay. Like — they collectively, suggested that?

Carl: Somebody said, well, why don't you go with themes, so you'd get more people involved. So I tried themes, and uh – I'd gotten a little far *away* from GLBT, because I have other interests too, and started showing a few non-[LGBT]"

Carl takes pride and care in crafting the themed slates of movies, but whether this has any affect on attendance numbers is difficult to say. Rather, Carl also sees attendance as contingent upon individual desire and availability:

Carl: I said, I'd like to have the movies – every week! Not knowing what I was getting myself into. Um, and they say, if you're doing it every week we can't allow you to have both Sunday and Monday open – choose one or the other. And, basically – her Monday attendance had not been good – you'd think Monday might be better, but Sunday was her main showing, so we started with the Sunday movies. And I finally convinced them to have Sunday and Monday, and they're

right — having it twice a week is not necessarily the best thing because people say – oh, I got something I want to do on Sunday, so well – I’ll catch it on Monday, and Monday, then it comes, oh I forgot about this but – oh I wanted to see that movie, but, I should have gone on Sunday. They’ve convinced me to go back to just once a week... people keep saying to me, but there’s no bus service on Sundays and we don’t have transportation to get here. But it’s interesting, those same people, when we did have it on Monday nights, never made it either. I have thought, if we ever found a time – now, Vicki has her Friday afternoon movie, and uh – if there was an afternoon during the week that was totally dead, I might try for an afternoon movie. There would still be who would not be able to come – oh, we’re college students and we have to go to classes, and we wanna go to the movies *too*, why can’t you have it in the night-time? Well – too many times people are busy in the night time too. So – I’ve stayed with the Sunday at one o’clock.

The results of the time diaries resonated, too, with my own occasional feelings of ambivalence about going — though in theory (I felt that) I should have felt the strongest obligation of anyone (except perhaps Carl), that of an academic or ‘work’ commitment. This excerpt from my a personal aside in my fieldnotes captures the thought process that sometimes impeded, and yet will prove analytically useful:

from fieldnotes, Sunday, March 2, 2014

I didn’t go this week, because I was really busy and feeling overwhelmed (trying to finish that daily book thing for Gwen in time to send it to Megan’s dad/also having gotten caught up in “finishing” *rights of passage* for submission to IC Docs and some other festivals). And Gwen called me at like 12:45, just to say that she saw some Nutella thing in a market in Antigua or something, which should have been cute and made me feel good but it stressed me out about getting to the screening series on time, so I didn’t go right at 1, and then I was like, it’s cool, I can go late, the important part is the conversation after the movie, but then it was after 1:30 and I remembered that they have weird building hours for the Center on Sundays, and the building locks up at 1:30, so you have to be in by then if you want to attend. So, so much for that.

It all makes me wonder about what motivates attendance; Carl is there every week that I have been there so far (and what he says leads me to believe that he is there *every* week — he is the unifying factor, he makes it happen).

Absent from my considerations is any counter-waffling in the way of guilt or a sense that I might be *missed* — and this felt and personal instance is echoed in the logic that Carl offers above for why the series is only on Sundays. And while this excerpt is imbued with personally specific anxieties, the reality of the building locking at 1:30 and thereby limiting a sense of being able to come and go from the series as a social space keeps it in the realm of an ‘event’ with structural limitations on fashionable lateness.

Space and Power

There is a clear hierarchy within the series, between the leader, who dictates programming and the people who attend, both located in the decision-making processes about programming, and in directing the flow of activities. For example, Carl will say “First we will watch the previews” or “Which special features shall we watch?” before and after the film proper, maintaining an overall control of the structure of members’ experience.

The spatial arrangement of seating also brackets Carl off from the rest of the viewers, as he sits at the front-right of the room at a large table against the wall where he can keep his DVDs and briefcase, and the rest of the stackable chairs are arranged in the two rows set back from Carl’s personal spot. The seating arrangement among regulars within the chairs tends to be similar, but is flexible (compared to Carl’s consistent anchor point). And while the series is officially termed the “Gay-Straight Alliance Screening Series”, members and the outreach coordinator have referred to it colloquially as “Carl’s movie series.”

The room itself is also used for a variety of other programs throughout the week, and is kept fairly sterile in appearance — fluorescent lighting, unadorned walls, neutral

gray carpet, and easily rearranged furniture make the space interchangeably functional for the institution's shifting needs. However, it is likely difficult to feel a sense of comfort or ownership over the space given its non-specificity, its almost-pure functionality. Would a change of location change the sense of community within the group? This may not be feasible, but it is worth considering — and if a change of space is not within the realm of possibility, how might changes *to* the space transform it into a place? Could it be cozier? Could there be rainbows?

Geography and Community Boundaries

The only 'online home' for the series itself is a Yahoo Group called "Gay-Straight Movies Iowa City". As of June 2014 however, there are only two members in that online group, and the text in the program guide that refers to the Yahoo Group is somewhat imbedded, and may not be read by many (I overlooked it at first). Yahoo groups also, in 2014, recall a different era of internet community that is antiquated in a way that Facebook or Google groups might not be.

Thus, save the dormant Yahoo Group and the Quarterly Program Guide which can be found in PDF form online, there is also a notable lack of official online documents associated with the series, such as a Facebook group page or a website or other online gathering space for the community that meets in person on Sundays. Knowing members have expressed desires for continued discussion as part of the screening series, I would tentatively speculate that some extension of the community into an online space might be a means to this end.

I am also reminded of the way that I myself first discovered the movie series — via an internet search. Carl uses a website called ChristianGays.com as a way to mentor

others and to connect to a larger community, and spoke extensively in his life-history interview of finding friendships and connecting with potential partners via online forms of communication, and Jennifer spoke in her time diary about emailing friends and family as a consistent part of her routine. So, perhaps one of the clearest ‘solutions’ to the ‘problem’ of insufficient connection within the group lies in a theme that is echoed throughout the interview that Carl and I conducted together — that of online sociality. Facebook is increasingly the modern American home for non-profits, arts groups, and activist communities to connect, in ways that often reinforce actual lived connections. Both Carl and Dorothy are active on Facebook, as may be more of the community members, though not necessarily with each other. I am curious what the creation of a Facebook page and or group page might do for reinforcing the in-person sociality of the community, which is not geographically defined, with online sociality. Carl often worries, too, about changing the film that will be screening on any given weekend and not being able to notify people, but posting to a GSA Screening Series Facebook group could be a practical means for sharing this kind of information, and reminding members that there is a community there in which to take part.

Food and Drinks

On my very first visit to the series, I made a fieldnote which said: ‘Kira heads out around 3:20pm, saying she “needs to go eat lunch before she faints.”’

Sharing food and drink (especially alcoholic drinks) serves many community-building functions — as social lubricants, as gestures of goodwill or ways to foster trust, and, perhaps most importantly, to create reciprocity through exchange. And, as indicated by Kira’s hunger-fueled departure, food is an important way to keep people discussing

and interacting by literally nourishing them — hunger is a great distraction from building shared emotional connection.

A potluck style of snacks might heightening of members' investment or sense of influence within the group, though it is possible that limited resources or mobility makes cooking and transporting food more difficult for some community members than others (and that this in turn may place more pressure on the members who *can* bring snacks to do so).

It is of course impossible to confirm that the absence of food or alcohol is a primary contributing factor in limiting the coherence of the community into one characterized by senses of belonging, but it doesn't hurt to try.

In more ways than one, my work there feels far from finished. Perhaps like any good learning experience, this process has shown me the ways in which I have 'failed'¹³ this time around, and might learn from that. Given that this last bit of speculation, regarding sustenance and reciprocity, my intention was to close my field research with an instance of near-intervention, or perhaps super-participatory participant observation, by bringing homemade snacks on the last Sunday of the term and then observing how this affected the extent or quality of interactions between community members. However, my academic term was cut short by the sudden illness and subsequent passing of my grandmother, such that I had to leave campus rather abruptly. My intention is now to return in the fall and test this hypothesis.

¹³ I note now that 'failure' here is a strong and perhaps misplaced term – it might be more accurate to say that I had numerous complex and/or 'bad' feelings, and at the time this felt like a kind of failure, but wasn't truly such.

Conclusions

Hearing members speak of a longing for deeper connection with their fellow spectators, I began to see the ways in which a spectatorship-oriented community was tending to keep members in the role of more detached, passive observers, like the fieldworker who thinks she is doing it wrong. Considering the gap between ‘community’ and ‘sense of community’, this led me to question what of my observations might suggest both successes and areas for ‘improvement’.

Thus, the movie series as a sort of necessary but not sufficient condition for community formation — its existence successfully marks the Johnson County Senior Center as a site of non-discrimination, and creates a space in which a vibrant community is on the verge of blossoming. Perhaps a few rainbow flags and a cookie exchange is what it ‘needs’.

CHAPTER 3 REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 4

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“(How) Can there be a feminist (filmic) ethnography (of eating disorders)?”¹⁴

Preface

This is an academic paper, but I will begin with a coming out story, because the choice of what, and how, to study is hardly disconnected from the personal experience of those who study it, in one way or another. Somewhere between the ages of 14 and 16, I began to become anorexic. After spring break of my senior year of high school, I went to my parents and asked them to help me get treatment. Recovery, as I recall it, came in a strange dance of steps forward and back, often times more steps back than forward, and the eating disorder lived with me, in various degrees of silence and speakability, throughout college. A few months after graduation, I read a book, a recovery narrative based on the AA 12-step program, which suggested, at risk of over-simplifying my process, that I could simply ‘decide’ to be recovered. I tried it, and in many other ways I must have been ready, because it worked.

There is an unease that hangs with me, though, and an anger that rises whenever I learn of another friend or acquaintance who is struggling with an eating disorder. It feels worlds apart to be recovered, but as my training as a filmmaker and ethnographer unfolds, I am increasingly compelled to turn those skills towards understanding, dismantling, or exposing these diseases through my work, hoping that I might help even

¹⁴ The main text of this chapter completed December 18, 2014.

one person to recover more smoothly or to stop short of this experience that so ruled my life for almost 8 years. I am also, of course, still looking for insight to my own experience (and this is an important aspect of my own positionality that I try to keep in mind as I approach this writing). The more I study the way that others have studied these experiences, the more miraculous and yet also de-mystified my own recovery becomes to me, in the hindsight of academic labor.

Much of the existing research on eating disorders comes from clinical studies. I know my own recovery must owe some significant debt to these clinical studies, but my personal experience has affirmed for me that there is a decided need for qualitative, and feminist, ways of knowing about these diseases and their social and cultural contexts. The last ten years have seen a surge in this sentiment amongst researchers, particularly of the anthropological bent, calling for an expansion beyond the biomedical or psychiatric approach to understanding eating disorders in hopes of expanding the way in which compassionate and effective health care for recovering individuals can be offered, and combatting the conditions that make eating disorders possible in the first place.

Introduction

Eating disorders are complex diseases that exist not only biomedically, psychologically, and physiologically, but in culturally-specific, -inflected, and -bounded ways, and involve both representation and perception, in heavily visual and other (mediated) sensory ways. To my mind, this makes ethnographic film or visual anthropology (as both research mode and representational mode), while not the only methodology applicable, incredibly apt for exploring the intricacies of lived experience. Similarly, the roles of gender, power, control, and embodiment suggest a fruitful space

for a specifically feminist approach to fieldwork on this subject. As I will explore, a variety of popular media portrayals and ethnographic accounts of eating disorder experiences exist, but we await a specifically ethnographic filmic approach to this subject, and to fill that gap is a long-term, ultimate aim for my own work.

Thus, partly in preparation for a feminist ethnographic filmmaking process that will span (at least) the next two years, this paper will form a comparative study of the existing literature on the topic, both written and filmic, asking what knowledge has been generated and assessing the ways in which it has been generated and re-presented.

