

Stuck: Time, Difference, and Power in American Visual Culture

By
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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes four case studies in American visual culture to propose a theory of stuckness, a way of doing time in visual culture. Using a theoretical grounding in queer theory, performance studies, and ecocritical theory, I engage with stuckness utilizing a methodological approach I call sitting with stuckness, paying close attention to those moments where unimaginable losses (of life, of power, of position) become visible in culture, revealing alternative ways of doing time. I start by examining Charles Darwin's entrance into the American public consciousness alongside the end of the Civil War and the compressive violence of depictions of black Americans as less-than-human "missing links." Then, I look to the political actions and art of HIV/AIDS activist group ACT UP and Daniel Goldstein to see the reparative production of their engagements with waste as a productive site of politics and aesthetics. In the third chapter I and a co-author engage the website of FBI anti-trafficking effort Operation Cross Country X, noting its usage of spectacular instants to encourage state-serving understandings of trafficking and its possible solutions. In the conclusion, I examine depictions of behavioral deviance and paralyzing emotions in *My Strange Addiction* and the complex narrative and temporal juxtapositions taking place within the reality television format between its subject and the production team, ending with future directions for a method of sitting with stuckness.

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...Who am I kidding, we both know that's a lie.

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Preface

At 3:50 pm on December 24th, 2001, my three-year old niece, Hannah Saulsbury, died from complications due to neuroblastoma, a cancer of the nervous system, after a year of difficult treatments at hospitals and clinics around the United States. We got the call from my sister, Valerie, as my parents and I were speeding towards Kansas City on Highway 49, knowing that Hannah was fading in the hospital emergency room and hoping to see her one last time. No one told me what had happened; my father swerving off the highway to a quick stop on the shoulder before breaking down sobbing on the steering wheel - only the second time I had ever seen him cry - made it unnecessary.

This moment, the death of my niece, was and remains a point of stuckness for my sister Val, whose birthday falls on December 23rd, the day before the anniversary of her daughter's death. As the years went on, Hannah's presence in my sister's life lingered far beyond what many might consider an acceptable period or form of grief and mourning, becoming visible every few months or so in some type of spectacle. A couple of years after Hannah's death when Val and her husband gave birth to another daughter, she was given Hannah's name as her middle name, burdened with such complex and weighty history from birth. My sister's family photos and Christmas cards would include a super-imposed image of Hannah's face in the corner, as if she had been looking down on her family from Heaven. After my sister divorced her first husband and shortly thereafter married another person, "Hannah" wrote a letter to the family to be read at the wedding, letting everyone know she was okay and happy for the lives they were leading and choices they were making.

Through all of this, I found myself at times confused, horrified, saddened, and angered at my sister's seeming inability or unwillingness to get better, to move on from Hannah's death and

continue with her life. As she went from unhappy marriage to unhappy marriage, remaining in situations that were clearly causing her pain and distress but unable to get out of them, I saw in her a form of being stuck, one that damaged my capacity to connect with her, to make sense of her life in relation to mine. Val and I had once been extremely close; as a child I called her “Sissy” and would follow her around the house when she visited from dental school, a chubby barnacle stuck to her leg. Our once-easy intimacy eventually became stilted conversations at family holidays, occasional text messages that started and stopped with no momentum to them.

As I grew older, more intellectually and emotionally capable and less (or at least differently) selfish, my investment in understanding my sister grew, in making sense of her actions and what led her to them. The questions began to shift in my mind, from “Why is she stuck in this moment in her life?” to “What is she getting from these attachments, from these public performances of them?”; from “Why can’t she just move on?” to “Why am I so bothered that she isn’t moving on? Is moving on the only course of action?” Instead of relegating her actions to the realm of the unknowable, I wanted to make sense of what looked to be her inability or choice to remain stuck in the past, to sit in that space of stuckness, however unwillingly, and make a life there. What might we be able to gain from sitting with stuckness instead of pushing past it? How might we consider these spaces of intense loss not as ones of pathological failure, of an inability to connect with others in a normal manner, but instead as a complex alternative mode of being in time, where value begins to take new meaning and the bonds of intimacy expand beyond what we had previously imagined? I want to look at those spaces of stuckness, the realms of unfathomable grief and unrepresentable trauma, to see both how we try to represent and make sense of those losses, as well as what the attempt to represent leaves behind.

