How to Make a Queer Counterpublic

by

Jenna Chasse

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Abstract

Situated at the intersections of ethnography, relational aesthetics, and curatorial practice, this thesis explores and promotes the radical aspirations of queer worldmaking through an analysis of COVID-19 specific queer exchange across digital spheres. Drawing from queer theorists, Lauren Berlant, Michael Warner, and José Muñoz alongside the creative contributions of three fellow queer artists, Madeleine Lychek, B Wijshijer, and Racquel Rowe, a critical future – one that is ripe with queer desire, exchange, and intervention – is embodied within both the making and writing components of this project. The aim of this work is to unearth *everything you wanted to know about sex (but queer theory forgot to tell you)*. That is, to discuss the kinds of exchange that queer theory has too often omitted from its discourse which is typically the kind that heterosexual culture is unable to name. This might be things like fucking your friends, fucking for money, fantasizing about sex with objects, masturbating with strangers online, camming, and so on. It might also be the kind of sex that doesn't immediately read as pleasurable or erotic, but rather, perplexing or awkward. A collaborative worldmaking project that began as a theoretical query of capitalist economies of exchange, this thesis is an interventionist curatorial undertaking wherein a group of queer collaborators exhibit their sex and exchange as it is mediated by *publics*. From here, we can think about how proliferation of these publics might inform new modalities for queerness and what this could mean for the making of queer utopia. Though the process of creating queer worlds is never this linear, this thesis interrogates the heteronormative present, looks towards a queer future, and exhibits a host of exchanges, pleasures, and sex that lie at the center of this worldmaking process.

Keywords: (counter)public, utopia, worldmaking, exchange

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The writing of this thesis took place on the northern shores of Lake Ontario in so-called Toronto, a city situated on the traditional territories of several nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat, and is governed by the Dish With One Spoon land agreement to peaceably share the region's lands. These territories, in which I am currently based, are also the lands I have grown up on as a settler and uninvited guest. I am indebted by the opportunity to learn, work and live on these territories, and am grateful for all they sustain and make possible.

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Introduction

In high school I wrote a really bad poem about what sex was like for the first time. Bad because it lacked any and all poetic convention but good because it became a kind of emblem of what sex meant to me at the time. It was sprinkled with words like “lovemaking”, “quiet”, “forever” where what began as a detailed description of sensation and physicality became a timeline of some fantastical future filled with house-hunting, happiness, and babies shared with my ninth grade boyfriend. Then, last year, I found another poem I wrote in 2019 after a horrible weekend titled *Good News / Bad News* which goes like this:

> Another weekend from hell
> where I thought that if I did it just right, that if
> I mastered the aggressive presentation of the cunt I
> could convince someone here to fuck me
> the way I’ve always liked

Much different from my high school poem. Less of a narrative *around* sex and more of a distinct yearning for the act itself, the poem captures a suspended moment in time driven completely by consciousness: pleasure, aggression, fucking, frustration. It’s easy to credit the candidness of this poem to simply “growing up” where age and maturity turn fantasy into reality and naivety into wisdom. But I think it’s more than that. The remainder of the thesis dives into what I mean by this. Chapter one is a deconstruction of the hetero life narrative and an introduction to the kinds of exchanges that actuate the poetic transition described above. Chapter two is a conversation with queer theorists, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, about the fundamental link between queerness, publics, and worldmaking. This chapter changes “queerness: an identity” to “queerness: a mode of becoming” whereby the meaning of queer is best understood as a collaborative *public* eandeavour rather than an individual label. Finally, chapter three presents the possible forms this public endeavour could take which, in this case, is the making of a book

full of queer content through a collaborative process. The nuances of the queer worldmaking process are outlined in this chapter, alongside a speculative account of how a project like this effectively foregrounds queer utopic visions and new worlds.

Discovering these poems and comparing their stark differences was not as much an indication of cynicism or "coming of age" so much as a development of queerness at its core. While I was reading these two poems and several others I had written in between, I noticed that many of them exhibited varying degrees of affect and consciousness where the content of the writing shifted away from linearity, narrative, and consistency and towards descriptive moments of affect, sensation, and pleasure. Most likely, this transition can be attributed to my burgeoning queer desire, but mostly my growing distrust of heterosexual love to deliver the "good life" it promised.

Chapter One: Exchanges

"Wait… I didn't get the Zoom link!?"[1]

The idea of the "good life" is interesting to me because I wonder: *is it really good?* It seems that we can learn a lot from the stories of heterosexual love plots that have gone astray where, as queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner point out, there is a whole public environment of therapeutic television and other media genres dedicated to witnessing the constant failure of heterosexual ideologies and institutions (I'm talking about shows like The Bachelor, Dr. Phil, Love Island, and so on).[2] Every day we witness heterosexuality's shortcomings, yet straight culture is newly astonished to find that people who are committed to hetero intimacy are nevertheless unhappy. But then why is it that heterosexuality and its ideologies never get blamed for this despair? Why is it always the couple's fault for being unable to communicate or the spouse's fault for having an affair, but never heterosexuality's fault for unconsentingly boxing us into a forever-binding narrative that condemns any kind of exploration or intimacy outside of it.

This may seem unimportant, trivial. I am most definitely not the only teenager to have fabricated a life with the first person she had sex with only to find the "high school sweetheart" fever dream is rarely true. I pose these questions at the beginning of chapter one simply because they are the questions I started with. Similarly, I invoke these poems because, first, they are personal illustrations of very different sexual worlds which offer some insight into how these ideas and questions have been and continue to be activated in my life. Second, their changing

[1] Quotes and banter from Zoom meetings with collaborators during the making process.
[2] Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. (1998). "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry*, 556.

content inadvertently reveals the deeply illusive nature of the heterosexual life narrative which prompts the belief that queer desire cannot be satisfied within the current condition of heteronormativity. When I say "queer desire" I do not mean only same-sex relationships – we know that straight-identifying people find ways to fulfill their queer desires in both public and private settings all the time. Rather, "queer" defined by theorists Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant as an expression of utopian desire for unconflicted personhood.[3] In other words, heterosexual culture – which Berlant and Warner describe as a complex cluster of practices (both sexual and other) that get confused with the love plot of intimacy, and therefore signify belonging to society in a deep and normal way – does not allow for the expression of non-normative desire without serious moralizing or regulatory consequences which can be, in some contexts, fatal.[4]

This is precisely the premise on which the thesis unfolds: *a fundamental interest in the systems of publicity, membership, and affirmation that queer people uphold through a host of exchanges enacted in our daily lives.* Drawing from a diverse field of queer theorists and practitioners including Michael Warner, Lauren Berlant, and José Muñoz, this research aims to make visible modes of exchange that queer worlds foreground. I use the phrase "modes of exchange" rather than "non-normative desires" because the interactions I'm interested in here transcend sex, though intercourse and physical pleasure are certainly involved. By modes of exchange, I mean a more expansive host of collaborative and relational projects, discussions, practices, reciprocities, negotiations, choices, and other modes of feeling, being, and touching that we (as a heteronormative society) may even be unable to identify at this point.

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 554.

The thesis is structured so that the methodology typifies the negotiated exchanges this research aims to depict. This is to say that the works embedded within this thesis *are*, in and of themselves, embodiments of queer exchanges which inform queer worlds. Rooted in collaboration and improvisation, myself (curator) and three queer performance artists, Madeleine Lychek, Raquel Rowe, and B Wijshijer, have been engaged in an ongoing exchange of dialogue, images, texts, memes, resources, and visual art in hopes of instigating a different kind of interaction based on the types of sex and pleasure for which the hetero world has almost no intuitional matrix and has deliberately pushed to the margins. This type of pleasure is, as Berlant and Warner argue, not necessarily sex acts (though they can be) but forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that act as *publics* (more on this later) in the sense that they are accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity.[5]

For queer folks, these pleasures often take the shape of ephemeral relations such as gossip, clubbing, sites of drag, and other queer performances that work to affirm queer lives. For this project, however (partially as a result of COVID-19 but also because of the unique encounters offered by the vast container that is the internet), all the relations depicted have been developed across digital spheres. This means that sexts, memes, resource-sharing via social media, online therapy sessions, online strip teases, Zoom calls with friends, camming, and other forms of online exchange are at the forefront of analysis in the following chapters.