In the midst of a growing body of work on the subject, I focus here on one written ethnographic work by a contemporary anthropologist, Helen Gremillion, and two documentary films, PBS' *Dying to be Thin* (2000) and photographer Lauren Greenfield's *Thin* (2006). In addition to questions of "being there" (process) and "being here" (re-presentation) in both media, there is the fact that the two ethnographies present themselves as feminist, while the films do not. What does this disjuncture mean, in terms of the kind of researcher-subject relationships, knowledge, and ultimately representations that each medium is able to achieve? In addition to fieldwork methodologies, what are the ethics and aesthetics of representation that constitute the relationship between an ethnography or a documentary film and its audience? I will argue that relationships with these audiences — audiences which so often include eating disordered individuals themselves — take on a special force with both unique potentials and dangers.

Finally, another dimension of methods and representation that crystallizes in specific and complex ways when studying eating disorders (and mental health in general) is stigma, in both overt and implicit forms; I seek to conclude with some meta-analysis of

these biases and how they affect the questions of when, how, and where to conduct and disseminate research and representations from and of that research.

Thus, the organization of the paper will be in three parts: a discussion of written feminist ethnographic approaches, with a focus on methods and perspectives; a review of documentary films about/addressing eating disorders, with a focus on representation and relationships with audience; and a comparative synthesis of these sections with an eye towards suggesting a possible method for future approaches. This final section will seek to draw on and critique both of the precedents set in ethnographic writing and documentary filmmaking, paying particular attention to deconstructing the reproduction of ‘stigma’ in research/representation of mental health conditions.

A Brief History of Thought on Anorexia Nervosa

In the Oxford Bibliographies Online Anthropology section, Stanley Ulijaszek and Karin Eli describe anorexia as a disease that with its “multidimensional etiology, rich history, and increasingly complex epidemiology, has emerged as a biocultural disorder of significance for medical anthropology”(Eli & Ulijaszek, 2013). They trace the history of thought on anorexia from early clinical studies beginning in the 1870s, identifying significant paradigm shifts in medical anthropology’s understanding: “from culture-bound syndromes and explanatory models of disease, to analyses of globalization and ethnographies of the body and self—[new research] transitioned the anthropological discussion of anorexia away from ‘culture’ and toward the critical analysis of practice, experience, and subjectivity”(Eli & Ulijaszek, 2013). In order to contextualize contemporary approaches, I find it useful to summarize their cogent assessment of the evolution of the field itself. This will later open up a reflection on the particular stigmas

and biases that have proliferated historically, with the belief that becoming aware of and critiquing these past approaches lays essential groundwork for continued research on eating disorders.

Eli and Ulijaszek trace the history of thought as it is seen through increasingly culturally specific lenses, especially as contributed by ethnography and feminist critiques, beginning with foundational clinical accounts by La Segue and others, and with the coining of the term “anorexia nervosa” in 1874. Attempts at explaining anorexia have, in the past, situated it as a form of contemporary asceticism, as a culture-bound syndrome, or in terms of its possible evolutionary and adaptive functions, but many of these analyses have been problematized by feminist and postmodern critiques, even going so far as to “problematize anorexia itself as a clinical entity, arguing that ‘anorexia’ is a medicalized condition, expressive of converging, politically charged gender discourses rather than actual pathology”(Eli & Ulijaszek, 2013). From this point onward a focus has evolved on eating disorders in the media, pro-anorexia and anorexic cyber communities, eating disorders beyond the west.

This historical tracing arrives at what the authors term “Ethnographic Perspectives on Medicalization, Selfhood, and Embodiment”(Eli & Ulijaszek, 2013), which sees a rise in the focus not just on the study of individuals and their pathologies but on treatment centers and approaches to recovery, a category that encompasses many contemporary ethnographic works including the ones I am exploring, both filmic and ethnographic. This shift in focus has produced an important new line of work, which I seek to continue, and I would speculate that it has its origins in a couple of recent theoretical shifts towards ‘studying up’ (studying institutions and sites of power) and studying network theory; and

in the practical concern of ethnographers looking for ways to work with challenges of access, since a treatment center (or, alternatively, a proana-website) provides a more seemingly-bounded community than would otherwise be accessible in the study of diseases that affect individuals in a variety of dispersed locations.

Something that presents itself in a review of these literatures, and which Eli and Ulijaszek note in their analysis as well, is the relative invisibility of bulimia, and the theoretically-challenging bulimic body, in the spectrum of eating disorder research, as anorexia's messy 'Other'. For example, Helen Gremillion's ethnography, tellingly titled *Feeding Anorexia*, focuses almost exclusively on its eponymous diagnosis, although her fieldwork took place in what is ostensibly more broadly categorized as an eating disorder in-patient clinic; and both films that I will discuss focus more heavily on anorexia, each with one token bulimic to balance out the bias, as it were. This dichotomous and hierarchical construction of the two primary types of eating disorders has been the focus of feminist critique, but remains strong in the public imagination. In her article "Eating like an Ox: Femininity and dualistic constructions of bulimia and anorexia", Maree Burns offers a powerful post-structuralist critique of this dualistic construction and its real, negative ramifications for individuals, showing how there is a sort of inversion in the deviance/normality of bodies and practices associated with each: bulimic bodies are seen as normative but bulimic practices as deviant, whereas anorexic practices are actually rather normative (consider the proliferation of diet culture) and anorexic bodies are what get marked as deviant (read 'deviant' here as closely linked to popular spectacle and shock value). (Burns, 2004)

Thus, the history of thought on anorexia has, along with broader intellectual shifts, repeatedly re-evaluated itself in seeking more complex and culture-specific understandings of the theor(ies) of eating disorders, in which theorization ethnography and mass media have both played increasingly important roles, which brings me to contemporary feminist ethnography of a U.S. treatment center.

Feeding Anorexia: An Ethnographic Approach

Feeding Anorexia: Gender and Power at a Treatment Center is an ethnographic monograph on eating disorders in America, published in 2003 by anthropologist Helen Gremillion, based on fieldwork conducted in the mid-1990s at a state-of-the-art in-patient program in the Western United States.

Gremillion's compassionate and incisive study works to shift the argument from patients' 'pathology' and tenacity to the therapy itself, and how the struggles it is characterized by indicate how "mainstream therapies participate unwittingly in historically specific, dominant cultural discourses of gender, individualism, physical fitness, and family life that help constitute anorexia's conditions of possibility"(Gremillion, 2003, pg. xv). Positioning herself early in the text as a "feminist activist"(Gremillion, 2003, pg. xvi) working openly from a feminist perspective, she also exposes the largely male-dominated treatment lens through which eating disorders are viewed, and argues that a deep understanding of dominant models of treatment is essential to developing and implementing alternative approaches to recovery.

Her argument centers on the patients' and treatment teams' deployment of the cultural notion of "the fit body, as icon for the American imperative to achieve individual productivity and self-control"(Gremillion, 2003, pg. 38). This local concept of 'fitness'

becomes a dominant organizing notion for the book, as she analyzes it in terms of consumer capitalism and the contradictions in dominant discourses about fit female bodies that ‘fitness’ produces, specifically in the simultaneous (gendered) injunctions to consume and to produce, and the coding of the female body as both a resource and a ‘limit’ to its own maintenance.

She extends this analysis of political economy in tracing gradual changes in American ideals of family (Gremillion, 2003, pg. 39), and how this manifests in the treatment unit’s promotion of individuation and what she calls ‘minimal motherhood’ — a seemingly gender-equalizing re-inscription of maternal nature as personal desire, insidiously re-naturalized, placing mothers in a paradoxical double bind not incomparable to the late capitalist injunctions that structure their daughters’ (all patients featured in the book are female) eating disorder experiences. This naturalized notion of minimal mothering, she argues, in conjunction with hierarchical creation of sexual difference in the treatment program, actually results in a reproduction of gendered inequality by the ‘surrogate family’ of the inpatient treatment team.

She also analyzes the dimensions of race and class in treatment, and how middle-class white bodies as “always already fit”(Gremillion, 2003, pg. 40) for treatment, with ‘other’ bodies less able to participate, but possessing of more of the qualities of personhood that white middle-class bodies/family units lack, and shows how these racially and classed categorizations are not only problematic but are also indicative of notions of health on the unit.

Through all of this, her main argument is that these dimensions of mainstream treatment reinforce and recreate the conditions of possibility for the eating disorder itself,

by engaging in the same discourses about fitness and family. Recovery itself can become framed in terms of yet more quantitative measures and yet more notions of achievement, through “the psychiatric production of bodies as resources for self-transformation”(Gremillion, 2003, pg. 49) in which the (female) body is its own source for success.

Another primary contribution of Gremillion’s study, in terms of theorizing feminist ethnography, is the question she asks when faced with a variety of incarnations of patients’ notorious resistance to treatment: “How do we understand a form of subversion that exaggerates the criteria that are being subverted?”(Gremillion, 2003, pg. 47) For example, she describes patients interpreting their ‘exercise weight’ (which, upon being reached, allows them to leave in-patient care) as not merely a bare minimum to be maintained to stay out of the hospital, but as a maximum weight — no need to gain more if these are the programs rules. Gremillion terms this re-interpretative agency as a “legalistic” form of resistance (pg. 61).

Finally, she closes the book with a discussion of the possibilities of narrative therapy as a radical departure from mainstream treatment modalities, able to externalize these messy aspects of illness by producing it as a ‘problem narrative’, through collaborative, on-going work that highlights less culturally normative understandings/stories.

The text is generally theory and analysis-heavy, and the ethnographic detail, though rich, has a more traditional feeling of detachment, when considered beside other feminist ethnographic texts such as Wekker’s *The Politics of Passion* or Abu-Lughod’s *Writing Women’s Worlds* that rely more heavily on ethnographic detail. However, having

experienced the disease as intellectualizing (recall the mental wrangling of Gremillion's 'legalistic' resistance), I can understand the theoretical and analytical infusion, the seeking to understand, as possibly a stylistic resonance with an anorexic experience.

Thin: A Documentary Film Approach

Photographer Lauren Greenfield, who studied anthropology as an undergraduate at Harvard, was commissioned to make a film about eating disorders by HBO films, and spent 6 months living at the Renfrew Treatment Center in Florida where she documented the struggles of both patients and staff in a residential treatment center. The film, which was completed in 2006, works mainly to create a narrative with fully-constructed characters and a conflict-driven arc that unfolds in observed filmic time, pitting treatment center staff against residents.

With this in mind, one of the most striking aspects of *Thin* is the lack of trust and on-going struggle between the patients and the treatment teams, and the way in which the painful and ineffective potentials of (mainstream) treatment are laid bare. In this way, it demonstrates visually and narratively what Gremillion analyzed in *Feeding Anorexia* — the many negative or counterproductive ramifications that can result from many in-patient treatment approaches.

For example, two patients in the film are given a reward of leaving the clinic for making progress on their recovery, and while out of the clinic, they break the rules to get tattoos of the NEDA (National Eating Disorder Association) symbol that represent their own recovery. Speaking from personal experience, the choice to get a tattoo was a significant part of my own recovery process, and such markers have the potential to be an important part of one's psychological healing. However, one of the girls who goes

against the clinic's rules to get the tattoo is later expelled, for that and other reasons, creating a double sanction, in the name of recovery, on a potentially *positive* recovery experience.

Additionally, popular discourse surrounding the film and the way in which paratextual knowledge of the continued experiences of its four main “characters” is readily accessible (online) also contributes to this sense of treatment’s ‘failure’ — the character who was kicked out of Renfrew after getting a tattoo (and having her insurance run out) died two years later, most likely from suicide, and another main character has been public about her relapse and suicide attempts, and subsequent re-admittance to Renfrew.