In this dissertation, I conceptualize stuckness as a way of doing time in visual culture. Sometimes it cannot be helped, sometimes it is elective, sometimes it is imposed, but common to each is an affectively-charged loss that disrupts linear expectations of life and necessitates a cultural response. I take inspiration for stuckness from Mel Chen's conceptualization of animacy as "much more than the state of being animate, and it is precisely the absence of a consensus around its meaning that leaves it open to both inquiry and resignification;" in a similar way, I see stuckness as never being as simple as a lack of momentum, but an entrance into thinking about different temporalities.¹ Moments of stuckness, like the death of my niece for my sister, can seem to be moments of stoppage, but I argue that stuckness instead does important work on the cultural and personal level as it forces different ways of doing time. Consider the culturally-imposed stuckness of 9/11 and the ever-present push to "never forget," a phrase that conjures time-locked images of a waving American flag and the Twin Towers in a perpetual state of collapse; the overwhelming loss of life and national sense of safety became a simultaneous rallying point and obfuscator for political interests, an excuse for more than a decade of nationalist sentiment and military deployments.² The It Gets Better Project is similarly a type of stuckness, although one that is ultimately more forward-looking. The heavily-publicized suicides of multiple young gay teenagers led to a massive video campaign centered around the idea that "it gets better," that LGBTQ youth might find hope through inhabiting a not-yet-there temporal space where they will no longer be bullied.³ In both of these situations, visual spectacle (in the

¹ Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

² For more on the complex temporalities inherent in visual culture surrounding 9/11, see Thomas Stubblefield, *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

³ For perspectives on the It Gets Better Project (IGBP), see William Cheng and his interrogation of academic skepticism of hope and futurity within IGBP in chapter three of *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016), and Jasbir Puar's analysis of the normative drives of IGBP in her article "In the wake of It Gets Better," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign>.

forms of endlessly collapsing towers and waving American flags, to school photographs of children dead from suicide and videos of celebrities discussing how it will get better) is central to the communication of the ways time is being (un)done.

This dissertation, then, attempts to do the work of sitting with stuckness, paying analytical attention to those moments where unfathomable losses (of life, of people, of control) and reactions to them become visible in culture. The case studies in this work are intentionally disparate, as I sit with stuckness through a variety of different types of visual examples—costume sketches, filmed political actions, gallery exhibits, online public relations material, reality television—each of which offers its own opportunities to develop my research questions and the concepts of stuckness. In many ways this dissertation is an experimental work, an attempt to build a theoretical and methodological model that makes sense of a body of case studies that have stuck with me through the years, each building up its own sometimes-overlapping orbit of theorists, concepts, and cultural works that resonate together. In each of these case studies, complex relations of loss, trauma, and power become represented in visual culture, and these representations are brimming with temporal and affective meaning. If we think of these losses as wounds, each chapter interrogates the ways that those wounds have been cauterized, stapled, sutured, treated into meaningful representations of these losses. To sit with stuckness is to look at these instances and read the tissue to see what is gained, what is lost, in the attempt to represent, to run a finger over cauterized grief and feel the murky pulse of unknown meaning underneath.

Among the theoretical texts from which I pull, Mel Chen's scholarship in *Animacies* is especially inspirational for my own work as their usage of animacy—presented as a sometimes nebulous and hard-to-pin-down “quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness”—as both

a category of analysis *and* an object of inquiry is reflected in my dissertation's understanding of stuckness.⁴ For Chen, an attention to animacy forces scholars to make new binary-destabilizing theoretical moves that open up new understandings of intimacy and community, both human and other-than-human.⁵ Similarly, I argue that sitting with stuckness as a method works to dismantle simplistic binaries in analysis that can obfuscate the complex ways loss in all its forms is woven throughout networks of power and culture. I want to move away from thinking of a stuck/normal binary in this work, instead deconstructing this binary to examine how labels of “stuck” and “normal” are deployed as ways of ascribing value through my analysis in each chapter. Such definitional complexity is necessary in approaching the temporally disruptive spectacles I explore in this dissertation.

⁴ Chen, 2.

⁵ Chen, 4.

Introduction

Among the dozens of sketches from the Mistick Krewe of Comus's costume designs for their 1873 Mardi Gras parade theme of "missing links" are a menagerie of fantastical human-nonhuman hybrid creatures. In one drawing, "Kangaroo" is dressed in feminine frills and bows with an enlarged, humanoid bust and made-up face signifying her femaleness, her belly pouch replaced by an outstretched apron filled with joeys. On others, more unexpected and bizarre combinations of human and nonhuman are present: a "Radish" as an elderly bishop with the tapered tip of the vegetable replacing a mitre, a "Medusa polyp" showing its mass of flowing tendril-hair. Mixed in with these visions of human-nonhuman connection, "Gorilla" and "Baboon" combine dark fur and skin with banjos, tambourines, and large-mouthed red-lipped grins, visual hallmarks of black minstrelsy manifesting common discursive combinations of racialized human and animal others.