Though these interactions occur within and through the digital milieu, we chose to construct a book of material titled *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic* – filled with not just documentation but transformative collaborations through a series of virtual exchanges that were established during the actual bookmaking process. One artist, for example, uploads something to

[5] Ibid., 558.

the shared bookmaking space and another artist comments, notates, and/or artistically manipulates the work. In this way, the art of the individual becomes the art of the collective through a virtual exchange of ideas and text. The online tool (*Blurb*) we used to edit and collaborate became a kind of "censor-less" space for nude photos, abject art, and other content typically filtered and removed from platforms like Instagram and Twitter. Thus, what was initially thought to be a curated exhibition transitioned into a complete subversion of curatorial strategy whereby the gallery becomes the book, and the artist-curator relationship collapses into a wonderful mess of negotiated intimacies.[6]

Following this unexpected turn, my role as curator in this context is reimagined as ethnographer, facilitator, observer, artist, participant, and collaborator, which suggests valuable links between an array of relational fields and the making of queer worlds. Because this work is research and time-based, ethnography as a methodological approach becomes central to the work. I want to invoke scholar Keith Murphy's definition of ethnography here to emphasize the fundamental ways in which the practices executed in this project are adjacent to ethnographic intervention yet inclined toward artistic production. He says,

> ethnography is, at its core, a method for understanding social formations and forms of life —or perhaps more accurately, forms of living. The word "form" here is not meant in its vaguest sense, as a proxy for "stuff that more or less goes together," but in its more

[6] T.L. Cowan and Jasmine Rault's essay titled *Onlining Queer Acts: Digital Research Ethics and Caring for Risky Archives* considers the lack of academic research protocols for how to ethically publish, circulate, and use the proliferating archive of digital cultural materials. They argue that, though digital research ethics are sketchy, many ethnographers do, in fact, develop ethical parameters around their research through care practices and negotiated intimacies with the people they're working with. For this project, the transition to the book form (via *Blurb*) is, first, a response to wide-spread censorship across digital platforms like Instagram and Twitter, where both the making and archiving of queer work (often nude or abject) becomes virtually impossible. And second, an attempt to make room *for collaborating* with consenting participants wherein the "archive" is refunctioned as a shared space for both ethnographers and intercoluters to change, edit, rewrite, or delete material or documentation, and to make decisions *as collaborators* about what is published and how they are represented. In this way, the bookmaking space accomodates for the kind of "risky" and "sensitive" content this project (and many other queer-centric projects) takes on, where there is zero censorship and editing access is granted to everyone involved.

> technical sense of discernible configurations and arrangements of elements that, even if not obvious, are still recoverable with some effort.[7]

Though working with three performance artists whose contributions were initially artistic, the primary curiosity of this project generated a much more expansive response from the artists which aligned with Murphy's definition. Our impromptu collaborations solidified meaningful accounts of queer existence which detailed patterns and exchanges that organize relations between ourselves and other people, how these patterns are distributed and organized in space, and the ways in which people make sense of and follow and/or bend the rules binding them to specific activities and to each other. Unexpectedly, the outcome was the interesting hybridization of ethnography and art wherein the deliberate assembly of people to talk, work, and simply *be together* in formations that likely would not spontaneously occur – that is, orchestrating encounters and interventions in people's everyday lives – became an artistic undertaking in and of itself.[8]

Alongside typical curatorial work like scheduling meeting times, gathering works, and facilitating dialogue between my peers, my role became to enable the making of what Grant Kester dubs "dialogic art" which is a style of production that eschews the typical materials and methods of artistic creation – painting, sculpture, collage, photography, and so on – in favor of fostering specific human interactions as the very *stuff* of the artwork itself.[9] These interactions required that I implicate myself within the project in a specific and intimate fashion. Unlike traditional curatorial approaches, which often involves hanging art on walls in a white cube setting, my tasks shifted to accommodate the changing parameters of the project. Mediating

[7] Murphy, Keith. (2017). "Art, Design, and Ethical Forms of Ethnographic Intervention." *Between Matter and Method: Encounters in Anthropology and Art*, 99.
[8] Ibid., 101.
[9] Ibid., 100.

dialogue and cultivating sex positive discussion, prompts, advice, feedback, transparency, sharing, and kink-positive space for nude photo exchange, became my central role. In this way, the methodological approach of this project is a direct disruption of common curatorial strategy wherein meaningful interventions are explicitly introduced in ways that alter both the types of artistic forms produced *and* the quality of the artist-curator relationship that would've ensued had the curator not adopted a more ethnographic position and amplified attention to this segment of the social world.

Keith Murphy explains that there are two distinct features of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics that also sit at the center of projects like these. First, the notion of artistic form is radically re-imagined in this framework where socially ordered contours like human action and interaction, patterns of bodily motion, and arrangements of people in space are all rendered eligible for artistic manipulation.[10] Second, work that draws on relational aesthetics is almost uniformly political in both tone and topic. This is obviously so in research concerned with queer folks, but even in terms of their basic mechanics, Murphy argues that many of these projects attempt to instantiate what Nicolas Bourriaud calls "everyday micro-utopias" where "the artist is able to catalyze emancipatory insights *through* dialogue."[11] The results of such arrangements may not be predetermined or even predictable, but that rarely matters. Instead, by prioritizing Bourriaud's "criterion of co-existence" in relational aesthetics the artist or curator is emulating the work of all great art by critically revealing an otherwise unacknowledged social reality through aesthetic experience.[12]

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 101.
[12] Murphy, Keith. (2017). "Art, Design, and Ethical Forms of Ethnographic Intervention," 101.

I want to take a moment to name these emancipatory insights cultivated through what Bourriaud terms "everyday micro-utopias" because it is precisely within these small utopias that two very essential components of the queer world-making project are satisfied: first, the assertion of queer culture in ways other than through official publics of opinion, the state, or norms of privatization often associated with sexuality; and second, the reinforcement of queer knowledge practice that centers *messy* kinds of queer sex, fluids, and other bodily functions called, "The New Pornography."[13] Mainly, these things go hand-in-hand as they both subvert heteronormative systems of knowledge transfer and untangle identity politics from its deep entrenchment in queer theory, but they deserve thorough illumination, nonetheless.

As four queer women, our dialogue centered on the specific ways in which sapphic desire manifests in our everyday lives and exchanges. We joked about how many of the memes we make and share use words like "brats," "tenders," "daddy," "girl best friends," "gal-pals," "kinksters," and "U-Hauling" to describe how queer people develop a type of queer-infused vocabulary that is only recognized as intimate or sexual in queer culture.[14] We discussed how we move quickly through partners (U-Haul), fantasize about our hot female therapists, meet women online through gay dating apps, OnlyFans, and Instagram, engage in polyamory, and derive

[13] Haver, William. (2002). "The Logic of the Lure and the New Pornography." Foreword to John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of The Lure*, 2.

[14] This list of terms frequently appears in memes, and other text on the internet (Instagram, Reddit, and OnlyFans specifically). Here are their meanings:
Brat – Someone who snarks back at their partner during BDSM play.
Tenders – A personality designation typically used by lesbians, bisexuals, pansexuala, softbois, and nonbinary folks to indicate a preference towards enforcing radical vulnerability.
Daddy – A name used for a sex partner or significant other in both heterosexual and queer relationships. In queer relationships this is someone who frequently tops (penetrates during sex).
Girl best friends/galpals - Another term for female sexual partner.
Kinksters – Someone who enjoys and participates regularly in kink culture or "kinky" sexual activities.
U-Hauling – Refers to two queer women who move in together very soon after they start dating.

pleasure from camming, stripping, and other forms of sex work with men and women alike.[15] Berlant and Warner call these practices "queer insurgents" which empower queer people to sexualize hetero relations (and terminology) and then use these relations to witness intense and personal affect while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation.[16] From here, we realized that our understandings and embodiments of intimacy bear little to no necessary relation to domestic space, kinship, coupling and monogamy, property, or the nation but *do*, in fact, bear an intrinsic relation to a queer counterpublic – an indefinitely accessible world fully conscious of its subordinate relation.[17] In this way, queer culture functions well outside of heteronormative systems of intimacy, or more accurately, stealthy within the concepts that the hetero world makes available.

Messy kinds of sex and pleasure are also at the center of these conversations. Again, as four queer women, we rarely see our preferred type of sex represented in hetero media, medical science, pornography, and other national recognitions of intimacy. When I say "type of sex" I do not necessarily mean "same-sex" but rather messy, dirty, sweaty, unruly, unsure, loud, and vulgar kinds of intimacy that constitute much of our queer sexual lives. Queer scholar, Michael O'Rourke, argues that queer theory has a lot to say about sexuality but very little to tell us about sex simply because it is so hung up on identity that it forgets about sex acts, which have little or nothing to do with identity at all.[18] Queer knowledge practice takes courage and involves a

[15] OnlyFans is a content subscription service where content creators can earn money from users who subscribe to their content. It is most popular with sex workers and allows content creators to receive funding directly from their fans on a monthly basis.
[16] Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. (1998). "Sex in Public." 558.
[17] Ibid.
[18] O'Rourke, Michael. (2014). "The Big Secret About Queer Theory." *Bodily Fluids*, 2.

certain risk that requires the subject to not just perform but celebrate the kind of truth-telling that the hetero world has (historically) condemned (often in lethal ways) for queer folks.

Our conversations around messy sex were mainly hilarious – an intimate sharing of funny (and hot) sex stories involving things like the use of toys and strap-ons, pegging, anal after-care, lube, period sex, urine and fecal matter, cramps, gagging, yeast infections, douching, urinary tract infections, getting cum in undesirable (or desirable) places, the musty smell of sex and body odor, and so on. This exercise was liberating because not only did it feel good to be *this* honest, but it felt undeniably political to celebrate the abject in this way. Philosopher Johnny Golding describes the emancipatory element of this exchange:

> It is the courage to speak out, to provoke, to incite into action without taking oneself out of the relationship; to invent anew by supposing 'it could be otherwise' and then figuring out how this 'otherwise' might become real, alive, take root and flourish, without preventing 'telling it as it is' from being heard [...] Not shock for shock's sake; not offence just because it could be done; not a sterile rationality backing any decision; but rather, a kind of connection, a certain kind of care and attention to detail; a certain kind of courage, curiosity, stylistics of existence, generosity, intellect, humor—call it what you will—a complex/heterogeneic logic of sense to make 'it' known; to make 'it' happen.[19]

William Haver, whose work Golding is drawing from here, calls this, "The New Pornography" wherein the appeal of this anarchic sexuality lies in its, "fragmentary, anonymous, perverse, always in flight from the rigor mortis" nature.[20] There is *something* about the kind of sex that is all at once new and archaic, impossible to name, not sure of what's to come, and yet not concerned with anything other than what is happening right now, right here, like this.