Despite its home in public media and its usually-educational bent, PBS’ 2000 NOVA special *Dying to Be Thin* epitomizes the kind of framing that popular media often create, in situating the spectacle of the eating disorder, and the melodrama of recovery, first and foremost. Reality television shows like A&E’s *Intervention* and the eating-disorder-specific show *Starving Secrets with Tracey Gold* dramatize the recovery as both a sheer matter of willpower and as a process that should be made into mediated shock-value-added spectacle for viewers to consume — another dimension in which consumer capitalism inflects the meanings and cultural positionings of the diseases. And since reality television sustains itself on sustaining conflict, it’s difficult to believe that these ‘interventions’ are truly useful or that they provide any positive points of social comparison or sources of thoughtful, compassionate hope for struggling individuals.

Given media’s proclivity for sensationalizing and sexualizing bodies in general, especially female bodies, it seems all too easy to sensationalize the bodies and

experiences of individuals with eating disorders (even for PBS). But in my experience, the real work of recovery is not sensational at all. In comparison to these other works, the extent to which Greenfield lets the conflict unfold through long takes and unobtrusive editing shows the patients in a sympathetic light. When done right, or at least relatively so, I think this speaks to film's ability to humanize the eating disorder experience through visual depiction in a way that written ethnography does not always access as readily or as easily.

Texts in Comparison

Gremillion's ethnography picks up, in this sense, where Greenfield's film leaves off — as Greenfield says in a trailer for *Thin*, she understands eating disorders as “a coping mechanism for whatever they're going through.” Gremillion's analysis seeks to theorize this last part, from the specifically effective stance and methodological underpinnings of a medical and cultural ethnographer. Gremillion doesn't presume to posit a singular etiology, but uses the persistently messy and multidimensional understanding of the origins of these diseases as a diagnostic of the contradictory discourses and cultural factors that might give rise to or begin to explain a portion of this appropriately ambiguous statement: “whatever they're going through”.

The specific juxtaposition of these two texts points at a general tendency in the possibilities for written ethnography and documentary film. Both texts here take on the specific task of critiquing treatment and therapy itself as a move away from pathologizing of individuals and towards advocating for better treatment, as well as using that focus to extrapolate, invoking various degrees of theorization to do so, about the root cultural causes of these diseases.

While they offer related critiques of institutions, they each do so in medium-specific ways; *Thin* creates melodrama and pathos that evoke a sympathetic and complicated identification with the patients in their struggles, and *Feeding Anorexia* deconstructs the institutions that create the conditions, inside and outside of hospitals, for these diseases, with the specifically articulated rhetorical goal of creating a deep understanding of the problems of mainstream treatment in order to offer an alternative (in her estimate, narrative therapy). In an environment where film is thought of as a means of storytelling, and academic texts are thought of means of creating/disseminating knowledge, each text plays its role — though I would argue that each medium can do both or either (and that the ability to do both is the ideal of ethnographic filmmaking).

Following once again from this medium specificity, the goals of the two works are distinct — and this, I believe, is a distinction that relates directly to my ultimate question of audience, and application. On her website, Greenfield describes the film in her Director's Statement as “a cinema-verité exploration that...provides an emotional and experiential journey into the day-to-day reality of four women engaged in a life-or-death struggle and the Sisyphean task of the caregivers trying to treat them.” (Greenfield) The film opens upon *experience* much more than analysis; as Greenfield goes on, “unfortunately, the film does not offer prescriptions for treatment, nor explanations of causality of this painful condition.”

Gremillion, on the other hand, does begin to offer — not prescriptions, per se, but suggestions, beginning her Epilogue on narrative therapy with the assertion that “a critical cultural analysis of mainstream psychiatric treatments for anorexia is a first step toward formulating alternative therapies that render explicit the cultural specificity of

illness and health”(Gremillion, 2003, pg. 193). These goals suggest different but overlapping audiences.

I am thinking of ‘audience’ here in an expanded sense: the ‘audience’ of patients for the various therapies and treatment regimes in different treatment programs, and the audience for films and ethnographies about this topic — and thus the question of when and how these overlap, and how to practically apply some understanding of those different ‘audiences’ to avoid harm/maximize good (if approaching this from an applied anthro/feminist perspective).

In Gremillion’s text, there is of course the presumed audience of academia, her colleagues and fellow anthropologists, but also an audience of clinicians and treatment providers, and then the group of individuals she studied. I scoured the internet for lay reviews of her book, and could find only one, on Goodreads.com, which was rather lengthy and summed itself up by saying “I could go on - for a while I think, but really I’m left confused, dissatisfied, feeling like I want to shake off this book... Maybe were I an anthropologist or in some field of sociology I’d appreciate this more... who knows.” (“Claire” on Goodreads.com, June 4, 2012)

Thin, however, has elicited reviews, reactions, and comments across the internet. I first read about *Thin* through a list provided on a pro-ana forum by one member who was responding to a general online call for ‘films about eating disorders’. It topped many lists, and one commenter described watching it 8 or 10 times that year, until the patients depicted in the film became ‘like friends’ to her.

The accessibility and anonymity provided by the “democratic” medium of internet allow for the reactions and engagements that self-identified eating-disordered individuals

have with this film to be read and analyzed for some insight into the way that reception and audience are functioning with media portrayals of eating disorder experiences and recovery processes.

Thus, an introductory foray into ‘virtual ethnography’ (if this is the appropriate term) reveals a preponderance of self-reported love for the film *Thin*; for example, viewer responses on a pro-ana forum include:

“I love Thin I watch it like a movie. I could relate so much to the stories. I need to read the book.”

“I love this. I think I have seen it like 8659523472359 times. Love Polly.”

“Watched it for the first time this week and there were many feels to be had. It was sooo beautiful, i'm gonna watch it again now!”

In my own experience, and my sense of many others’ experiences, researching eating disorders and related online information, and consuming (pun intended?) as much media about them as possible, is quite common to the experience both of having the disorder (in seeking to learn how to ‘do it right’) and of seeking recovery (seeking support and sources of hope).

While the implicit audience of each of these texts is not necessarily the ‘community’ of eating disordered individuals, this comparison suggests a rather obvious but important notion, which is that these cultural texts — films, ethnographies, websites — are being sought out by that audience, are particularly able to *reach* that audience, but that a film (easily available online) like *Thin* is reaching this audience much more effectively than a physical academic text like *Feeding Anorexia*. As I have suggested, Gremillion’s written ethnography is much more able to deconstruct and de-pathologize

patients' experience by focusing on the institutional and historical contexts of lived experience, while *Thin* remains in a realm of mere pathos. This leads me to speculate about the potential to marry certain aspects of the film form with certain aspects of ethnographic content (and vice versa) in order to make the kind of knowledge Gremillion has to offer available as a liberating and new way of thinking for recovering individuals — to give them a moment of, “it's not me, it's consumer capitalism”.

Thus, judging from online responses alone, film is, apparently (or according to the internet), a much more effective means of sharing information with a target audience, in particular this target audience, whereas Gremillion's book is not, to my knowledge, being widely circulated amongst proana communities or amongst patients who are seeking recovery. Both (ethnographic) film and written ethnography rely on durational engagement and engage questions of representation, but the ethical dimensions of those questions shift with these shifts in consuming audiences and in modes of representation.

Gremillion is particularly overt in her description of how pseudonyms/protections of identities are deployed in her writing, and uses moments of fictionalization or 'curation' in her storytelling, switching and recombining characters in a way that keeps them less readable as specific individuals. As we think again about a comparison with filmic approaches, this kind of 'protection' is not as easily afforded with a 'strict' documentary approach, as Greenfield takes in *Thin*. For example, as I mentioned, we can know via the internet what the individuals depicted in that film are up to now, and this raises yet more ethical questions about rights to privacy or the impact of the filmmaking process. From a personal, qualitative perspective, I see this as demonstrative of a primary difference between written ethnographic accounts and filmic/documentary accounts —

that is, the level of sensationalizing that goes on in the latter, and the extent to which the former is able to skirt these issues — visual issues, or issues of the consumer capitalist dimensions of mass media — due to differences in economic and audience commitments.

Considering how to bridge the disciplinary divide and marry the two forms and contents, as it were, a first impulse is to think towards ‘pseudonyms’ in film. The possibilities of an ‘ethnofiction’ form that creates reenactments rather than relies solely on real-time documentation, for example, deserve consideration. Additionally, I want to begin to think this through in conjunction with Gremillion’s call for narrative therapies, since film as a time-based medium is, as demonstrated by *Thin*, poised very well to narrativize and to complicate its own narratives through reflexive gestures. To this end, the review of these texts has directed me towards considering a method that would involve co-authoring of screenplays with recovered or recovering informants, and the filming of those screenplays, leaving open the option for the collaborator to act in their own screenplay or not.

To take up the question of audience again — a special ethical consideration for these studies is that of audience. Since, in my experience, patients or eating disordered-individuals are often voracious consumers of media about eating disorders, whether in search of ‘thinspo’ for eating disorder maintenance or online support for their recovery processes, the public dissemination of each new work regarding these diseases is an act that creates great potential and perhaps danger. This suggests that the style and form with which such works are crafted is hugely important to consider with not only general public or academic audiences in mind, but with these ‘informant’ audiences in mind as well. And while ethnographies and films and reality TV shows increasingly proliferate on this

topic, rarely are these portrayals of recoveries or media intended *for* struggling individuals, as a means of therapy or recovery support in themselves. Where many anthropologists (and sometimes filmmakers) may have a hard time interesting their interlocutors in their final product, this presents a situation the audience is *there*, but simply remains to be reached, as it were.

Conclusion

Considering Gremillion and Greenfield's different demonstrations of how treatment can unwittingly reinforce disease itself in conjunction with my desire to approach this as a topic of activist filmic exploration, my own awareness is already heightened in thinking about how the media I aim to produce might be received by its subject community. If I am thinking of ethnographic filmmaking as a kind of societal/cultural treatment (and this of course places a great deal of faith in my own ability to share my work publicly), is there a danger that my audience can have their state reinforced by the work? I am reminded by my own question of Gremillion's concept of resistance as exaggeration, and the self-reporting of members of proana communities watching *Thin* over and over again (though with a variety of intentions in those viewings).

Thus, how can ethnography/ethnographic film be an effective tool to return to those that one studies, in their individual quests for recovery? Can it be at all? Can an ethnography in this case be a tool of activism or health care or perhaps even both?

Finally, as Anne Becker states in the introduction to the 2004 special issue on eating disorders of the journal *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, "the potential contributions of ethnographic data and social analyses have been largely untapped and

the critical integration among psychological, epidemiologic and anthropological perspectives necessary to move the field forward has not yet been made”(434 Becker).

Megan Warin, an Australian anthropologist, cites this special issue in the preface to her 2009 ethnography *Abject Relations: Everyday Worlds of Anorexia*, noting also that colleagues cautioned her that “anorexia has been done to death”(Warin 2009, pg. ix), suggesting that Becker’s call for ethnographic approaches was rallied to, and continues to be met. And though it is a rather morbid phrase, I might agree that it has been ‘done to death’, in terms of the approaches to studying it and approaches to sharing those studies that are already in place. But perhaps this notion, this done-to-deathness, sheds yet more light on a research bias towards anorexia and away from, say, bulimia, or towards (white female assumed-heterosexual middle-class) anorexia and away from other-gendered experiences, queer experiences, different-classed experiences, and racially and ethnically-diverse experience.

As I move forward to create filmic ethnography (and ethnographic film) that addresses itself directly to its own community, these are the stories that remain to be ‘done to death’, and to challenge the control that anorexia seems to maintain over its own narrative of theory.

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CHAPTER 5

AESTHETICS

‘This Is My Lived Experience’: A Movement Toward an (Ethnographic) Authenticity in the Documentary Arts¹⁵

...to resist meaning does not necessarily lead to its mere denial.

— Trinh T. Minh-ha

Authenticity on the Move

In closing his piece entitled “Jargons of Authenticity,” film historian Paul Arthur suggests: “it is highly unlikely that the realist windmills of authority and transparency against which American documentaries have been tilting for the last 50 years will suddenly disappear or be demolished by postmodern allegories” (134, in Renov). Though he spoke more broadly of documentary when he wrote that line in 1993, from my vantage point of 22 years later, the windmills are (at least partially) intact in both the documentary world and more specifically, the realm of ethnographic film.