The stretched piece of leather stands out against the murky black felt onto which it is pinned, its earthy tones reflected in the copper frame of the Plexiglass-fronted wooden box holding the artifact firmly against the wall of the art gallery. On the surface of the skin are the visible remnants of physical contact from its years spent covering the bench of a San Francisco gay community gym's exercise machine, the constant rubbing and pressure of flesh from countless men working ghostly lines and humanoid figures into leather in ways that cannot be found in synthetic vinyl coverings. The plaque describing the box makes the process of producing this artwork clear, as "sweat" appears within the list of components, and it would not be much of a jump to add "skin" to this list, as well. Reclaimed from the gym after its closing in the early

1990s due to the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS within San Francisco's gay male population, the skin remains a link to a physical and temporal place that once was.



The video feed on the webpage shows images of a group of FBI officers (all white-presenting) following a suspect, who appears to be a black man, down a motel hallway, one holding his handcuffed wrists. The camera starts to cut between closeups of a variety of items as a woman cries offscreen: stacks of cash, a purse holding a package of Skittles and a powered toothbrush, a pocket knife, a vape pen, a handgun and magazines of hollow-point ammunition. An officer takes the suspect away in his car, and the camera is left staring at the backs of a police officer and a woman who seems to be one of the titular “child victims” as they sit a foot apart on a scuffed motel bed. The woman sits with her hair carefully, almost artfully placed to conceal her face as she speaks to the task force officer, their conversation cut out of the video’s audio. The camera zooms in to fill the screen with the logo printed on the back of officers’ uniforms, POLICE - EXPLOITATION CRIMES TASK FORCE, repeating a shot that has appeared multiple times already. The footage ends with an extended shot of a group of four FBI officers leaning on a balcony after the operation, their reposed image reflected in the back window of a Ford Explorer. As an officer turns to look down at the reflection and meets the eye of the camera, the feed cuts to black.



As Casie sits crosslegged on her bed eyes closed and leans backwards against the headboard covered with pictures of her deceased husband and herself, the camera stays fixed on her person. She holds a small box in her lap, and as she begins to rub a finger around inside of the box her voice-over sets the scene. “With the transfer of his cremains...they spilled out on my

hands. And I didn't wanna wipe him off, 'cause I...That's my husband, I didn't wanna wipe him away” we hear as her finger digs into the contents, swirling until she pulls it free and we see the tip of the digit covered in a thin layer of grey silt. Her eyes close as she pops the finger in her mouth; the scene begins to cut to other instances of this same series of actions, repeating this same gesture over and over, as nondiegetic music intensifies until the clip ends with a final voiceover from Casie: “I'm eating my husband.”



What do these vignettes, clearly separated by time and space and subject matter, have in common? Each invites the viewer through visually striking imagery to gaze upon others who are stuck in one way or another—in time, in behaviors, in emotions—in depictions manifesting discourses of inability or refusal to be normal. These manifestations of visual difference emerge in the Mistick Krewe of Comus’s costume sketches sticking racialized humans to nonhumans across evolutionary time; in Daniel Goldstein’s scavenged art that refuses to discard cultural associations of HIV/AIDS with waste and death; in the FBI’s depictions of trafficking victims as docile, damaged women in need of police intervention; in *My Strange Addiction*’s pathologization of Casie’s eating her husband’s cremains as affectively and temporally stunted by her husband’s death. In my dissertation, entitled **Stuck: Time, Difference, and Power in American Visual Culture**, I analyze these and other cultural productions to track and make sense of stuckness and its appearance and appeal at various points in American history.

My dissertation looks at instances where stuckness emerges in discourse as a marker of those ways of being that lie outside or beside normative time and its push for productivity at all costs. We can find stuckness in those instances where individuals or communities are seen in states of stasis, non-motion, inactivity, and failure, as in Casie’s depiction on *My Strange*

Addiction in which her behaviors are pathologized and attached to a history of trauma. In examining these moments where immotility and dysfunction become most salient, we can see the ways that discursive networks rely on concepts of stuckness to define, influence, and control populations; racialized and visibly disabled bodies become stuck to a sense of proto-humanity, marked as less evolved and temporally regressive, while queer people with HIV/AIDS are treated as literal and metaphorical waste and denied respectful treatment as a result.