More examples like this will surface as I detail the contents of the book and the dialogical exchanges that informed them in the chapters to come. This chapter, however, has been about introducing core concepts, outlining the parameters of the project, and foreshadowing the quality

[19] Golding, Johnny. (2014). "The 9th Technology of Otherness: A Certain Kind of Debt." *Queer Texturealities,* 103.
[20] Haver, William. (2002). "The Logic of the Lure and the New Pornography." xi.

of collaboration exhibited throughout both the remainder of the text and the physical book itself. The next chapters provide concrete examples of queer worldmaking – a detailed look into the queer social practices and modalities of exchange that are happening right now, within a heterosexual present, during a pandemic. With distinct queer and feminist theoretical entanglements, this research also contributes to broader scholarship on futurity and queer conceptions of sex and pleasure. Ultimately, this thesis celebrates queerness as a structured and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.[21] Contextually, it offers an account of queer exchange during COVID-19, which considers visceral and ephemeral qualities across digital spheres alongside new modalities and negotiated intimacies that promote radical publics and pleasures for queer futures. Embedded is a type of queer strength that perseveres despite regulatory and anti-queer forces, wherein the notion of utopia is postulated and reinvented as the current hetero world becomes increasingly unbearable. Though not everything presented here is necessarily the kind of sex that is hot or sloppy or even always enjoyable, these examples are modes of exchange that occur within publics organized around sex, and they demonstrate a complex and nuanced series of practices in which new pleasures, cultures, and intelligibilities can thrive.

[21] Muñoz, José Esteban. (2009). "Introduction: Feeling Utopia." *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 3.

Chapter Two: Queer Publics Through Sex and Pleasure

"Np, I usually upload my more adult content i.e. nudes, masturbation to pornhub, and after the viewers tend to sub to my OnlyFans which is barely nsfw.[22] It's weird."

This chapter questions the viability of queer theory as a pragmatic force and foregrounds collaboration as a preferable vehicle of production. Thinking primarily with theorists Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, I discuss the important link between queerness and publics as mediated by the act of worldmaking. I outline the necessary elements involved in constructing a queer counterpublic through subversive engagements with "the everyday" and detail the types of making and collaborative work these publics inspire. Before diving into major concepts, however, I want to provide a brief summary of the way in which myself and my peers arrived at these ideas in the attempt to document the development of thought carried throughout this project.

[22] NSFW: means not safe for work. Internet slang or shorthand used to mark links to content, videos or website pages the viewer may not wish to be seen looking at in a public, formal or controlled environment.

At the point of beginning substantial collaborative work with my peers, the practical goals of this project were still unclear. I had established an ongoing dialogue with three fellow queer artists who were interested in a type of improvisational endeavour, though the foundation of this endeavour was becoming increasingly difficult to pinpoint. We knew that we wanted to generate something queer, multiple, pleasure-seeking, and honest but had no concrete understanding of how this project might be tactically realized, so to speak. We were all familiar with queer theory and its metadiscourse including practices like literary methodology and textual interpretations – a way of theorizing how queerness can be applied in various disciplinary contexts. But this wasn't the thing we were interested in working toward; my research was not a queer reading of a text or even an analysis of an object to which queer theory could be applied. Instead, I sought a more involved set of practices that worked to embody what it actually *means to be queer* and the ways in which one does the continual work of making queer worlds. What I truly wanted to observe was not how either historical or contemporary content could be understood through a queer lens but rather how queer subjects bring a different world into *being* through a series of choices, exchanges, and making which often work to blur the distinction between private and public, normative and non-normative.

Moving forward in this process, then, meant to acknowledge the pragmatic limitations of queer theory. I say "pragmatic" to communicate the experiential restrictions presented by theory as opposed to practice. In other words, the ideas we sought to depict were better linked by practice and collaboration, not theory. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that "queer commentary" rather than "queer theory" might be a more accurate term to describe the type of deliverables that queerness manufactures.[23] Queer theory, unlike other academic theory, has

[23] Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. (1995). "Guest Column: What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" *PMLA*, 343.

incited a massive visual industry of literature and aesthetics including special issues, collages, reviews, anthologies. Furthermore, theory typically intends an academic object whereas "commentary" has vital collaborations in different genres and thus cannot be assimilated to a single discourse, let alone a propositional procedure.[24] This distinction is important because it alludes to the act of making and collaboration as generative forces instead of the near impossible attempt at answering a question posed by theory. This is not to say that queer theory is invaluable or illegitimate, it is however, to frustrate the common assertation that queer theory has only academic politics whereby the word "queer" has a stable referent.[25]

In my view, queerness is varied, risky, ambitious, and ambivalent. It is less concerned with providing a solution to a theoretical problem and more focused on generating knowledge and/or commentary that is central to living. Borrowing again from Berlant and Warner, this commentary (unlike theory) aspires to create publics.[26] In this case, publics are not populations of self-identified queer people in different locations. Rather, they are constructed loci of new knowledge that make available different forms of membership at different times.[27] I use the word "loci" to emphasize that queer publics are not necessarily buildings or physical sites, but rather perceived locations of something abstract where pleasures and intelligibilities can be realized and disseminated. This is not to say that queer publics cannot be linked to infrastructure or geography

[24] Ibid.
[25] This is to say that queer theory implies a determined system of (often) academic ideas intended to explain something where the word "queer" denotes a concrete or fixed thing, though we know that queerness is not singular or stable. The word "feminist" in feminist theory, for example, broadly describes someone who is concerned with gender inequality. "Queer," however, does not seem to have the same steadfast referent, thus making "queer theory" a poor term to describe the very nonacademic and expansive exchanges that I describe in this thesis and often arise from queer studies more generally.
[26] Ibid., 344.
[27] Ibid.

– we know that queers have claimed property and mapped locales for decades. The main difference is that queer publics do not *require* a fixed facility or modality to be erected.

The process of making queerness imaginable, then, is not necessarily a matter of choosing to enter the right queer environments or being granted access to certain public spaces. It is more so a matter of constructing a social context of *being* that is no longer burdened by the invisible normativity of heterosexual culture. For many of us, this means challenging major conditions of the private-public binary so that sex practices are related not just to family or romance, but also to the public sphere and everyday life. It makes sense, then, that queerness becomes most visible in the quotidian for those of us who are engaged in the act of making the world queer. And it is no coincidence that heterosexual culture works very hard to keep sex private (i.e., only legitimizes sex and pleasure if it happens in the privacy of one's home) when they know that queer folks do not typically align with this dichotomy. This is not to say that queers are engaging in public displays of sex because we are hypersexual or uncontrollable, but rather, that queer people often use the public sphere to push normative boundaries of intimacy because it is precisely these boundaries that facilitate our subjugation.

The private-public boundary is a common site of queer analysis — one that I am sure most queer people have defied at some point. Beyond this point, though, the question becomes: *So now what?* I might choose to kiss my partner in the Uber, for example, or introduce my partner to my boss at the workplace holiday party but that does not mean the world is magically liberated from oppressive systems. It simply means that I have created a temporary tear in the fabric of heteronormativity which, though valuable and disruptive, fails to provide sustainable change because the threat of heteronormativity remains too pervasive. In this example, the "threat of heteronormativity" is not necessarily heteronormativity itself but rather the threat of

violence and/or moral regulation that could ensue from choosing to break with heteronormative practice in public. Ultimately, the likelihood that hetero practice will seep into a temporarily queered space and insidiously reclaim it as its own is too strong.[28]

One might ask at this point: how, then, might a queer person carve out space in the current world that does not run the risk of being dominated by heteronormativity? I suggest that queerness becomes truly tenable not by the carving out of space but through the *development of a world outside of heteronormativity* wherein queer people can thrive. Feminist and queer scholars call this process "queer worldmaking."[29] For example, in *Disidentifications,* José Muñoz says

> The concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances – both theatrical and everyday rituals – have the ability to establish alternative views of the world. These alternative vistas are more than simply views or perspective; they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of 'truth' that subjugate minoritarian people.[30]

Here, Muñoz confirms that queer worldmaking is the process of constructing an entirely new world that is absent of heteronormativity. Unlike the seemingly dead-end outcome of a momentary tear in the social fabric, the *making* of new queer worlds is rooted in development and sustainability. It is an ongoing exploration that not only imagines new contemporary practices but also new horizons in a way that effectively queers the concept of futurity.[31]

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[28] A very basic but relatable example is when certain bars host drag shows or other queer-centric events (i.e., gay meet-up nights, drag bingo) and cishet men show up, effectively thwarting any efforts to cultivate a fully queer and safe space.