To *answer* the question of authenticity in nonfiction film becomes almost impossible almost immediately, so I will do my best to engage it without hope of arriving in a place of absolute certainty. That is to say: I will tilt at these windmills a bit myself, by means of writing towards them.

Arthur argues that the rhetoric of authenticity has shifted with concurrent turns in Western thought and liberalism, and describes three moments of authenticity in history of (American) documentary:

¹⁵ The main text of this chapter completed January 31, 2015.

“Technology and its imbrication with power is thematized in each instance according to the changing political dynamics of liberalism: in the first, iconographic identification with industrial technology and its ability to rectify social affliction; in the second an incorporation and masking of the apparatus as an extension of individual cognitive acuity and physical skill; and in recent films, disavowal or technical proficiency as a guarantee of non-omniscience and metaphoric link with disenfranchised profilmic subjects”(133, in Renov).

The mechanism of these shifts is one of dialectics, it seems. As soon as a documentary mode becomes codified through its success, for example, the “reflexive abnegation”(133, in Renov) of Michael Moore’s *Roger and Me*, someone — perhaps Trinh T. Minh-Ha — asks a question that threatens the unity or sovereignty of that trend in the documentary arts. In our scramble to answer it, we seek to restore unity, even if the critique is of unity itself, as Minh-ha’s can be read. And if we accept the critique in its surface admonitions, we simply abandon that particular rhetoric of authenticity as one used up, and move on in search of another, while upholding authenticity in its fundamentals even as its manifestations are called into question.

From Trinh T. Minh-ha, I will define authenticity as the valuing of the relationship between, as she puts it, “the name and the named” — the link between a concept, image, sound, or individual and some something, which might be profilmic, which might be what we call a ‘referent’.

The gap between theory and practice is where the quixotic gesture emerges. Or rather, it has been displaced, perhaps repeatedly, but we chase after it. (And why we

chase after it intrigues me as well.) Authenticity is on the move. It resists pinning down, and has shown itself to be quite capable of moving documentary houses across the last century. In theory, the early poses of authenticity have been shown fallible and their charge has diminished, to the point where a discussion of documentary truth or sincere claims to ‘objectivity’ meet a collectively seasoned scoff from the filmmaking, anthropological, and broader art/academic communities alike. Authenticity, though, as a concept or even simply as a *word*, proves more slippery than objectivity, which we have been able to reject handily. Objectivity and authenticity have been historically link, but theory has severed that link, and authenticity, not objectivity, hangs on in practice as it repositions itself to be theorizable again.

Thus, a rhetoric of authenticity in nonfiction film is always already contingent, in a way not dissimilar to the contemporary conception of an individual’s intersecting identit(ies). Arthur focuses his analysis on major trends in American documentary history, but numerous smaller shifts could be identified in between the 1930s rash of New Deal-sponsored films, the cinema-verité of the 1960s, and the work of the late 1980 and early 1990s which was characterized by “a slippery ambivalence in which the instrument of cinema is a necessarily visible but confoundingly inadequate mediator”(133, in Renov). At the time of writing, that slippery ambivalence was new enough that where it might slip *to* remained to be seen, but Arthur’s own ambivalence about it is clear, and he cites Minh-ha in voicing his concerns about the way in which the evolution of the rhetoric of authenticity functions to “merely replace one unacknowledged source of authority with another”(132, in Renov). In “The Totalizing Quest of Meaning” (written not long before Arthur’s piece), Minh-ha raises the essential, and perhaps unanswerable,

question of a direct challenge to filmic patterns of authority. She pushes beyond a mere critique of whichever specific rhetoric is currently in vogue.

As a contribution to theories of (the myths of) documentary verisimilitude, her challenge is immensely important. It is necessarily frustrating to any attempts to specify methodology, and its ability to frustrate practice, to instigate inventiveness, is essential to its role as theory.

Minh-ha's big questions remain the touchstones from which to re-open, again and again, the dialectic of critique that fuels the shifts in rhetoric that Arthur also sought to theorize. If Paul Arthur were today to amend and extend his 1993 work, he would undoubtedly be able to locate a fourth moment, or perhaps moments, in which we are embedded, as the product of this re-positioning of authenticity which persists in spite of post-modern revelations and challenges to the supremacy of positivist thought. He would also (along with Minh-Ha, perhaps) note that the fundamental challenge to *patterns* of filmic authenticity remains unanswered. While to dismantle or deconstruct these patterns is beyond the scope of this paper, noting the ways in which they do persist and re-shape themselves to fit the modern moment may be a first step towards understanding *why* they continue to persist so powerfully. Thus, with the remainder of this paper, I will explore where we have moved in the succession of documentary authenticities since the 1990s, and the ways in which ethnographic film falls uniquely in and out of place with these shifts.

The Arrival of the New(est) Authenticity

Since at least the 1980s, post-colonial and feminist critiques of Western and masculinist theories of representation and knowledge (of which Minh-ha's work is part)

have sensitized the academy and the art world to the power relations inherent in encounters, bodies, and ideas previously assumed uninflected by such concerns. This is one of the shifts in liberal thought that Paul Arthur invokes in describing the advent of his third moment, that moment of reflexive abnegation; the effects of these critiques, like Minh-ha's potent questions, linger, and unfold new ramifications and possibilities for a rhetoric of authenticity. In particular, we remain sensitized to the dangers and seemingly endless pitfalls of representation across difference, and the power dynamics that structure, and derive from, such attempts at representation.

Steeped in this awareness, I sometimes feel in a state of constant alarm, vigilant in the attention to exploitation of power, ever-ready to pass judgment on the relative appropriate-ness or ethical status of the power relations perceived in and around a work of documentary art or ethnographic object. If we understand power as something that organizes itself through identity, I have been trained to look for cultural markers of identity of those involved — filmmaker, ethnographer, subject, informant — and the politics of how they are represented (and the power dynamics that suggests), in determining the 'value' of a work. If we understand power as something that can derive from the acquisition and exercise of knowledge, whether written or visual or otherwise, the entire projects of ethnography and of nonfiction filmmaking (and their intersection) is bound up in a history of unequal power dynamics, of extracting and preserving knowledge of the Other, whose power is diminished relative to the filmmaker or ethnographer by the very act of that person, let alone the ways in which the power and privilege organized around certain identities tend to fall on the agentive side in the history of those interactions.

Thus, I feel as though I am trained to see an ethnographic film such as *Les Maitres-Fous*, and arm myself to the teeth in preparation for denouncing Jean Rouch as imperialist; trained, by the representation of black bodies and the knowledge that Rouch's skin is white, to ask whether the work is racist; to understand his whiteness, his maleness, his class, his education, his economic privilege as inseparable from — and morally marked by — his filmmaking and his anthropology. We are in a moment in which one must be very wary of “speaking for” the Other, and the greater the perceivable (read: categorical markers of identity) difference across which the attempt to speak (even in dialogue) is made, the more precarious the gesture becomes.

One thing which Arthur fails to explore fully is the possibility that authenticity is not a question asked once of a film, but over and over again, in different moments, directing itself at different dimensions of the film itself and its production, its contexts, the experience(s) it produces. In the wake of this sensitivity to the power dynamics of representation across difference (and it is always across difference, though the degrees of difference matter as well), I would argue that particular attention is being paid to the authenticity — inflected with liberal humanist ideals of equality — of the relationship between the maker and the subject, whether the subject is a place, another people, another person, or even themselves. This last possibility most effectively assuages our fears about representation across difference, because we see that the difference has been eliminated from the equation. It runs the danger of being elided, though, with the maker taking as subject a place or community which they claim as *part* of their identity but which is not synonymous to them alone and which extends to others outside of their individual body and experience.

So within ethnography, ethnographic film, and documentary film more broadly, this sensitivity in its most utopian moments has prompted, instead of the traditional model of “speaking for” the Other, the advent of the Other speaking themselves — taking the means of production into their own hands, through the indigenous media movement, the advent of autoethnography, or the increase native ethnographers

How do we measure this new rhetoric of authenticity? Through the same mechanism through which power is organized — through those markers of identity. By the same rubric that encourages me to question the authenticity of a white female filmmaker chronicling queer men of color in the New York ball movement (Jennie Livingston and *Paris is Burning*), I am encouraged to appreciate more deeply the achievement of Marlon Riggs in documenting his ‘own’ community of black gay men in *Tongues Untied*. The playing field on which documentary meaning is made — and who gets to make which meanings — is at once expanded and contracted, and on the basis of markers identity such as race, gender, sexuality, age, educational status, class. Identity, particularly that which is inscribed in and on the body, becomes a new locus of authenticity, and by extension, the interactions of conscious beings with separate and unique (intersecting and contingent) identities produces relationships whose authenticity we ask questions about.

From my own felt anxiety over this, I will (appropriately, perhaps) posit that the newest wave of authenticity in documentary might be called one of both *embodiment* and *experience*; where the ‘lived experience’, ‘embodied experience’, the personal narrative, and the ability to show the authentic relation *between* bodies and their experiences is given primacy. Seen from a more individual-oriented Western perspective, this

authenticity of experience connects to identity, of filmmaker *and* subject, and by proxy (eventually) the viewer. Communities, too, can have a body in this sense, or a body of experiences (share history, collective conscious).

Similarly, the body of the film itself gains authenticity in this framework, and with the body of the spectator as they experience the film, thereby the authenticity of the relationship between the viewer and the film itself becomes more centralized in the evaluation of a work. This emphasis on authentic relationship between the film and viewer (and filmmaker) is present in Catherine Russell's *Experimental Ethnography*, in her discussion of what she calls "hyperrealist" ethnography. Invoking structuralist film, particularly those films with a fixed frame and durational tendencies, as the nonpareil of this genre, she describes how "three bodies are put into play: the body filmed, the embodied viewer / artist / filmmaker, and the body of the film itself"(Russell 162). This creates an active viewer, whose bodily experience of the film itself involves a negative or positive (or some combination of the two) physical response, boredom, arousal, something in between.

Thus, we have two primary sites in contemporary ethnographic and documentary film in which a rhetoric of authenticity is being deployed: in the embodied relation of the audience and the film (and filmmaker), and in our estimation of the embodied relation of the filmmaker and the film (and its subjects). The specific aesthetic deployments of these rhetorics may vary — for Russell, the technique of structural film may be one answer — but the underlying direction of our hope for some authority is in both cases bounded by a renewed belief in the kind of knowing that originates from specific, situational, phenomenologically embodied experience.

Fieldwork: The Generation of the Authentic

Now to consider, within nonfiction, the more specific case of ethnographic film.

This idea of embodied authenticity is not new to anthropology, by any means; nor is fieldwork or the kind of engagement it might entail new to documentary and other forms of filmmaking. Certainly fieldwork, as it is defined in the context of cultural anthropology, is not necessarily a prerequisite for the making of a film about some other than the self; but if the new(est) rhetoric of authenticity is one based in the bodily experience of the individual, this lends itself handily to an understanding of fieldwork as legitimating, or doubly legitimating in the case of ethnographic film.

Straddling the humanities and social sciences (and now possibly the arts), anthropology has had a long history of legitimating itself as ‘science’ — the dislodging of positivist truth claims came as a great relief to ethnography. Ethnography, as a method and a medium, has historically long been on shakier ground in certain realms of ‘authenticity’ — when authenticity bedded more closely with objectivity — precisely because of a predominating epistemological positivist bias in Western art and scholarship. It is a means of data collection that is filtered through the individual body and mind of the researcher, and is, for all intents and purposes, never fully replicable and therefore ‘never’ ‘fully’ ‘verifiable’ — its authenticity of data questionable on the very grounds of positivism. The canonical questioning of the supremacy of positivism has, then, opened up a space for ethnography to be more legitimate, more inherently authentic, by this new and shifting and cracked-open rubric of what counts and what means.