This dissertation investigates these and other representations of stuckness in a variety of senses, both to see how meaning and power seem to stick to certain people more than others along normative lines (frequently in violent manners), as well as how certain modes of existence become privileged as vibrant, dynamic, and productive, while others are treated as regressive, stilted, or left to the past. While dominant constructions position the state of being stuck as negative, this perspective prevents us from engaging with the effects of choosing not to or being unable to “move on” and elides the ways this push towards normative modes of being diminishes the worth and meaning of nonnormative lives and experiences. Sitting with stuckness can help us see how, for example, dominant discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS treat it as a degenerative toxicity, a stuck point in time that slowly putrefies whatever it touches, rather than as a generative source of new bodily experiences, knowledges, and connections as in Goldstein’s *Icarian Series*.⁶

I use works from the fields of queer theory, performance studies, and ecocritical theory to build my theoretical model of stuckness throughout the dissertation, and each chapter summary discusses some of the specific theoretical lineages and ideas key to that chapter's iteration of

⁶ On HIV/AIDS and toxicity discourses, see Michael Polgar, “Social Constructions of HIV/AIDS: Theory and Policy Implications,” *Annual Review of Health Social Science* 6, no. 1 (1996): 81-111; and Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987.

stuckness. At the core of it all, though, are theorizations of time, affect, and productivity in contemporary queer theory, and it is to this field that I see this dissertation making its key contributions. In addition to Chen's *Animacies*, I draw inspiration from and put myself into conversation with a number of other key scholars who are interested in analyzing alternatives ways of being in time and space. José Esteban Muñoz and his work in queer performance studies on futurity and the notion of queerness being a temporally not-yet-there aspiration to strive towards is an early driving force in this particular subfield.⁷ Jack Halberstam's relation of queer temporalities as emerging in opposition to the pressures and violences of normative temporalities based in reproduction and proper development opens up a space for more discussions of queer temporalities.⁸ Judith Butler's work on the biopolitical effects of mourning reveals the capacity of grief to both constitute and undo systemic and personal temporal narratives.⁹ Sara Ahmed's usage of turn/twist models to understand heteronormativity and queer existence in *Queer Phenomenology* offers a welcome visualization of how heteronormativity and queer orientations work in relation to the directionality and pull of social norms. If we think of normative time and appropriate life progression as a path that makes "some things become reachable and other remains or even become out of reach," stuckness emerges as those moments where one's adherence to the path doesn't just squiggle or arc to the side in response to resistance, eventually returning to its proper route, but when movement (either willfully or otherwise) comes to a complete stop or makes a U-turn.¹⁰ It is at the moments of temporal, affective, and mobile stoppage or sluggishness that I see stuckness both coming into view as a concept worth studying

⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

⁸ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), and Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 14.

(as my object of analysis) and as a conceptual tool that provides a useful model to make sense of these emergent phenomena that may not otherwise seem connected or meaningful (as my analytic framework).

This dual sense of stuckness as object and analytic is reflected in my methodological choices for the dissertation, my core method being **sitting with stuckness**. One of the informative concepts for my modes of analysis within this method is Foucauldian **discourse analysis**, or the examination of texts with an emphasis on intertextuality, the “relations between statements . . . relations between groups of statements thus established . . . [and] relations between statements and groups of statements and events of a quite different kind” that reveal the operations of power as a complex network of knowledge-producing discourses, rather than a force wielded by one body over another.¹¹ This offers a way to understand depictions of cultural difference as always engaged with other discourses (science, sexuality, nation), but my investment in visual culture in a broad sense and tracking stuckness through its various incarnations needs a more capacious understanding of archive. As such, I look to contemporary work from scholars like Mieke Bal, Mel Chen, and Diana Taylor to build my model in a more explicitly **multimodal** sense, capable of examining archival sources in a variety of media. Bal's insistence on visuality and visual discourse as an object of analysis when considering images;¹² Chen's analysis of the discursive construction of lead and other items of material culture;¹³ and Taylor's emphasis on the specific knowledges created and maintained through performance and other ephemeral actions provide me with capacious models for examining the numerous

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 29.

¹² Mieke Bal, “Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 1 (April 2003): 5-32.

¹³ Chen.

iterations of stuckness (temporally, materially, affectively) within my dissertation.¹⁴ These perspectives help me to answer one of the key questions inherent in a discursive analysis: “how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?”¹⁵ To reframe this question: how does an emphasis on sitting with stuckness help to reveal why some depictions appear rather than others when representing loss?