[29] Though José Muñoz coined the term "queer worldmaking," various scholars influenced by Muñoz's work like Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, and Ann Cvetkovich have used the concept to further their own thinking and writing around queerness, temporality, and affect.

[30] Muñoz, José Esteban. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Cultural Studies of the Americas),* University Of Minnesota Press, 195.

[31] Futurity is used here not to describe typical fantasies of heterosexual reproduction, but rather Cyril James's notion of "a future in the present" (referenced by José Muñoz) to describe a refunctioned notion of utopia that presents as a kernel of political possibility within a heterosexual present. This notion of utopia services existing subaltern politics.

I understand that the above definition of queer worldmaking is quite conjectural. Wrapped in abstractions that seem unable to penetrate the material world, this concept can read as theoretically dense even though it is grounded in making and doing. A deeper engagement with the concept, however, illustrates that there are many desirable effects including the idea that queer worldmaking does not need to locate a crack or a tear in the social fabric to thrive. If anything, queer worldmaking is rectified in its unique ability to undermine the normative while simultaneously functioning as a "bottom-up engagement with the everyday."[32] In other words, the act of queer worldmaking both undermines and acknowledges normativities, rendering it fairly permeable and profuse.

Queer worldmaking, however, cannot necessarily be conceptualized in a linear fashion. Muñoz offers a comprehensive description of worldmaking as a conceptual force but omits the part about it being a process brought to life by a host of exchanges, relationships, and freedoms. Sexuality scholar, Gust Yep, fills this gap when he claims that queer worldmaking consists of creating spaces where "individual freedom and collective possibilities" are thoroughly explored.[33] Cultural communication professors, Thomas Nakayama and Charles Morris, describe queer worldmaking as, "not a strategic plan organized by anyone, but a bottom-up engagement with the everyday."[34] Remembering, of course, that the proliferation of any world radically altered is a long-term process that demands an endless repetition of non-normative espousal.

[32] Nakayama, Thomas K., and Charles E. Morris. (2015). "Worldmaking and Everyday Interventions." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 5.

[33] Gust A. Yep. (2003). "The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies." *Journal of Homosexuality*, 35.
[34] Nakayama, Thomas K., and Charles E. Morris. (2015). "Worldmaking and Everyday Interventions." 5.

In Deleuzian and Guattarian terms, we might say the making of a queer world is fundamentally rhizomatic, a multiplicity of queer paths that resist chronology and organization.[35] Invoking the rhizome here offers an effective illustration of the ways in which queer worldmaking is not static; not only is it a bottom-up engagement with the quotidian but it is also a growing public – not just in numbers but in spatialites, connections, and horizons. *Blurb*, for example, the platform we used to make the book, also plays an important role in the rhizomatic regard because it allows users to make multiple editions of their work which can exist both online and in print. In this way, the book lives multiple lives in which it can be distributed at different times with different people, and build on previous versions to establish a kind of ongoing citational link across time.

In the process of shifting from theory to practice – that is, conceptual thinking to collaboration – I brought these ideas to my queer collaborators. We discussed how the act of worldmaking might be enacted in our own lives, during a time where effecting change is compounded by a global pandemic that prohibits any physical interaction. We started by building individual lists of our daily engagements which have undergone drastic shifts to the digital sphere. Our lists shared many similarities because our daily lives had been uprooted in variant but contextually related ways. As emerging artists who have experienced housing and income precarity as a result of COVID-19, many of our engagements with the everyday overlapped in areas of care practices for our communities and soothing techniques for ourselves. Things like

[35] I invoke Gilles Deuluze and Felix Guattari to demonstrate the similarities between queer worldmaking and the rhizome. While "worldmaking" here is described as a "bottom-up engagement," the bookmaking platform (Blurb) allows for the making of multiple (un)finished iterations of the book which is better described alongside this quote from *A Thousand Plateaus*: "The question is directly one of perceptual semiotics. It's not easy to see things in the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below, or from left to right or right to left: try it, you'll see that everything changes" (1987: 23).

therapy sessions, eating in bed with our friends via FaceTime, sending nudes to our romantic and/or platonic partners, resource-sharing via social media, and engaging in camming and other forms of online sex work were common activities – often sexual or pleasure-seeking in nature. During the exercise of list sharing, we found that many of our engagements aligned with Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's understandings of sex and pleasure.[36]

Before tackling Berlant and Warner, however, I want to expand on this relational exercise of list-making which I briefly mentioned in chapter one. Initially, I brought these ideas to my peers as a launching point for discussion hoping to generate any kind of dialogue around boredom, sex, quarantine-specific habits, crafting, depression, and so on. This exercise became the unexpected foundation of our work moving forward wherein the lists inspired connections between our individual routines and provided dialogical space for a deeper analysis of our daily engagements. As aforementioned, ethnographer Keith Murphy, delineates the link between the deliberate assembly of people in this way and Nicholas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics which accurately describes the type of bond and correspondence revealed during this exercise.[37]

To reiterate, the relationship that ensued was a unique ethnographic-interventionist one which involved little pushes that went against ethnography's impulse for "objectivity" in the everyday intimacies of fieldwork.[38] In most participant research endeavours, the ethnographer is installed as a newcomer with an ambiguous identity into an existing environment or situation where they are assigned the near impossible task of remaining completely uninfluential,

[36] Our engagements aligned with Berlant and Warner insofar as our quarantine projects and habits had become very sex-centric without being the act of sex itself or even the kind of intimacy typically tethered to heterosexual culture such as dating or flirting.
[37] This often repeated reference to Nicholas Bourriaud is useful for describing the publics that relational aesthetics creates: "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (1998: 113).
[38] Murphy, Keith. (2017). "Art, Design, and Ethical Forms of Ethnographic Intervention," 97.

objective. Keith Murphy argues that to expect the ethnographer to have no effect on interlocutors, or to uphold the notion that the ethnographer should go unacknowledged as a physical body is an extremely unlikely – if not, virtually impossible – claim of objectivity in the field of social science. Instead, he wonders: what would happen if we admit, rather than ignore, that our presence is inherently interventionist, and then play with that form to make the intervention more productive – for interlocutors, for research, and for knowledge-building more generally?[39] In choosing to adopt a more involved role, *allow* my presence to distort the fieldsite (in this case, the fieldsites are the digital platforms which facilitate conversations, collaborations, bookmaking), and provide my own insights and content to the book, I convert the unavoidable presence of the ethnographer from a source of anxiety into a manageable methodological advantage.[40] A moment of relationality is produced here, not for art alone but for art and research together, wherein the result is a significantly more honest and fruitful analysis of the actual impact of queer collaboration. Here, we see the merging of parallel structures such as the curator's involvement in artmaking and the ethnographer's role in the fieldsite.

Returning now to the actual content of these collaborations which were mainly centered around sex and pleasure. In their seminal essay titled *Sex in Public*, Berlant and Warner are interested in the kind of sex that is a crucial component of a larger project called "culture-building": sex that is mediated by *publics*. These publics, all of which are configured *around* sex without needing to be exclusively sexual acts, are productions and embodiments wherein heteronormativity is not the fundamental motor of its organization. For example, I sit in my room and teach my friend how to masturbate via FaceTime because touching myself with other queers

[39] Ibid., 102.
[40] Ibid.

in my community is an exchange that I not only take pleasure in but see as a form of knowledge central to queer living. By this, I mean that initiating and exploring different pleasures as a means of knowledge and care instead of a passive byproduct of heterosexual sex, is a way that queer people have long affirmed their intimacy outside the "love plots" of heterosexual coupling, rendering pleasure-seeking a central component of queer life. After all, it is Berlant and Warner who claim that "queer social theory is committed to sexuality as an inescapable category of analysis, agitation, and refunctioning."[41]

We soon realized that being in quarantine was the beginning of many repeated non-normative engagements – everything from irregular daily schedules to attending online holiday strip tease events eager to connect with other people from our community.[42] Unable to occupy our normal spaces of interaction like parties, school, gay bars, or home gatherings, we began to push toward queer worldmaking in a visual manner across digital milieus. For me, this was an array of online content in which I both participated in and observed the visual affirmation of queer lives. In these instances, visual representations of queerness portrayed a type of imagined utopia whereby the reality of heteronormativity had been inverted into queerness. For example, I started watching exclusively queer OnlyFans content (mainly lesbian) which quickly started to emulate feminist forms of knowledge transfer via instructional videos concerning sex-related topics like consent and technique. These OnlyFans accounts had interestingly morphed into queer spaces for learning, community care, and pleasure through listening-based dialogue, an activist model representative of queer and feminist organizing.

[41] Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. (1998). "Sex in Public." 564.
[42] Maggie's Toronto is a community organization that provides direct support for sex workers. In October of 2020, they began hosting BIPOC strip teases for festive holidays like Halloween and Christmas.