By this estimation, ethnographic film is simultaneous ahead and behind the arc of authenticity’s evolution. Cultural anthropology’s faith in situated and embodied knowledge has solidified through the institutionalization of fieldwork as a rite of passage

for the anthropologist, and as the necessary practice in which one must engage in order to be officially considered to be “doing” anthropology — performing ethnography. (Franz Boas changed this forever for American anthropology, as a champion of fieldwork.)

Fieldwork increasingly encompasses both autoethnographic exploration and trends of doing fieldwork ‘closer to home’ as the canon of who and what are considered fit subjects for anthropology’s purview transforms to meet the shifting academic landscape. And to raise, however briefly, a long-standing debate, while fieldwork does not ever fully transform the outsider ethnographer (or ethnographic filmmaker) into an ‘insider’, the immersion of participant observation is an experience that they undergo, that requires and calls on and transforms their body (if only most noticeably through the passage of time), and imbues them with the authenticity of experience. Thus, ‘fieldwork’ is a means to establishing the embodied or experiential authenticity that has entered into the current vogue.

The potentially concerning absence of fieldwork in cross-cultural (ethnographic) filmmaking was articulated by Hal Foster, just two years after Arthur’s article, in his seminal piece “The Artist as Ethnographer?”. Skeptical of the pseudoethnographic role that some artists are adopting, he critiques, among many things, a new wave of site-specific artworks where in fact “there is little time or money for much interaction with the community (which tends to be constructed as readymade for representation)”(Foster 306), and the principles of participant observation are invoked in name but not so much in practice — “let alone critiqued”(Foster 306). The goal of collaboration investigation (where authenticity of bodies and experience might reside) gives way to an “ethnographic self-fashioning”(Foster 306) that fails to really address the sensitivity to power and

difference (and a willingness to relinquish some of the power that *comes* from difference) that, in theory, has instigated the very ethnographic and documentary turns that make conceivable the artist's authentic engagement in fieldwork.

This critique, now intensified after the 'documentary turn' was made official in 2002 by Okwui Enwezor and Mark Nash's *documenta 11*, surfaces again in the 2013 roundtable discussion between (ethnographic(ish)) filmmaker Ben Russell, theorist Catherine Russell (of *Experimental Ethnography*), anthropologist Chris Wright, and producer/filmmaker Pratap Rughani. Wright notes that "many anthropologists that I know get upset about artists borrowing some of their methodologies but taking the bits that they want without seeing the breadth of it. They adopt the allure of ethnography — the promise of 'authenticity' and connecting with the real world — without embracing either the *duration of fieldwork* or the *ethics of representing others*, both of which require a massive commitment"(Russell et al 84) [italics mine].

These critiques are valid, and the privileging of these two criteria — durational fieldwork and a deep consideration of the ethics of representation — point to one of these new rhetorics of authenticity yet again, framed here as a 'massive commitment' to particular experiences that tax the body and mind, and are thus inscribed and authenticated in the maker, and which rely on authentic relation with one's subjects/collaborators, through both the extended time spent together in fieldwork and the vulnerable and intimate experience of fully exploring and maintaining oneself with the precarity and openness of the ethical stance. Thus, fieldwork can be understood as not merely a disciplinary tool of cultural anthropology intended for the gathering of data

through the instrument of one's body, but also as a means of engaging in an embodied experience that authenticates the project of the ethnographer or filmmaker.

Towards, and Away from, an Aesthetics of Authenticity

Understanding aesthetics as a sensory or affective possibility, what might this particular rhetoric of authenticity look like, and what might this particular rhetoric of authenticity feel like?

Like this elusive but alluring 'authenticity', its possible aesthetics will be multiple and reside in different places. Perhaps one could even speak of an aesthetic of process, of the documentary or ethnographic encounter, an aesthetic marked by openness or the ethical stance (which always be one of openness), or by defining more closely the look and feel of something like an emerging 'collaborative turn' (though we have had so many 'turns' of late that we run the risk of dizzying ourselves).

Describing an aesthetics of embodied and experiential authenticity in too practical of detail runs the risk of codifying into a kind of visual morality that which is in fact an ethical question. Like Timothy Asch's attempt to define "The Ethics of Ethnographic Filmmaking" — which also by virtue of its specificity, produces and dictates an *aesthetics*: of long takes, wide shots, and considerable tilting at yet another kind of realist windmill — the intent is honorable, but result is a code that reified yet another rhetoric of authenticity, of ethnographic authenticity.

I will hazard as far as to suggest, at the risk of reifying this fourth moment I am explicating, an aesthetics that is situated and situational, embodied and born out of lived experience, just as this particular brand of authenticity is — an aesthetics that responds

and adapts to every instance of authenticity (since this authenticity is authentic by the very virtue of its uniqueness, one could argue).

This is one of the greatest contributions that anthropology can continue to make in the realm of nonfiction film, including that which might be called ethnographic — to keep oneself, as maker, open to possibilities of the aesthetic as they present themselves.

Authenticity has a particularly *renewed* or shifted charge in the post-positivist moment, where traditional theories of knowledge come into question and thereby open the way for other ‘ways of knowing’ to gain legitimacy, particularly the knowledge of the body and of lived experience, in the body. We cannot predict what that will look and feel like in all cases, except perhaps that it will ‘feel’ authentic when we are residing in that rhetoric, minding Hal Foster and Christopher Wright’s admonitions to make the ‘massive commitment’ that is the attempt to represent (ethically, authentically) across difference, in ethnographic work but in documentary work more broadly.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s challenge to filmic patterns of authority holds its charge — it is a challenge we have not fully risen to, to which we perhaps can never rise. Even if we never succeed in a full and practical displacement of the filmic patterns of authority that she set out to displace, each relative displacement and reinstatement of authenticity seems a sort of dispersal of some original authority, and perhaps the best hope is that we can keep proceeding with this dialectical critique of the rhetoric of authenticity, asymptotically.

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CHAPTER 6

(QUEER) THEORY

Queering Eating Disorders: Tracing Towards a Reparative Reading, or What is this process called “recovery”?

It's funny even to try to start writing this, to try to know where to start, because there are so many different versions of narratives and sub-narratives that I have written for myself over the years that I'm afraid I won't be able to find any truth.

— Personal GoogleDoc dated January 27, 2013

Introduction

My project in this text is one of revis(it)ing a history of thought. Or rather, two histories of thought: a private personal struggle with an eating disorder (my own), and the public wrangling of academic research and writing with the *study* of eating disorders. While the above epigraph comes from an attempt at the former — describing my eating disorder recovery to myself, several months after I had finally “fully recovered” — I wonder if its precarious and uncertain grounding, in multiple and conflicting narratives, might not apply to both histories of thought: the narrative of the academy and the narrative of myself.

To explore these two narratives and how they are being (and still yet might be) engaged anew, I am tracing forward from the work that Eve Sedgwick does in *Touching Feeling*¹⁶, specifically her theorization of paranoid and reparative reading practices. In order to focus on recent critical historiography of queer presence/absence in the

¹⁶ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching feeling: Affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Duke University Press, 2003.

psychological literature on eating disorders, I will draw on how Sedgwick's theor(ies) of readings have been applied since their original introduction in her 2003 text. How might these reading practices allow us to understand the public narrative that is critiqued in the historical glance back at the psychological literature of eating disorders? This will be seen in the context of specific strands of that literature (and its counter-narratives).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I posit (queer) moments in which reparative readings, in particular, can be locally and strategically essential for both individuals and texts. Sedgwick and her intellectual descendants' mobilization of reparative readings can let us theorize the eating disorder recovery process in more nuanced ways, ways that allow for an understanding of the complexities of gender and sexuality as discursively and materially intermeshed with the bodily and psychological experience of the eating disorder. This culminates in the the application of an interdigitated paranoid-reparative *re*-reading to the specific text of a queer, eating-disordered body (my own).

Two “Histories” of “Thought” (also Two “Bodies”)

To write this, I have been reading articles that link eating disorders and LGBT populations, and there is a trend in the opening sentences of some of these articles (I note that neither receives a citation):

“Body dissatisfaction and eating disorders are primarily associated with White, middle-class, heterosexual women.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Waldron, Jennifer J., Semerjian, Tamar Z., Kauer, Kerrie. 2009. Doing ‘Drag’: Applying Queer- Feminist Theory to the Body Image and Eating Disorders across Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. In *The Hidden Faces of Eating Disorders*, Edited by Justine J. Reel & Katherine A. Beals, (63-81).

“Eating disorders have historically been associated with straight, young, white females.”¹⁸

I myself am a white, middle-class, relatively young, and female-identified¹⁹ eating disorder survivor — but not straight. I identify as queer, and for the longest time thought that this had little or nothing to do with my deep dissatisfaction with my body, my years of struggling at self-regulation. Like my assumptions about myself, this common-sense notion (as seen in those first sentences above) of *who* gets eating disorders is, more often than not, no longer even cited.²⁰ The assumption of a specifically young white female straight subject for the overarching project of eating disorder research (and larger discourse) is thus codified. Its solidification into a stereotype so extreme, and so widely accepted, that in itself it is not addressed as an assumption unless invoked to situate research that seeks to demonstrate that other (marginal) types of people also get eating disorders.

In beginning this project, I sought to revisit and critique the history of how eating disorders have been studied, to re-prioritize the sexual as a possible organizing factor in those experiences, with the aim of opening up different understandings of how these mental health conditions manifest as bodily, sexual (or seemingly non-sexual) experiences. But in doing so, I am reminded that I am not the first to be interested in applying the lens(es) of queer theory to the study of eating disorders, and in pursuing that

¹⁸ NEDA Website, “Eating Disorders in LGBT Populations” -- listed under “Diversity Issues” on the National Eating Disorder Association website, which is overall a very comprehensive and thoughtful hub of resources and community.

¹⁹ (though I chafed at dresses and actively rejected anything ‘girly’ as a child).

²⁰ Note, also, that this still diminishes the experience of “young straight middle-class white girls” even as it primarily serves to erase the experiences of others outside that (set of) categor(ies)....

analysis, it has become as interesting (if not more so) to trace a similar impulse in *other* academic work, as well as my own.

The International Journal of Eating Disorders began publishing in 1981, and has published 4 issues every year since then; of the over one thousand articles this amounts to, 42 were filtered in a search for “sexual orientation,” and only 2 search results returned for the term “queer.”²¹ There is a clear (quantitative) paucity of research, but beyond suggesting that more LGBT eating disorder research would be *nice*, I’d like to turn my attention to the content analysis that has lately (since the mid-2000s until now²²) been applied to this history of research.

Recent critiques of the history of psychological study have been productively paranoid (in the Sedgwickian sense), beginning to trace the presence and absence (and functions of those states) of considerations of sex, sexuality, and gender through the history of the clinical study of eating disorders. For example, to return to the assumption of a specific embodied subject in the study of eating disorders raised at the beginning of this section, one of the existing critiques of the literature is that Otherness is only studied in relation to naturalized or normative categories. Waldron, Semerjian, and Kauer raise this concern in a 2009 chapter in *The Hidden Faces of Eating Disorders*²³, noting that the majority of “research has explored body image concerns among lesbian women and gay

²¹ Taylor & Francis online.

²² It is interesting to note that the National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA) webpage did not introduce its current page on “Eating Disorders in LGBT Populations” until February 2013. The site was created in 2001, and included information and resources on male experience of eating disorders at that time, though not regarding sexuality.

²³ This is an academic book, with clinicians in mind, that systematically works through the Other possible identities of ED subjects, reading rather flatly like a kind of politically correct game of identity politics in spite of its noble intentions.

men in comparison to heterosexual women and men.”²⁴ In a classically paranoid gesture, the authors’ main critique is that the bulk of clinical research re-centers of binaries of both sexuality and gender identity, and to call for an understanding of the intersection of these dimensions of identity.²⁵

Taking a broader view of body image (and its relation to eat disorder experiences), Clarke et al. conduct such a project of critiquing the existing literature, in an attempt to delineate a field of “LGBT appearance psychology.”²⁶ Their critique makes three major findings, two of which are most germane to this project: “first, the assumption of...early sexologists’ gender inversion model of homosexuality underpins almost all appearance research on non-heterosexuality, and consequently non-normative gender performances are pathologized. Second, the assumption of a homosexual/heterosexual binary: ...appearance research, like other areas of LGBT psychology, is underpinned by a binary model of sexuality...that marginalizes bisexuality and bisexual people’s appearance and embodiment.”²⁷ The language here, as I will show with regard to Sedgwick, is engaged in a primarily paranoid mode of reading (or even re-reading), functioning more diagnostically than anything else. Interestingly, the Waldron et al. article enacts this assumption of a gender inversion model of (homo)sexuality, the very thing that Clarke et al. warn against in their 2012 review of the literature.

²⁴ Waldron, et al. 68.

²⁵ They also deploy a potentially interesting use of Judith Butler by contextualizing body regulation as a kind of ‘drag’, but limit their analysis to a Foucauldian paradigm of whether or not dominant society will reward individuals with power, etc in exchange for their successful performances of femininity or masculinity.

²⁶ Clarke, Victoria, Nikki Hayfield, and Caroline Huxley. "Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans appearance and embodiment: A critical review of the psychological literature." *Psychology of Sexualities Review* 3.1 (2012): 51-70.

²⁷ Clarke, et al.

Thus, these meta-critical studies do the work they set out to do: they point a disapproving finger at the state of limited research that takes as its object the experience of queer individuals with eating disorders. Each goes slightly further to show that most existent research that does so upholds a tendency to underscore the assumptions of those first sentences: that eating disorder subjects are young, white, straight girls. In this paradigm, individuals whose bodies and experiences mark them as Others don't exist, or only exist in opposition to the normative subject. Or in my case, such Others are intersectional and partially so — parts of myself are called into being and other parts silenced as I read these texts, and the critiques of these texts. My race, age, and class are secure and affirmed, but I still long for research that makes space for my queerness and my androgyny. It is like standing to the side of a mirror; it is seeing half of a reflection.

Thus, in addition to a body of work that critiques the perceived straightness and gendered nature of previous eating disorder research, the second body that I am revisiting is my own physical one. In the GoogleDoc I began the paper with, I go on to write: “I guess one ought to try to start at the beginning, but it's hard, too, to say where the beginning is. Or was.”

There is a fuzziness about my own etiology that lingers and remains to be read (or perhaps written), as a text, and thus I turn to Eve Sedgwick and her interpreters to craft an approach, and to understand more intricately the approaches that are being taken to the scientific literature.

Beginning with Sedgwick

In Sedgwick's foundational work, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You”, she defines

paranoid readings as operating within a hermeneutics of suspicion, locating in the progress of critical theory a (perhaps dangerously myopic) approach to analysis that relies on anxious treading of the line between hidden/revealed (and of course privileging the revelation of the hidden).

Drawing on Melanie Klein's theories of love and the work of Sylvan Tomkins in general (but specifically his idea of 'shame theory') to critique the projects of Freud, Nietzsche, and others, Sedgwick undergirds her argument with two key points: paranoid readings have been productive for certain projects of exposing hegemonic structures and relations, *but* such reading practices don't take into account what one *does* with that revelation of truth, once one has engaged in this practice of paranoid exposure. In fact, this over-reliance on a "faith in exposure" is itself one of the primary characteristics of paranoid reading practices, in addition to Sedgwick's categorizing of them as anticipatory, reflexive, and mimetic, and reliant on/classifiable as a strong theory of negative affects.²⁸ As Sedgwick notes, "it seems to me a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds."²⁹

The faith in exposure that characterizes the paranoid mode (and has made it so popular and 'coextensive with critical theory') separates Sedgwick's paranoid/reparative models in the way (as Sedgwick would note, as she relies on his work in a previous chapter) that J.L. Austin distinguishes between the assertive and performative in the functioning and use of language — the former is concerned with considerations along the

²⁸ Sedgwick 130.

²⁹ Sedgwick 126

axis of true/false (and, as Sedgwick points out, in queer theory's paranoid readings is often concerned with proving as true that which we already know — through some other way of knowing — to be true, bordering almost on tautology). The latter, however, the performative, aligns with Sedgwick's suggestion of the reparative mode, in a way that I think will become suggestive as I return to the matter of eating disorders and specifically the process of recovery — that is, I will attempt to posit recovery as a (reparative) performative practice, next to but not coterminous with the paranoid assertion of a diagnosis.

While Sedgwick's foundational definitions remain deeply useful in this project, her open-ended and singular offering of *camp* as an example of a reparative reading practice leaves the possibility of what reparative (or other, non-paranoid) reading practices might actually entail. Her work does precisely what she intends, in posing a question to the rest of her colleagues (and new generations of thinkers), in opening up a new space for inquiry and truly inviting responses.

Her invitation has not gone unmet. Ellis Hansen applies Sedgwick to new texts and to her own body of work in his 2011 essay, "The Future's Eve: Reparative Reading After Sedgwick," raising the question of how we are to read (and apply) Sedgwick after Sedgwick. Examining Sedgwick's writing on the poetry of Gary Fisher, Hansen positions her as having "proposed a less aggressive, less thesis-driven, less angst-ridden style of critique that would seek to repair the damage of homophobia and other forms of prejudice and violence rather than simply revealing allegedly new and ever more insidious forms of abuse in rather unlikely places."³⁰

³⁰ Hanson, Ellis. "The Future's Eve: Reparative Reading after Sedgwick." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110.1 (2011): 101-119.

In noting that the reparative mode is one that begins from the depressive position, a critical practice originating in psychic damage (which could include the eating disorder), Hansen underscores the strategic and essential nature of such reading practices, which Sedgwick also spoke of and which I will find useful in my argument.

Personalizing³¹ the position, he argues that “the reparative is not just a critical mode but more generally a life skill that I need”³² — redemption but less naive. In one section headed “The Paranoid Reparative; or, You’re So Depressive, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You” (in homage to Sedgwick’s original title), Hansen states that he wishes to discuss “her most reparative writings, which also happen to be some of her most gloomy and most personal,”³³ pointing to the complex possibilities and permutations of the reparative mode, affirming its distance from the naïveté of mere redemption.

Most importantly and usefully for my purposes, in “Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” Heather Love writes of Sedgwick’s original piece: “What the essay argues, and what it performs, is the impossibility of choosing between [paranoid and reparative modes].”³⁴ Love cautions against reading Sedgwick *only* in the reparative mode, demonstrating the possibility of reading the original essay in *both* modes, or rather in a mode that vacillates between the two. She says: “to read Sedgwick always reparatively is to miss the energizing force of paranoia in her work; it

³¹ A practice, as I will discuss later, in itself that seems to accompany many reparative modes, a local and weak theory.

³² Hansen 102.

³³ Hansen 106.

³⁴ Love, Heather. "Truth and consequences: On paranoid reading and reparative reading." *Criticism* 52.2 (2010): 235-241; p. 236

also reduces the kinds of relations we might now cultivate with her,”³⁵ calling for us to recognize not just the reparation but the damage present in Sedgwick’s late essays, and to learn from both.

Hansen and Love are two among many who offer their readings of Sedgwick’s modes and apply them to new objects, heeding the call, as Love puts it, “to reparation, which cracks us out of academic business as usual and promises good things both for Sedgwick and for us,”³⁶ as well as her call to paranoia and aggression.

Coming to Sedgwick’s work at this point in time, when she is already being re-read and re-interpreted (ever so lovingly, of course), allows me to see something unique about (this part of) her work and its focus on reading practices: the importance of re-reading. Neither Love nor Hansen (nor Sedgwick, for that matter) explicitly situates their reading temporally (though with academic work I suppose we can assume obsessive and repeated close reading, and Love is not elsewhere unconcerned with such concepts as temporality), but something about the reparative mode, as a response to the paranoid mode, entails something sequential — just as Sedgwick is re-read (in both modes by Love), so are (and can be) objects, and, my point will be, clinical literatures and bodies.

As Robyn Wiegman puts it in her 2014 re-reading: “Reparation...is for Sedgwick about learning how to build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered. You could say that it is about loving what hurts but instead of using that knowledge to prepare for a vigilant stand against repetition, it responds to the future with affirmative richness.”³⁷

³⁵ Love 240.

³⁶ Love 239.

³⁷ Wiegman, Robyn. "The times we're in: Queer feminist criticism and the reparative 'turn'." *Feminist Theory* 15.1 (2014): 4-25.

Writing after both Love and Hansen, and engaging their interpretations of Sedgwick (as well as those of Ann Cvetkovich and Elizabeth Freeman), Wiegman goes on to trace “what precisely motivates the widespread embrace of reparative reading for queer feminist readers today.”³⁸ Her synthesis challenges the juxtaposition of reparative and paranoid readings as mere good and bad, or the championing on reparative readings as an alternative to paranoid readings — that is, they are not completely opposed, nor is either mode without agenda, she says. In addition to a beautifully written narrative of reparative reading’s contemporary allure and the uptake of Sedgwick since 1997, Wiegman’s most useful contributions are for me, twofold: her location of reparative readings within specifically queer temporal frameworks, and the subtle and effective use of her own personal narrative of growing up with a bipolar mother. Though Wiegman does not theorize it as such,³⁹ her article is structured by a process of reading the body, and the indications it gives, as a text — a lifetime of reading her mother’s bipolar both paranoiacally and reparatively (and at times both) in order to cope and continue.

In addition to this personalizing discourse, Wiegman situates her object of study — queer feminist criticism (in which both she and I are engaged in these respective projects) — as being characterized by “its critical engagement with reparative reading moves in multiple temporal directions, aspiring toward the future as well as the past in

³⁸ Wiegman 12.

³⁹ Sans explicit theorization, though, she is extremely self-aware with regard to the non-universality of this notion of reading the world as a text: “‘The world is not a text; reading and interpretation are not universal values’, and while I would be drawn to demonstrating the speaker’s essentialist belief in worlds and subjects that can be known before the social constructs them, the accusation would otherwise leave me speechless on the terrain of what it was most calculated to reveal: that critical practice as a tactic of everyday living is an alienating option for those unmoved by approaching the world as a test – or playground – of interpretative skills. This, it seems to me, is what haunts reparative reading as it works to reassemble interpretation’s value while believing it has side- stepped the sovereign agencies and mastering hermeneutics that it pins on paranoid reading alone.”(Wiegman 19)

affective tonalities that reimagine the project of living in and through the present.”⁴⁰

Comparing the work of Heather Love and Elizabeth Freeman in their invocations of Sedgwick, she finds that both “turn their gaze toward the past – toward ‘history’ – to affectively nurture the present, albeit in very different terms.”⁴¹

It is this reparative affect of time itself in queer feminist criticism that I wish to carry forward into my project as a whole — taken in light of Wiegman’s work, Sedgwick’s call for reparation is in some ways a call for looking again, for reading something once read paranoiacally as reparative, for repeated re-readings, for the *possibility* inherent in reparative *re*-reading. And it is this kind of mixed, repetitive, messy, reparative reading that activates the kind of reading-for-recovery that I seek to posit with regard to an understanding of eating disorders as neither strictly straight or divorced from the sexual.

Re-Reading the Body Reparatively

Counter to the paranoid readings that have been advanced in a revisitation of the clinical literature⁴², the interjection I wish to make into this theory is to offer a new object, and perhaps a new ‘type’ of object, to *love*. Come sit with me beside my powerful paranoia and look weakly and lovingly at the ravages of self-regulation on both a body and a body of work.

⁴⁰ Wiegman 14.

⁴¹ Wiegman 14.