I also made second Instagram and Twitter accounts solely dedicated to sharing and creating queer anti-capitalist content. My meme account @pissedandpolitical is a collaborative Instagram page with administrators in Toronto, Hamilton, and Oshawa which is always looking for more queer contributors, and alternative text and caption updaters.[43] With almost 2000 followers, @pissedandpolitical is a small but fruitful digital community of users who are interested in exploring the complexities of the queer human condition in the form of text-heavy niche memes. The content is mainly political, made by and for queer folks as a resource-sharing, queer shit posting, Toronto news distribution hub. Similarly, my second Twitter account is an anonymous trolling page where I take to right-wing and anti-queer threads to rant about politics and queer sex. Mostly daft and absurdist humour, this account is another visual (and political) affirmation of queerness – an obnoxious intrusion into deeply heteronormative online space.[44] These social media pages informed much of our dialogue while creating the book. All collaborators follow these accounts which allowed for quick referencing of certain material and subsequent discussion of the types of memes we all thought would work well in the book.

This is the queer commentary that Berlant and Warner say is resistant to a singular discourse and rooted in collaborations, exchanges, and relations.[45] The creative fusion of varied

[43] Also called "alt tags," alt text is the written copy that appears in place of an image on a webpage if the image fails to load on the user's screen. The text helps screen-reading tools describe images to visually impaired readers. @pissedandpolitical uses alt tags on all posts.

[44] Recent example from a tweet during George Floyd protests and looting in May 2020:
Twitter user: "So basically if someone is discriminated based on the colour of his skin or who he has sex with it's wrong but if he is discriminated because of his profession it is funny and ok?" (referring to police officers).
Me: "Yes, you are correct in this case! If I was discriminatory toward a war criminal because he chooses to go to a job everyday that facilitates the widespread murder of innocent people, that would make perfect sense. The same thing because of someone's skin colour? Way less sense. Or because someone sleeps with another person in a way that quite literally affects me or anyone else in no way at all? WAY less sense."

[45] Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. (1995). "Guest Column: What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" 344 .

media like meme, text, lofi aesthetic, and specifically sapphic sentiment on these pages becomes the constructed loci of new knowledge that queer publics foreground. Again, not necessarily physical acts of sex, these publics are organized *around sex* in their intended non-heteronormative worlds; sexual worlds that to do not claim privacy (or the private sphere) as their ground, but rather use exposure to produce non-heteronormative social contexts that make for unpredicted, publicly-mediated pleasures.

Strictly physical acts of queer sex and pleasure were also prominent on all our lists and became another useful site of queer counterpublics (like publics but with more discursive intent). Like I said, some queer cam girls began to make instructional videos on OnlyFans where they would describe their masturbation technique for the benefit of other vagina-having people who might be interested in learning how to make themselves squirt, for example. Additionally, nude photo sharing as a form of self-expression and/or queer knowledge production was also an interesting overlap. Whether it be in a private message to our friends and partners via text or a public post on Instagram, we all found ourselves seeking pleasure, admiration, and support in the form of exposing our naked bodies to our friends and online followers. As a group, we discussed the reasons for this collective gesture which turned out to be motivated by different circumstances but linked by one very important incentive: to push for normalizing the nudity of queer bodies.

Feminist philosopher, Nancy Fraser, argues that counterpublics are "parallel arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs."[46] Michael Warner confirms this interpretation, understanding counterpublics as spaces in which "a dominated group aspires

[46] Fraser, Nancy. (1990). "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text,* 67.

to re-create itself as a public and, in doing so, finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public."[47] In *Sex in Public*, Berlant and Warner theorize queer counterpublics as a form of culture that aims to uncover,

> the radical aspirations of queer culture building: not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture.[48]

Here, Berlant and Warner reiterate that, as a form of culture-building, queer counterpublics must seek to form an affirmative identity through the invocation of queer transgressions. This is to say that cam girls using OnlyFans as a platform to disperse queer instructional content, and other queer folks posting nude photos on media sharing applications with the collective motivation to normalize being naked, embraces the defiance and promiscuity that heteronormativity has used to define queerness. The counterpublic developed through the circulation of nude photos and instructional videos on these platforms is a deliberate choice to reclaim the supposedly depraved parts of queer culture and redefine them as dynamic modes of relationality.

Indeed, queerness itself is a counterpublic. One does not need to circulate nude photos of themselves or troll right-wing Twitter or even publicly express their sexuality to occupy the counterpublic. The mere fact that "queer culture has almost no institutional matrix for its counterintimacies" means that any form of exchange predicated on the existence of queer pleasure is "counter" or operates in opposition to heteronormativity.[49] The distinguishing factor is to deploy a host of aesthetic collaborations with the desire to spread non-heteronormative

[47] Warner, Michael. (2002). "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture*, 80.
[48] Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. (1998). "Sex in Public." 548.
[49] Ibid., 562.

representations, link these representations as *perverse* and *queer* and *good*, and then re-write these perversities as criticisms of the actors and institutions who condemned them in the first place. In other words, when queer counterpublics rewrite the connotations attached to queerness they invoke a type of transformative politic in which the public materializes itself *through* a staunch opposition to heteronormativity or heterosexual culture. The counterpublic created through this project – that being the group of queer artists gathered for the deliberate theorizing and making of the book – redefine queer culture *precisely* in and through simultaneously distorting heteronormativity. When queer counterpublics reframe the depraved queer narrative in this way, they establish an oftentimes affective connection to the very signifiers and identities that heteronormativity deems deviant and illegitimate.

This chapter has theorized the relevance of queer commentary, queer world-making, and queer (counter)publics. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner introduce queer commentary to explicate the ambitious and genre-defying quality of the work ensued from and around queerness. Everything from collage to writing culture has come to represent the extent of queer reach in both academic and practical arenas. Our book, *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic*, contains hybridized work like such: lofi images overlaid with text or other sharp images, fragmented or digitally manipulated nudes alongside poetic excerpts, performance stills and photograms of bodies in space.

Queer worldmaking seeks to create new worlds from the one we know now. Not only does it envision different futures, but it also makes available alternative regimes of truth through diverse engagements with the everyday like exchanging gay zines with our friends, making low-budget porn with our partners, attending online holiday strip teases to support queer sex workers during COVID, using social media as a digital playground for censorship and sex, and a variety

of other boundary-defying activities. I have described a number of these engagements throughout the chapter to emphasize the range of content and activity that might fit this rubric – that is, the assortment of mediated pleasure-seeking relationships and exchanges that help imagine a world sans heteronormativity.

Queer (counter)publics seek to change and rewrite this world's deployment of heteronormativity. Discursive, sensuous, experimental, and often artistic, queer counterpublics can illuminate the "contradictions and perversities inherent in the organization of all publics" and thus deconstruct the fundamentally social nature of *meaning* in spaces.[50] In other words, queer counterpublics are places through which we can see the creation of queerness as a spatial form itself – one with entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, and incommensurate geographies. We recognize these spatialities within the digital counterpublic as well, where the word "public" in this case alludes to something more expansive than just a community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, and modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright.[51] These modes of feeling are detailed in a discussion of queer collaboration throughout the next chapter, and ultimately represent a kind of intimacy that the het world has always been unable to name but that the queer world (or queer worlds) make space for everyday.

I end this chapter by invoking a notable moment from Berlant and Warner's *Sex in Public* where they detail what they term a performance of "erotic vomiting". It is worth quoting these theorists at length here as they provide a detailed description of a future completely detached from heteronormative order:

[50] Warner, Michael. (2002). "Publics and Counterpublics." 81.
[51] Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. (1998). "Sex in Public." 558.

> A boy, twentyish, very skateboard, comes on the low stage at one end of the bar, wearing lycra shorts and a dog collar. He sits loosely in a restraining chair. His partner comes out and tilts the bottom's head up to the ceiling, stretching out his throat. Behind them is an array of foods. The top begins pouring milk down the boy's throat, then food, then more milk. It spills over, down his chest and onto the floor [...] From time to time a baby bottle is offered as a respite, but soon the rhythm intensifies. The boy's stomach is beginning to rise and pulse, almost convulsively. It is at this point that we realize we cannot leave, cannot even look away. No one can. The crowd is transfixed by the scene of intimacy and display, control and abandon, ferocity and abjection. People are moaning softly with admiration, then whistling, stomping, screaming encouragements [...] Finally, as the top inserts two, then three fingers in the bottom's throat, insistently offering his own stomach for the repeated climaxes, we realize that we have never seen such a display of trust and violation. We are breathless.[52]

This scene temporarily transports the people involved into another moment, another future, one in which queerness thrives in and of itself. Curiously unpleasurable yet intensely erotic, "staying with the mess" of this scene – that is, Berlant and Warner choosing to physically stay and watch the scene unfold – is a deliberate choice to remain with unpleasure, and to share in both a sensual and disorganized moment of sociality and undoing. Though reference to the future is not explicitly implied in this scene, the outright perversion of the act itself paired with its contextual organization around sex (the scene takes place in a gay leather bar), imbues the event with a kind of self-shattering illumination that look towards a future that might be both delightful and perverse. Instead of being disgusted by the seemingly unpleasurable act, Berlant and Warner are mystified, breathless, having just witnessed a moment of intense bodily penetration that unapologetically presents the limitless nature of queer sexuality in its purest and filthiest form. In this way, the scene provides modes of access to new forms of relationality, styles of pleasure, and a general openness to the kinds of desire heterosexual culture has long been unable to fathom.

[52] Ibid., 565.

Chapter Three: Toward Utopia and a Different Kind of Futurity

"I'm so fucking excited to our nudes in print."