⁴² I note that these interventions, including *The Hidden Faces of Eating Disorders*, rely heavily on Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* to make their arguments about queerness and EDs, and while this is by no means proof of their paranoiac reading strategies, the fact that *Gender Trouble* was Sedgwick’s example par excellence of the hermeneutics of suspicion suggests a possible vector of theoretical transmission here, as it were.

To return to Sedgwick, a paranoid reading searches for what it has already decided it will find; it is a way of critiquing negative aspects of objects that has its uses, but runs the risk of simply pointing a disapproving finger at the heteronormativity or gender essentialism (or any other myriad of faults) it wanted to find in the first place, without necessarily offering any suggestions of what to *do* with the ‘bad object’ once identified as such. In thinking about the treatment of my eating disorder, the paranoid reading is rather like the moment of diagnosis:

“...the spring of my senior year of high school. I was 102 pounds then. I got ill, stayed home for a week, shaking and feverish but still metering out my meals with measuring cups (or spoons) — literally measuring how much milk I would let myself drink, leveling the 2 tablespoons of peanut butter I was allowed to put on my sandwich.”

Not long after that week I went to my parents and asked for help. Shame theory (the engine of theories, of paranoid readings...) in its most potent private form for me — shame theory turned on itself, more ashamed of the damage I was doing than about its origins, a meta-shame leaving me, by some counts, no longer ashamed about my body and my inability to shape it materially (or discursively).

Coming to terms with the fact that you are killing yourself is rather different than receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, I know (least of all in terms of the possibility of agency, and how that might relate to both hope and healing). But nonetheless, I feel some affinity for Sedgwick in *Touching Feeling*, knowing that her diagnosis of cancer was present in her life and (likely) in her mind as she repositioned herself in that text. She move away from her own historical methods towards a way of being in the world that draws on Buddhism to think about pedagogy (the last chapter of the book), that pays

particular and reverent attention to how bodies and affects shape one's relation to the world. She is the early echo of a strain of queer theory that pulses on in José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (and his other work), a push to understand how critical objects might be necessary for healing or for hope, not just for an academy-wide enactment of shame theory.

I am coming to see (my) eating disorder recovery as something marshalled by a paranoid-reparative reading of my own history — thus, I have found myself asking myself, can I apply Sedgwick's original work, in its 2015 forms, to a different kind of text — the text of my own body?

Thus, what follows is the first stutter towards re-reading myself reparatively, reparative reading of an eating disordered body as a way to account for a queering of that body's eating disordered experience/experience of queerness, and the queerness of an eating disorder.

Reading One's Own Body Reparatively

I keep reading over that GoogleDoc, the one in the epigraph, as I attempt this project, and find no closure. It trails off. It became an email of support (still no closure, but many suggestions, a tracing of my recovery) to a friend who had just disclosed her own experience to my partner. But etiology. I begin this section with it held at a distance, fuzzy. I am placing some trust in the theory of reparative re-reading (and, of course, re-writing) that I have advanced already in this paper. I am doing an experiment now, of putting it into practice.

My earliest memory of a possible origin of the eating disorder is in a locker room, off-site winter P.E. at my private middle school for gifted students. I wasn't queer at the

time. I was cycling through a series of intensely-pretended boy crushes, practicing having my heart broken over and over again (not knowing my heart would remain so, always already broken, until I found the girl who could put it back together for me). I performed heterosexuality as hard as I could until I turned 19 — it never elicited the responses that I had been taught to want though, something off in my performance.

In the echoing locker room, my bathing suit was navy blue, with dark yellow racing stripes. I remember another girl — heavier than me, though that might not matter — telling me I was scrawny, and knowing that was a good thing. A thing worth holding on to. Unbeknownst to me at the time, a way of fucking with gender.

“Scrawny.” The word hangs in my mind 13 years later, hangs precariously next to “feisty” (which was what I was declared at birth by my pediatrician). The word scrawny echoed in the locker room and in my mind; it interpolated me into being, into that first-sentence of a clinical piece of literature, into the subject position of my white middle-class female straight Western young self. I think perhaps the eating disorder grew out of that interpolation — by my classmate but by so many other structures and moments working around her — and the gap it created between what I felt was expected, and what *I* ‘actually’ felt — my desire, my gender.

Scrawny felt androgynous, and that felt comfortable — I hated being girly, and yet felt the pressures of assumed heterosexuality (and actively assumed it of myself for so long) bearing down on me. Reflexively, I grew to hate sexuality in any form, reserved ample disdain for anyone I knew (or more likely, heard of) engaging in sexual activity with their peers. I remember being 15, sitting on my kitchen counter, sobbing to my mother than no one would ever love me.

In retrospect, I had crushes on so many girls in my middle school. My best friend in high school was probably my first love. There is a mess of identification and desire at work here, and as a filmmaker I am attuned now to see it in its full complexity. Psychoanalytic film theory offers me an explanation of sorts, lets me understand that as a spectator of my own life or at least my high school experience, I was constantly being addressed as a subject who I was not, and like a good citizen (and high achieving student), I tried my utmost to be that subject, to turn and respond to the policeman who hailed me. Ironically, I was hailed again in high school health class, a toxically heteronormative space that exacerbated my confusion by teaching me (by way of required assignments) to keep track of every calorie I ate or expended. I listened to more words, after ‘scrawny’, pass over and around my head, and learned what the girls I admired (but couldn’t have) desired — my desire for others displaced onto my own body, and into a practice of trying to meet their ideals, as if that was the way to love without acceptance of sexuality in all its complexity for me. I started starving myself and exercising excessively, crafting my body to respond to the desire I read in them for their own bodies.

I hated my body because it wasn’t straight (though I wanted it to be), nor was it what straight girls wanted “a body” to be; it wasn’t feminine, or at least not properly so. I have had to learn to read my own body not as “wrong” — as always on the look out for the bad surprise of its uncontrollability, the bad surprise that you cannot forever become skinnier, as always chastising myself for its inability to fit into the heterosexual and girly paradigms. I have had to cultivate strategies of acceptance, of being present with my own queer body (and other queer bodies) in a more open-ended kind of close-reading. I have

had to strike out the connotative cloud around the word ‘scrawny’ and stop trying to critique, simple read and re-read. My body takes care of itself now, in a way. I re-read it constantly in terms of what it can do, of how it feels, not what a hermeneutics of suspicious critique might reveal about it. Re-reading my body meant touching it differently — no longer checking, paranoiacally, to see if I could still get my hand around my wrist or my upper arm, or if my ribs were still countable at night in bed, but instead letting my hands feel without judgment what my skin was like, feel that below it there is bone, is muscle, is fat. Describe and interpret the body, but not critique.

Loving sex with another woman who didn’t hate her body changed my life unlike anything I had tried before. A joint re-reading of my body, deeply reparative. Thus, queerness was my impure salvation, eventually. In simplified terms, self-repressed queerness was the cause of my need for salvation. (Of course I wonder if I had known and been comfortable as a queer person from age 12 if any of this would have happened.) Perhaps it is possible to say: queerness produced and constrained, and eventually liberated, me as a person with an eating disorder.

As Robyn Wiegman puts it, “the stakes, as I see it, are much higher, as I have come to wonder what it means to confer love on an object as a tactical strategy in rescuing one’s self from condemnation.”⁴³ What does it mean, indeed? For this particular woman, it means love and self-love, self-compassion, are the tactical strategies that reparative reading offers as a means of rescuing a precarious body from the serious precipice of *self*-condemnation. Without the possibility of re-reading myself as a *queer* with an eating disorder (and a fluctuatingly androgynous one at that), recovery, as a

⁴³ Wiegman 12.

reparative reading practice of the body, would have been impossible. It lets me read myself, my body, lets me re-interpolate myself into standing more fully, and more forgivingly, more attentively, without suspicion, before the mirror.

Conclusion

Reading practices that queer both bodies of work and physical bodies have the kind of material and discursive necessity for survival that hope does in José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*. Both histories of thought considered here are subject to not just reparative readings, but *re-readings*. Honoring Love's reading of Sedgwick as rendering the choice between paranoid and reparative readings as impossible, I argue for an understanding of (queer) eating disorder experience as characterized by an interaction between both modes of reading: the paranoid reading of one's own body and others' responses to it as (one possible) engine and origin of the disorder, and yet the paranoid reading that is itself diagnostic, the turning point(s) between disorder and the slow, faltering performance of reading one's body again, but reparatively — the re-reading practice of recovery.

I know I run the risk of privileging the reparative mode in yet another binary of sorts (paranoid/reparative), but I privilege it in brackets, and by no means in pure form — as something operational and nourishing to this singular (no-longer-) starved body, as something still yet useful for the study of eating disorders to take into consideration, as something that functions in tandem with its paranoid counterpart and yet leaves open other possibilities and modes.

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CHAPTER 7

PRACTICE: BODY OF WORK

Body of Work

In compiling the preceding texts, the (r)evolutions in thought and practice that have led to the production of *Body of Work* present themselves again to me. They are essays in the original sense of the word – *attempts* at thinking through, and thinking with (as Levi-Strauss would put it).

The thesis project that came out of these attempts at thought is a set of films that aim towards ethnographic film practice, taking a culturally-specific and compassionate look at a diverse group of individuals and how they experience the body, food, and their own intersecting identity in a contemporary American context. The films are based on a collection of six extended multi-interview oral histories with individuals in the Iowa City and Minneapolis areas who are recovering or recovered from eating disorders. Working together to craft reenactments, visual metaphors, and other filmic translations of each one's lived experience, my collaborators and I have compiled an anthology of short vignettes that empower or make meaning for the individual film participants as well.

From those I have so far created three videos: "*Performing my real truth*" (both single-channel and installation forms), which challenges the singularity of claiming an identity of recovered/not recovered through a proliferation of selves and a children's icebreaker game; *Show and/or Tell*, which juxtaposes the experience of a skilled photographer who hates having his picture taken; and *The Gap is not the only one*, which follows the slowness of recovery when diagnostic criteria themselves are moving targets.

With the remaining oral histories, and future ones that I hope to do, I will continue to create these video translations after receiving my MFA.

I am wary of claiming the ability to empower others at all, but I will note the moment in the third video, *The Gap is not the only one*, where Johanna, my collaborator, speaks candidly about how she feels that the process of making the film together has sped up or at least aided her recovery. (This makes me very happy, and feel that even if the film were not good, and it is good, that it was a success. Again it reflects and enacts my interest in the process as a space of ethical encounter, and one in which being responsible to the Other has enormous potential benefit.)

Synthesis

Chapter Two, Ethics, comprises a paper that was written in culmination of Professor Steve Choe's film theory course on The Ethics of Cinema, in the fall of 2013⁴⁴. In it, I am responding to the first critique of my work and its relation to power and consent, attempt to recalibrate my concepts of the why and how of filmmaking. In doing so, I begin to develop my commitment to ethics as a site of inquiry, and in particular become interested in the (nonfiction) filmmaking process *as* an ethical exchange, one that structures films as records of relationships. I write with a hopeful exuberance and a naïve (liberal) humanism, the latter being the primary critique that Steve had for the text.

Re-visiting it now, I agree - while it demonstrates particularly well the way that writing, research, and intellectual labor continue to inform my filmmaking, it is perhaps a more violently representational encounter than the ideas therein deserved. That is to say, I

⁴⁴ My first semester here.

make a lot of claims that I think I would better be able both articulate and support at this moment (and which I think that I do, in Chapter 5, Aesthetics).

All that being said, it served an important purpose in redirecting my thinking about a) the centrality of ethics to any documentary practice that I might pursue; b) the possibly greater potential in documentary forms for thinking through this essential area (ethics) than in the experimental practices I had previously been interested in. It is also in this work that I begin to conceptualize my practice in relation to ethnography, and in the wake of its writing, I turned more to anthropology for the kinds of ethical debates I was interested in applying to documentary practice.