In the previous chapter, I outlined the pragmatic limitations of queer theory. I pointed to practices like queer worldmaking and the development of queer counterpublics to demonstrate the ways in which queer folks engage in transformative politics through their diverse participation in "the everyday." I briefly touched on these engagements: masturbating with friends, documenting ourselves eating in bed, camming for and with other queer people, trolling Twitter, resource-sharing across social media like Instagram, to name a few. This chapter launches from these examples and describes the container that we (four queer artists) chose to put them in: a book titled *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic*.

This book is important for a couple of reasons. First, and perhaps most obvious, it functions as a dialogical space through which there is a fruitful exchange of ideas and opinions. The book contains documentation of queer projects, performances, and writing along with several references to other queer theorists and artists who continue to inspire our thinking and making. There are recorded conversations between the authors and playful ongoing commentaries carried throughout. Second, it functions as a queer archive and a queer public. Archival simply because it is a material collection of records providing information about a group of people, particularly a group of queer artists who share a common interest in sex, pleasure, body work, body fluids, and other weird stuff that often goes unacknowledged in the realm of public discourse. Most importantly though, the book is both a digital and material counterpublic.

Following Lauren Berlant from chapter one, counterpublics are loci of new knowledge where pleasures and intelligibilities can be realized and disseminated.[53] The making of this book works to crystallize millennial queer thought during a global pandemic, and the printing of the book allows for its easy and material distribution. Its design represents the fragmented quality of writing and making; it offers a visual representation of queer methodology insofar that it rejects coherent and sequential organizing to make room for, "a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance."[54] In other words, the book, its contents, and its design not only act as an effective container for the work but also encapsulates the methodological messiness and spontaneity of queer folks and queer projects.

Much of the formatting also functions as a basic deconstruction of spatiality on the page. Throughout the book, the reader will come across either very large or small print placed in the middle, corner, or three quarters of the way down the page with a right alignment or no alignment at all. Many of the images follow suit – placed in arbitrary sections of the page, distorted with radial blurs and lens flares while others are heavily pixelated with a lofi aesthetic. This experimentation is a subtle but powerful way of queering the book wherein the size, placement, and quality of certain text codifies it as more or less important, urgent, or critical. Collaborator, B Wijshijer, provided links to other zines and self-published books with similar design approaches like bolding and italicizing words or using different fonts throughout as a way of distorting the expected comprehensibility of the book form.[55] Some of the poems, for example, appear unsolicited and without context on random parts of the page. Other sections

[53] Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. (1995). "Guest Column: What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" 343.
[54] Halperin, David. (1995). "SAINT FOUCAULT." EPEL, 62.
[55] *The First Book of Philosophical Sexts* by Quantus Copericus and Satanic Banana: https://bitchassgodliness.files.wordpress.com

read on a 90-degree angle, forcing the reader to reorient the book for easier access. Footnotes appear very rarely and, when they do, function more as a mini comment section where other collaborators respond to the work on the page often referencing strange things like dreams, sexts, and other non-academic sources that scholars would not typically allow as referent material. They appear anywhere on the page – sometimes as the title – where they elicit a kind of inverse reading and viewing of the text. There is a unique physicality produced here for the experience of the reader which also speaks to the act of worldmaking beyond collaboration and the book form. Distorting the book in this way – changing its orientation or choosing to include unfinished or unedited work – points to the transformative power of "staying with the mess" from chapter two. Like Berlant and Warner choosing to remain with the "unpleasure" of erotic vomitting, the reader stays with the obfuscation of the book, attempting to decipher its messages and clarify its meanings.

Certainly, many texts including zines, editorials, collages, and magazines implement similar experimental formatting techniques. As Berlant and Warner state in their essay titled *What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?* "queer theory has already incited a vast labour of metacommentary including everything from dictionary entries to entire journals, many of which explore queer aesthetics in their design. *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic*, however, remains an interesting and temporally unique project that not only centers queerness, but also renders visible modes of intimacy that have emerged amidst a global pandemic. The book contains writing, photos, art, sex, unfinished projects, internal dialogues, obsessive habits, memes, poems, sexts, and nudes integrated with works from other queer and feminist artists from the past. One of the projects in the book titled *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* was a contribution by artist and author, Madeleine Lychek, which paid homage to Tracey Emin's 1997 installation of the

same name. The general concept is equivalent – the names of, literally, everyone she had ever slept with (not necessarily had sex with) documented in a simple list format. When she uploaded this project into the book, however, it adopted a new dialogical purpose in which it became a collaborative piece where myself and the two other authors began to add our own ideas to the growing list. The final product is a giant list of not just names, but celebrities, family members, objects, and food that we have either already slept with or wish to sleep with at some point in the future (again, not strictly sex). Some funny things that appeared on the list include: "one time I fell asleep with my strap-on", "one tampon, two tampons", "Joe Biden body pillow (ew)" ,"my stuffed animal bear, Lucy" ,"Julia-Louis Dreyfus (Seinfeld era preferably)", "robots (eventually)" ,"pizza box and ranch dipping sauce" and "my bong." In this way, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* became a multi-temporal work that reached across past, present, and future with the additional component of non-human items which certainly captures the zeitgeist of the 21st century (i.e., robots).

Memes constitute another large section of the book, and if there is one exchange that has remained prolific during COVID-19 it is the making and sharing of memes via Instagram. Many of the memes I am interested in are oriented around pleasure or women-loving-women (wlw) content hybridized with a new kind of "quarantine sentiment."[56] When I say "quarantine sentiment" I simply mean the mention of COVID-19 related topics such as: quarantine, pandemic, lock-down. This schematic is best illustrated by an example from the book:

[56] WLW stands for: women who love women. Typically used as a blanket term for a relationship involving two female identifying people.

Above this image would read: "Me giving advice to all the straight girls I know with live-in boyfriends once quarantine is over." This is one of many examples that is obviously queer and temporally grounded in the now. It is an exchange in meme format that asserts a couple of things quite clearly: queer desire, sexual fluidity, and a future-oriented commentary of the current pandemic, as if to imply that society post-quarantine will be more queer. The likelihood that this statement may or may not be true is less relevant than the fact that, within both the dialogical space of this book and the digital meme community that it originates, a type of fundamental queer reality is being asserted, documented, and disseminated.

At this point, the book has been outlined and certain sections have been detailed. The remainder of this chapter shifts focus to the concept of utopia and the ways in which these modes of exchange (and their associated publics) have embodied both affect and meaning despite heteronormativity, and have ultimately constructed a temporality that exhibits "the future in the present" wherein the notion of utopia is reinvented.[57] Following a brief introduction of utopia as a widely studied concept, this part of the chapter aims to make evident the link between the collaborative dialogical exchange of queer folks (as exhibited in the book) and the future of queerness itself.

[57] Muñoz, José Esteban. (2009). "The Future is in The Present: Sexual Avant-Gardes and The Performance of Utopia." *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 49.

Queer utopianism is a concept developed by gender theorist, José Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia*. Many people are familiar with the term "utopia" defined as a society that is (by definition) so perfect that it cannot actually exist but may not have a comprehensive understanding of what a queer version might look like.[58] Interestingly, Sir Thomas More, the man who manufactured the "modern template" of Utopia, which was originally theorized in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, did not think of utopia as a perfect place. While Utopia for More was a rationally organized society, which was fundamentally egalitarian being founded on the notion of communal (rather than private) property and collective (rather than individual) self-interest, personal freedoms were highly restricted. Permission was required to satisfy virtually any desire such as debating, traveling, or walking outside of the city. The question that many commentators have asked, then, is: why did More invent a recognizably flawed ideal?

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz argues that More, like all utopian theorists, projected a vision of a future that was modelled after the limited and often self-serving ideals of the present.[59] It becomes clear then why More's Utopia is actually a *nonideal* – because his inability to conceive of a different kind of time or a new mode of temporality, and thus a new mode of becoming, reproduces the same place (with the same systems, architecture, and so on) in which the rulers have only turned the knobs of another oppressive regime.

It is important to understand, however, that More was still attempting to convey a *new* idea, a *new* feeling to account for the rapid change that had resulted from the Renaissance at the time, which is why his template of utopia still has relevant applications here. And though his thinking is unable to accommodate for the future queer folks are interested in, his theoretical

[58] Suvin, Darko. (1973). "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genealogy, a Proposal and a Plea." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 6.
[59] Grosz, Elizabeth. (2001). "The Time of Architecture." *Embodied utopias: gender, social change, and the modern metropolis*, 138.

shortcomings are precisely where Muñoz's notion of queer utopia and Elizabeth Grosz's idea of embodied utopia are robust (which I return to momentarily).

While many scholars have approached utopianism from different angles with varying core concerns, there is a broad agreement amongst specialists that utopias articulate a type of *newness* or desire for something different. For example, utopian scholar, Ruth Levitas, argues that there is a fundamentally positive relationship between desire and utopia. She claims that "utopia works toward an understanding of what is necessary for human fulfillment and toward a broadening, deepening, and raising of aspirations in terms different from those dominating the mundane present."[60] Levita's understanding of utopia as a responsive progression towards greater fulfillment operates within the same paradigmatic interpretation as More, even if she and other scholars understand utopia in a more optimistic manner than he originally did.

The positive push toward an alternative and better future is an important link between queer and conventional utopias. While More's utopia imagines small shifts towards the betterment of society, queer utopias focus on disrupting space to demonstrate that utopia is, in fact, a concept best activated by those of us (queer artists and thinkers) who *affect space* in radical ways every single day. Whether it be pushing spatial boundaries or cultivating space itself, if utopianism demands the disrupting and (de)construction of the material world, it necessarily requires the unique lived experience of queer folks who have done this for decades, for its conception. Queer utopianism also acknowledges the generalized aspect of conventional utopia and, instead, works in tandem with queer folk's scattered and improvised paths of movement to *queer a multiplicity of spaces in and of themselves.* Less about aiming to construct a better world in reference to the one we have now, queer utopias work to *unsettle* this world by

[60] Levitas, Ruth. (2013). "Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society." Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

invoking moments of subversion, resistance, and experimentation within existing heteronormative social spaces. In a way, this model renders the task of making queer worlds more accessible because it simultaneously chips away at heteronormativity from multiple sides: physically, cognitively, and ideologically. It also demonstrates that, through the inversion of space, non-heteronormative sites *are*, in fact, possible.

This is where Elizabeth Grosz's concept of embodied utopia is useful in understanding why queer utopias might offer a more egalitarian approach to thinking ahead than conventional utopias. She contends that the very acknowledgment of the multiplicity of bodies and their varying political interests implies that there are several idealized solutions to living arrangements, ideas about collective coexistence, and therefore, it is no longer clear that a single set of relations or goals will ever adequately serve as the neutral ground for any consensual utopic form.[61] She continues by saying that, instead, ideals need to be produced continuously so that their proliferation and multiplication is an ongoing process in which various goals are being trialed and errored simultaneously to account for the multiplicity of human subjects.[62] Otherwise, she contends, current notions of utopia do not center consensus but rather the ideals of the privileged where (hetero)normative sexualities, arrangements, embodiments, relations, and architectures are fantasized time and again. In this way, it makes sense that the only type of utopia worth aspiring is one that defines itself in opposition to the current conditions of the present – that is, in opposition to heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, and systematic repression. It makes sense that queer worldmaking projects that strive for queer utopias are most capable at executing the seemingly impossible task of *making* utopia simply because queer people have always been and continue to be the keenest to embark on the process of endless

[61] Grosz, Elizabeth. (2001). "The Time of Architecture," 149.
[62] Ibid.

questioning, endless disrupting, and endless experimentation, tasks that Grosz names most central to conceiving of a true and just utopia.[63]

Michel Foucault's heterotopia points to a similar potentiality. Sociologist, Angela Jones, reading Foucault merges heterotopia and Muñoz's queer utopianism into what she terms "queer heterotopias" to describe spaces that, "can be created in reality [where individuals] queer space in emancipatory ways that do not necessarily realize a fixed utopia but create potential for a queer future."[64] Foucault's heterotopia is important here because, though not inherently queer, it denotes a physical approximation of utopia and ultimately points to the actual existence of better future spaces. As Jones suggests, queer heterotopias do not have to be concrete. They may be something as fleeting as a queer performance or the act of having queer sex in public. Jones argues that heterotopias are, "places where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime and are 'free' to perform their gender and sexuality without fear of being qualified, marginalized, or punished."[65] In this way, a queer reading of Foucault's heterotopia can offer a type of actualization to queer theories, including Muñoz's utopia.

A queer version of utopianism sees futurity as a problem. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz argues for the refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics. He says:

> Futurity can be a problem. Heterosexual culture depends on a notion of the future; as the song goes, "the children are our future." But that is not the case for different cultures of sexual dissidence. On oil dance floors, sites of public sex, various theatrical stages, music festivals, and arenas both subterranean and aboveground, queers live, labour, and enact queer worlds in the present. But must the future and the present exist in this rigid binary? Can the future stop being a fantasy of heterosexual reproduction? [...] I argue for the disruption of this binarized logic and the enactment of what I call, following C.L.R. James, a future in the present.[66]

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Jones, Angela. (2013). *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias.* Palgrave Macmillan, 3.
[65] Jones, Angela. (2009). "Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness." *Interalia,* 2.
[66] Muñoz, José Esteban. (2009). "Introduction: Feeling Utopia." 49.

Here, Muñoz calls for a utopia that is not entangled with typical fantasies of heterosexual reproduction. Instead, his utopia is performances of queer citizenship that contain what he calls, "an anticipatory illumination of a queer world" which is "a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present."[67] He further explains that this illumination *is precisely* the quality of art that creates a surplus of both affect and meaning within aesthetic, or simply put, the idea that there might be something else to detect from the quotidian that is indeterminate and affective.[68] This type of potentiality – one that is open and filled with affective contours – is proof that utopia exists in the mundane and is thus representative of a *doing for* and *doing toward* the future. The idea of surplus here is important because it points to the abstract idea of overabundance wherein there is room for the artist to manipulate or reframe the work so that it transforms into something different, *queer*; this is an approach used by many great artists like Warhol and O'Hara which I explain below.

Like Charles Morris's and Thomas Nakayama's ideas on queer worldmaking discussed in the previous chapter, anticipatory illumination is also present in the commonalities of everyday life according to Muñoz. He provides an example of how both Andy Warhol and Frank O'Hara unearth the anticipatory illumination of an everyday object like the coke bottle (in their art and poetry, respectively) to illustrate this concept, which is worth pursuing in detail here to fully grasp its utopic underpinnings.

After analyzing Andy Warhol's *Coke Bottle* alongside Frank O'Hara's poem *Having a Coke with You*, Muñoz claims that both pieces of work represent the common item of the coke bottle in a different frame, laying bare its aesthetic dimension and the potentiality it represents. He continues:

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 7.

> In its everyday manifestation such an object would represent alienated production and consumption. But Warhol and O'Hara both detect something else in the object of a Coke bottle and in the act of drinking a Coke with someone. What we glean from Warhol's philosophy is the understanding that utopia exists in the quotidian. Both [artists] are able to detect an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity.[69]

Muñoz uses Warhol's musing on Coca-Cola in tandem with O'Hara's words to see both the past and the potentiality imbued within an object, the ways it might represent a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening. Similar modalities are erected in *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic* through a transformative engagement with Tracey Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* wherein the simple list of (initially all male) names in the original piece turned into an expansive list of men, women, nonbinary folks, objects, items, food, and robots created by four queer artists. The simple notion of sleeping with someone (whether that be through intercourse or not) morphed into a list that was very indicative of our perceptions around future pleasures and intimacies. This is to say, we expect the future to be fully queer and rampant with robot sex.

Anticipatory illumination is also discernible in many of the memes. I often take stills from classic movies of my childhood and remake them with a heavy splash of text that completely detaches the image from its original scene and recontextualizes it in the present and the future. One meme I made recently, for example, is an image of Winona Ryder from *Heathers* (1989) looking deeply disheveled with a cigarette hanging lazily out of her mouth and blood running down her face with the text: "me thinking about how much better the world would be if cishet men's gender performativity and sexual exploration were not completely dictated by homohysteria wherein things like embodying feminine energy and/or enjoying prostate stimulation were immediately conflated with gay sexuality." Like Warhol and O'Hara, I attempt

[69] Ibid., 9.

to untangle the image from its original context, represent it in a different frame, and detect an aesthetic opening through which a queer sensibility can be postulated. While the medium of the meme is certainly more colloquial than that of poetry, *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic* has been deliberately filled with work that does exactly this: identifies the past, present, and future potential imbued within an object-text artwork to render it meaningful across several temporalities, and ultimately locate *the here and now* as a site of possibility.

As I near the end of this chapter, I want to reiterate the significance of looking toward utopia and a different kind of futurity. The creation of this book operates as a worldmaking project which establishes queer moments within a heterosexual present. Through the making of this book, we wanted to explore a type of counterpoint to queer theoretical dialogue, which has long privileged melancholy, incoherence, and the death drive.[70] Other theorists, notably Lee Edelman and Jack Halberstam, reject a future-oriented discourse and argue that queerness is a fundamental site of abjection which – though still generative and subversive – is always subordinate to the universal politics of reproductive futurism.[71] This might be true, and I know there are many valuable projects centered around the queer art of failure as theorized by Jack Halberstam. It is also likely that queer theorists from all camps do the great work of queer worldmaking by virtue of the fact that we are all invested in the ongoing thinking of a critical futurity in and of itself. This book, however, was developed during a global pandemic in which so many folks in the queer community including sex workers, artists, and friends found themselves in immediate combat with the devastating logic of the world as it exists here and now. Therefore, the work presented in this thesis is a negation of the idea that nothing exists outside the sphere of the current moment; it is a timely veto of a reality that naturalizes cultural

[70] Edelman, Lee. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.* Duke University Press.
[71] Ibid.

logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity. Intended to be an affirmation of queer life, I hope it acts as a reminder that queerness is everywhere, and alternative regimes of truth come not from the negation of a queer future but through the innate hopefullness that these truths are currently thriving.

Conclusion

"We should keep this going like a big gay ever-changing archive."