That work also engaged primarily with the ethics of documentation – of turning on the camera and engaging in some kind of recording activity. The work in Chapter 5, which came out of extensive conversations and independent study with Jason Livingston, extended and elaborated the ‘stage’ of ethics that follows from (yet also entails) that of documentation. This is the ethics of representation⁴⁵, and through critiquing its relationship to shifting regimes of authenticity, I begin to articulate my ethics in more nuanced ways, and to (I think) enter more fully into the questioning stance of ethics that I thought I had figured out how to occupy in the paper on Ethics. Chapter 5 also justifies *and* complicates my insistence on thinking through my own thesis project in relation to ethnographic practice – specifically through how I am authenticating my own work, arguably through (relatively) durational ‘fieldwork’ and a deep consideration of ethics

⁴⁵ For mental shorthand, I sometimes divide these into production (ethics of documentation) and post-production (ethics of representation), but I want to note that these processes are not so concretely separable, and that they overlap, iterate, and slide into one another. This model also ignores other kinds of image apprehension, creation, and compilation that don't necessary involve subject-subject encounters, and those ones are important to think about too!

(that one I am not too worried about). I still question the immediacy with which my own experience with an eating disorder ‘authenticates’ my thesis film project, as I’ve certainly had collaborators speak directly to how my ‘coming out’ about my experience made them trust me, or be more willing to participate in the project. Ethically speaking, I’ve done my utmost not to abuse that shorthand of access, but I remain curious about how the trust and willingness that collaborators demonstrate is structured by the current understanding of authenticity, its relationship to power, and how it consolidates itself in identities.

Chapter Three, Methods, was written as the culmination of one term of fieldwork as part of a graduate level course on Ethnographic Field Methods, taught by Professor Elana Buch in the spring of 2014. This mini-ethnography ended up not being about spectatorship and audience as much as I thought it would be, but it allowed me to hold open that question (of audience) as I moved forward into conceiving of the thesis project, as something that would be both about and *for* individuals in recovery. And more importantly, it expanded my toolkit for meaning making, particularly honing various observational and descriptive attitudes. Rather obviously, of course, it served as structured, guided practice in using ethnographic field methods with new collaborators – all previous ethical speculation in my work had been about relationships that already existed, but here I had to build relationships through the work itself, which prepared me for the thesis project (and future projects, undoubtedly). It also sparked some of the thought about the relationship between identity and authenticity that became Chapter 5, as I noted how I gained access to communities and subjects through different parts of my own identity, in this case through my queerness (though this was powerfully mitigated by my age, to be honest).

I also see in that chapter on methods a greater willingness to gently learn from failure, a tone slightly different from the reactionary and declarative mode of Chapter 2, and an openness to letting the affective experience of an ethnographic or filmmaking process serve as meaningful data or content in itself.

Chapters Four and Six are together comprised my surveying (though arguably incomplete, quite deep) of the space into which my imagined thesis project could fit. In particular, the need for humanizing, complex, and diverse narratives around eating disorders became even more apparent than I had already expected. With both of these chapters in mind, I actively sought to not re-privilege anorexia as the ‘only’ or ‘correct’ eating disorder narrative, and to include a diversity of genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and eating disorder experiences. I feel that this aspect of the project – the need for *more* stories, not just one right story, remains open for me, as I haven’t had the chance yet to really explore diversity along the axes of age and class, and could certainly do more with gender and race. I remain excited to expand the collection of films to be even more diverse.

Chapter Six also arrives at the question that one must always ask of any film you are making: Where are you in this film?

I am the filmmaker. I am also in Chapter Six. (My voice is in two of the three videos completed, but I am there as the filmmaker.) Being in Chapter Six, the attempt at understanding some aspects of queer theory by applying reparative readings to my own body, is not something that shows up overtly in any of the film work, but it is present in the attitude with which I kept working after writing that piece. As I note, my etiology and recovery were fuzzy (and remain so in certain ways), but wrapping myself in theory for a

few months and understanding the fuzziness for itself made me – for lack of a clearer articulation – more ‘ready’ to make the thesis films.

As I’ve worked towards completing the films in *Body of Work*, I’ve tried more and more to ask specific ethical questions of the project. Lately I’ve wondered: is an *ethical* film about eating disorders inherently uncinematic? And, as I continue to think through the relationship between an audience and a film: what is the difference – and is there a danger of conflating – the ethical and the comfortable-but-unethical?

When the collection is ready for distribution, my aim is for it ultimately be screened for ‘regular’ audiences, but also other individuals seeking to recover, providing a source of hope and new perspective on the individual particularities and cultural complexities of these experiences.

APPENDIX A

ORAL HISTORY QUESTIONS

Questions for oral history interviews with individuals about their experience with ED recovery; Anna Swanson, interviewer

(Notes for interviewer: don't assume 'recovery' or 'eating disorder' as a given term *or* 'state')

Opening Script Notes (Can Be Paraphrased)

How are you feeling about giving this oral history? Do you have any questions before we start?

Is there anything I should know to keep things safe and comfortable for you?

Terms - importance of my understanding terms as you use them ('eating disorder', 'recovery', etc)

I'd like to start from a very open-ended place, and let you guide the conversation as much as possible. I have some questions prepared, but am first and foremost interested in hearing the story of your eating disorder/recovery as you conceive of it. I'll make sure we hit the topics I think are most essential, but please feel free to move in whatever directions you wish with the conversation, (really no such thing as "off topic" here!) in order to tell the stor(ies) as they make sense to you. Thanks!

Questions

1. Could you please begin by stating your full name?
2. When and where were you born and/or did you grew up?

3. How would you describe yourself as a person? Perhaps share some stories/moments that represent the qualities you see in yourself.
4. What do you think about (or what is your attitude towards) eating disorders?
5. How (and when) did you first become aware that you might have an eating disorder? What was that like for you?
6. What was the process of seeking and beginning treatment like? Was there a moment you knew you needed or wanted to seek treatment, or that what you were experiencing was negative (if you see or saw it that)?
7. Please describe your recovery (if that's a word that you choose). How do you make sense of it, think through it, visualize it, see it as a metaphor...?
8. What was most effective or instrumental in your recovery process? Have there been detriments or sources of setback?
9. Where do you see yourself at right now?
10. Are there sources of support, resources, or information that you might have benefited from having access to earlier in your recovery process?
11. With the benefit of "hindsight", do you have any theories about the origin of your own experience?
12. Are there other things you want to talk about? Other questions I should ask?
13. As follow-up, how was the experience of giving the oral history for you?

Other/general topic areas to discuss in addition to or interspersed with above questions (allowing interviewee to primarily guide the narrative and topics of discussion)

diagnosis

etiology (origin of ED)

childhood/growing up

treatment - emotional experience, financial, physical, etc

attitudes toward food

family and friends

sharing/not sharing about the ED

sources of support

therapy

relationships and EDs

in-patient experiences

out-patient experiences

body image

gender/race/sexuality intersecting with experience

interactions with media and the ED/recovery

terms: 'control'; 'perfection'; 'fitness'

APPENDIX B

COLLABORATOR CONTRACT

Possible Recovery Project: Experiences of Eating Disorders and Recovery

Informed consent and copyright permission for oral history interview, images, and personal documents.

Participant's name:

Mailing address:

Phone and/or email:

I voluntarily agree to be interviewed for this sensory ethnographic study, as part of Anna Swanson's (hereafter, "the filmmaker") MFA thesis film production, of the experiences of individuals in the U.S. with eating disorders and/or disordered eating in relation to recovery and other topics. I understand that the following items may be created from my interview(s):

- an audio and/or video recording
- an edited transcript and summary
- thematic coding and/or analysis of that transcript
- a photograph of me
- copies of any personal documents or additional photos or media that I wish to share for the project

- a short film using audio clips, concepts, and/or images from the interview, to be collaboratively conceived and executed by the filmmaker with my feedback at various junctures along the way

I understand that my interview (and other items above) may be distributed to the public for educational purposes, including formats such as print, public programming, and the Internet. I will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on transcripts, written materials, and audiovisual products derived from my interview before they are released in a public manner. Also, I agree to freely share my interview (and other items above) under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. This means that I retain the copyright, but that the public may freely copy, modify, and share these items for non-commercial purposes under the same terms, if they include the original source information.

In return, the filmmaker promises to send one free copy of the interview recording, transcript, and related items to my address and/or email address above. Any exceptions to this agreement [such as a request for anonymity] must be listed below:

Permission granted:

Participant's signature	Date
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Filmmaker's signature	Date
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APPENDIX C

INSTALLATION SCHEMATIC & SPECIFICATIONS

“Performing my real truth” (Anna Swanson, 2015) — technical and other specifications

Technical Requirements for Use

Three screens are each constructed from a white vinyl shower curtain (~70”x70”), hung from two C-stands using clothespins attached at the sides and middle of the top of the curtain. These are arranged in an equilateral triangle, with space to enter, exit, or sit in a folding chair at each corner of the screen triangle. One of three synced video channels is rear-projected onto each screen, so that viewers can experience the triangle from both outside and inside, and from all angles, allowing for an architectural echo of the ethics of relation that the piece, its characters, and their ‘revelations’ invoke and evoke. Two stereo speakers are paired with each screen to provide a directional experience of each characters’ space.

Construction Requirements

Projectors may need to be placed on apple boxes for proper throw, but otherwise the mechanism can be visible and an open gallery space is sufficient and appropriate.

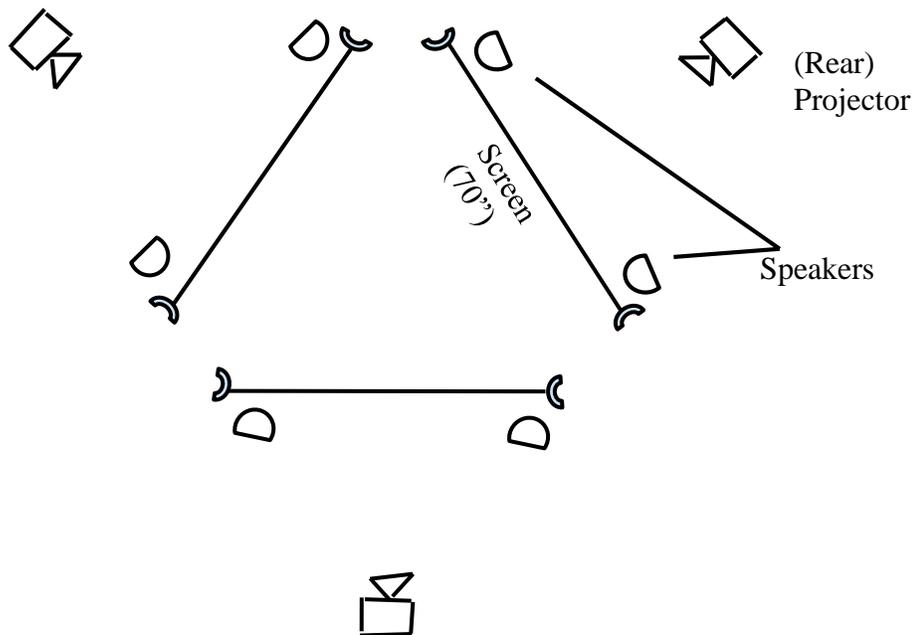
Duration and Sound Details

Each channel of video has its own stereo sound mix; the sequence of the piece lasts slightly under 15 minutes, but every time it loops (which is intended to be perceived

as continuous and seamless) the videos switch channels, and the process of playing the game (i.e. the content of the videos) begins again.

Space Requirements

Some measurements vary due to dependence on projector throw, but generally, a room of 20'x20' minimum is best.



Materials Needed

3 shower curtains

6 C-stands

12 clothespins

3 metal folding chairs

3 HD projectors (rear-projection capabilities)

3 pairs of stereo speakers

[1 Mac computer with QLab3 and a distribution amp/TripleHead2go] OR [3 Mac

computers that can be synced manually or with WatchOut or a similar software program]

OR [3 BrightSign HD222s]

Several cables (most likely HDMI)