Using the word "conclusion" here feels somewhat antithetical to the ideas pushed throughout this research. A looking and doing toward a queer future requires ongoing anticipatory discoveries where any notion of conclusion is less a final statement on what has been said and more a conjectural vision of what's to come. Indeed, there are concluding thoughts about the work presented in this thesis but there are also endless possibilities to the transformative engagements that queer people invoke in our daily lives.

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, two theorists I have quoted several times throughout, might argue that these transformative engagements require a readiness to "stay with the mess" as they certainly did for the erotic vomiting performance mentioned in chapter two. And staying with the mess is something that this thesis and the book have done. *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic* holds an imperfect quality in both its aesthetic and content where much of the writing feels like a work in progress, and many of the photos look pixelated as if plucked right from an unfinished photoshop project. The content is vulgar, subversive, and invites the reader to engage with their own sexual futures: *are you turned on by the gigantic bush on page 39? Do you know what your partner's cum smells like (page 20)? Have you asked your girlfriend to fuck you lately (page 15)?*

The project of thinking about queer worlds and queer futures is something that transcends this thesis and the exchanges within. As I've attempted to make clear throughout, the process of queer worldmaking is ongoing, multiple, rhizomatic, and requires endless inventions that index a new social world. When you take a moment to think about the vast repertoire of *stuff* that shapes a social world, there seems to be an infinite number of styles, genres, linguistic techniques and

phraseologies, idiom creations, referent materials with counterdiscourses, architectural methodologies, and so on, that need to be incited if we foresee the rise of completely new worlds or a queer utopia. This project – specifically the collaborative aspects and the bookmaking component – have been an attempt to add to this index. If new social worlds (queer worlds) demand an entirely new cultural undertaking, they necessarily require exchanges of things the current hetero social world does not facilitate, ways of curating that the current hetero art world does not institute, books for reading that the current hetero literary world does not publish, institutions for joining that the current hetero political world does not fund, ways of organizing and connecting that the current hetero physical world does not allow.

The fact that this thesis has materialized during a global pandemic, while the world has experienced unprecedented changes in all sectors, is not a coincidence. The foundational basis of this project and the exchanges it has engendered are, in fact, a result of major shifts in our daily lives and wellbeing, and ultimately demonstrate the particular adaptability of queer folks who, as I mentioned in chapter three, are always the most prepared to move, improvise, survive. In so doing, *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic* has been made, not as an instructional guide or even a zine, but as a material reminder of our *being* and *making* and *doing* toward a future in a pleasure-filled, unapologetic, and messy way.

Furthermore, the book is the traveling exhibition which will be distributed across the Greater Toronto Area by the queer community. Each artist has been given a number of copies to mail around, or place in subway stations, put in their zine collection as an archival gesture, send to their mothers, to do whatever they'd like with. I have also generated a long list of people and institutions – including locations everywhere from Vancouver to North Bay – to which the book will be sent so that it lives on as both an exhibit and an archive. The traveling exhibition and

archive points to Michael Warner's "public" as that which, "comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation."[72] Warner describes publics as spaces of discourse organized around written, audio, or visual texts wherein they exist by virtue of *being addressed*. In this way, the book travels as a curated space of discourse (or, a public) *in* and *through* other publics both domestic and abroad. Curatorial practice is completely opened up in this way. What is traditionally an anchored display becomes a portable item of social and artistic undoing as it pushes to rupture existing forms – that of the curated exhibition and the book itself.

More broadly, it lives and travels as a new modality for queerness and a radical temporality for utopia. It both activates and documents a host of queer relations of exchange like love and friendship and pleasure, or spatially queer distinctions like that of the digital, social, political, and beyond. It broadens the scope of queer counterpublics as a site for potential and utopia, and ultimately opens up the possibility of new sexual worlds full of endless exploration and questioning. It also merges the fields of ethnography and art wherein the curator/ethnographer (in this case) works collaboratively with the artists/intercoluters to inform new ways of *being* and working together for art and research purposes alike. A unique relationality (or relational aesthetic) is erected here which offers a qualitative blueprint for the modes of exchange that have always been and remain central to the creation of queer worlds.

This thesis has brought together several concepts to describe the kind of future that queerness looks towards and how the act of making that future is not a personal act of willing it into being, but a collective inception of queer projects and interventions on the basis of public formation and culture building. I have provided a number of examples in both the writing and the book of what these queer interventions might look and sound like – they could be messy,

[72] Warner, Michael. (2002). "Publics and Counterpublics." 50.

disorganized, not fully sure of what they are, (un)pleasureable, sloppy, or vulgar. But that's ok. The making of queer worlds is very generous, simultaneously syncopated and rhythmic, and full of exciting and affective contours, just like the sex we've always loved to have.

Afterword

This project, *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic*, has been realized through a combination of both writing and practice. Theoretical underpinnings are largely traced back to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner whose research broadly addresses modern public discourse surrounding sex in the nineties in the United States, and frustrates the rhetoric of privacy (i.e., separating and labeling sex as personal) as a tool through which national heterosexual culture achieves its hegemony. By having *Sex in Public* – that is, to support and engage more accessible erotic forms of living – Berlant and Warner suggest that what was once obscured by notions of privacy leads to paths of publicly-mediated non-heteronormative cultures.

Since the nineties, however, we've seen the proliferation of these cultures alongside the analytical expansion of the frameworks through which we assess them. Following Kimberlé Crenshaw**,** Black queer women have mobilized *intersectionality* as a theoretical and methodological construct to center folks who claim multiple intersecting positions and to address the complex ways in which non-white bodies engender varying modes of discrimination and privilege in both public and private settings.[73] Many contemporary queer projects like that of Mia McKenzie's *Black Girl Dangerous* or poet Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's *Sins Invalid* activate intersectional methods as a way of thinking through feminist care networks and queer femme aesethics.[74]

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[73] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." 140.

[74] Quoted from Sins Invalid website: *Sins Invalid'*s performance work explores the themes of sexuality, embodiment and the disabled body, developing provocative work where paradigms of "normal" and "sexy" are challenged, offering instead a vision of beauty and sexuality inclusive of all bodies and communities.
Quoted from BDG website: *BGD (Black Girl Dangerous) Press* is the brainchild of award-winning writer Mia McKenzie. What started out as a scream of anguish has evolved into a multi-faceted forum for expression. BGD seeks to, in as many ways as possible, amplify the voices, experiences and expressions of queer and trans people of color.

Doctor Amber Jamilla Musser, for example, turns toward Brown bodies and Brown pleasure in her 2018 book titled *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* to imagine epistemologies of sensuality that emerge from sensation and fleshiness. She analyses different pornotypes to think through the ways in which aesthetic forms might rearrange knowledge by engaging differently with brown flesh.[75] Similar to much of the queer aesthetic theory engaged in these projects, *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic* carries a contemporary relevance in which much of the artwork *is* the non-white body, its fluids, its spatiality, and its exchanges. Three of the four participating artists are women of colour who center their bodies and, in doing so, push the corpus of research and production beyond general questions regarding publicity, privacy, and pleasure. This is precisely where the afterword becomes an important place to first, acknowledge the ways in which the book itself surpassed the initial theoretical framework of the project, and second, situate the book as contemporary traveling exhibition filled with queer social criticisms and intersectional aesthetics.

While the book as it's own physical piece of art plays with the public-private dichotomy simply by way of its existence as a traveling abject exhibition, it's contents do not necessarily reflect the nineties cultural milieu outlined in Berlant and Warner's *Sex in Public*. Instead, its qualitative development and distribution exemplifies the formative concepts I engaged – namely, worldmaking and culture-building – while its contents speak more predominately to the *contemporary* (a.k.a., the radical and intersectional work being made by queer artists in Toronto right now). Holding candid insights around intersectional queer desire, femininity, and complex queer embodiments, the art within the book demonstrates an intersectional analysis of queerness and exchange during a global pandemic that is impacting racialized, working class bodies more

[75] Musser, Amber. (2018). "Sensual Excess." 1-240.

than others. Situating the book within an intersectional framework here, expands and strengthens the political potential for *messy* pleasures where, for example, Racquel Rowe negotiates and resists body ideals and body management expectations for Black women in her *Walking Discharge* piece.

I started with Muñoz, Berlant, and Warner because their philosophies and research were (and continue to be) central to my understanding of queerness as a movement, a modality, a formation of knowledge and sociality. What ensued once the collaborations took shape, however, was a more pointed dialogue around bodies and care effectively widening the scope of the project wherein the theories (theorists) I started with became less about describing the contents of the book to come and more about infusing the methodological and ethical framework set-up around the *making* of the book and the *doing for* different futures.

The works within are creative accounts of complex embodiment which align well with intersectional queer femme aesthetic projects happening in the now. *How to Make a Queer Counterpublic*, with both former and future attachments, takes core queer epistomologies and turns them it into textured minoritarian, pleasure-centric knowledge productions that file nicely into current bodies of work that not just reclaim but *rewrite* the scripts positioned on queer and racialized bodies. In this way, the book is rendered both theoretically rich and ripe for the contemporary art world in its celebration of uncertainty, messiness, and sensual politics as a bold and empowered launching point forward.

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Appendix

A PDF version of *How To Make a Queer Counterpublic* book is available for downloading as an accompanying digital file. Titled [HowToMakeAQueerCounterpublicbook.pdf], published and printed in April 2021, made available for downloading in May 2021.