Chapter Outlines

I have built the archive for this dissertation through a methodology of “sitting with stuckness.” Each of these chapters offers a site for mingled groupings of theory and culture that have been stuck in my thoughts and scholarship for longer than felt comfortable, some for almost a decade, to brew together as a critical practice. The case studies each focus on a specific mode of stuckness taking place in visual culture in their own historical moment within the bounds of the United States, and the chapters move forward in time, from the late 1800s (Chapter 1) to the 1980s and 1990s (Chapter 2) and ending with the contemporary moment (Chapter 3). This structure allows me to emphasize the specificities of stuckness as an analytic and object of analysis in different modes and contexts, while also tracking ways in which depictions of stuckness leak beyond temporal bounds and contribute to ongoing cultural conflicts over shifting definitions of proper citizenship and humanity. Each chapter introduces a different concept to understand stuckness, from compressive violence, to reparative production and the spectacular instant, each offering a different riff and point of emphasis on the relationship between time, power, and visual culture within stuckness. In the conclusion of the dissertation, I return to the

¹⁴ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Foucault, 27.

case study from the fourth vignette of Casie and her husband's ashes to synthesize the previously presented discussions of stuckness and suggest further possibilities for its usage.

The first chapter of this project, **Missing Links: The Posthuman, Compressive Violence, and Queer Time**, looks at the entrance of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution into a nascent post-war American popular culture during the late 1800s as a key moment in which discourses of temporal stuckness emerge to buttress inequalities in the face of radical change. With the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and the soon-enacted Fourteenth Amendment, the law was clear that persons of all races born within the United States were citizens of the nation. Ideologically and practically, however, little changed in most of the country, with various forms of interpersonal violence (lynchings) and state violence (convict lease system) reinforcing the notion that people of color were not *truly* citizens. In the realm of visual culture, popular depictions of black Americans relied on tropes of minstrelsy alongside suggestions of a violent, bestial, and hypersexual nature, these images "screens on which audience fantasy could rest, securing white spectators' position as superior."¹⁶ How do we make sense of these complex and contradictory discourses of visual otherness circulating through the nation's rapidly-expanding networks of mass media and burgeoning American visual cultures? I suggest that in looking at and analyzing the new vision of humanity and its origins emerging onto the cultural scene, we might find explanations.

While the debate over the descent of species and critiques of divine design had been taking place between scientists throughout the 19th century, Charles Darwin's 1859 work *On the Origin of Species* brought explanations of evolution to the masses through more accessible prose. The book had an immediate effect upon its publication, sparking conversation and debate over

¹⁶ Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations* no. 39 (Summer 1992): 28.

the book's inherent questioning of religious doctrine and, most importantly for this chapter, a radical view of time and the place of humanity in the world. In the world of divine design, humanity sits at the top of the animal kingdom as the shepherds of lesser beasts and the apotheosis of life itself. Darwin, however, presents a social order that is unstable and always capable of shifting wildly over time with no foreseeable end in sight; rather than the perfect end-game and the pinnacle of being, human society in Darwin's model is simply one blip in a long line of evolutionary points. This displacement of humanity from the center of the universe was (and still is) disconcerting and anxiety-inducing for many, partially because Darwin's sense of time as an infinite expanse of which human existence is only “a mere fragment of time” is almost incomprehensible.¹⁷ His ideas stand in direct opposition to dominant cultural investments in human accomplishment and progress over all else, central to burgeoning ideologies of industrialism and capital at the turn of the century.

From this conflict between Darwin's evolutionary time and a cultural need for humanity to remain central and superior comes a manifestation of stuckness that I call *compressive violence*. These anxieties over the meaning of what it means to be human within *Origin of Species*' evolutionary time lead to the complexities and nuances of the argument being greatly simplified, made easier to understand and less threatening to normative populations. The infinite expanse of time becomes violently compressed as these ideas enter the realm of culture, and the excess is expelled and sticks to visibly nonnormative bodies, most commonly in the form of the “Missing Link,” the supposed intermediate species between humans and their progenitors. Darwin himself exemplifies this in his 1871 work *The Descent of Man*, in which he abandons the more radical rhetoric of *Origins* to suggest the races' “mental characteristics are likewise very

¹⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004), 383.

distinct [. . .] partly in their intellectual faculties,” and proceeds to discuss the “light-hearted, talkative negroes” as a distinct and lesser race.¹⁸ In the realm of visual culture, these anxieties manifest as spectacles of the Missing Link such as the Mardi Gras costumes presented in the opening vignettes, depictions that emphasize and exaggerate visual difference infused with cultural norms. While spectacles of visual difference are not a new phenomenon at this point in history, compressive violence suggests that they present difference as inherently temporal, with whiteness and ablebodiedness kept as the teleological endpoint while other forms of being are marked as temporally regressive, and any possible links to animality are displaced onto the bodies of people of color and those with disabilities.

To build this concept of compressive violence and analyze particular instances of it within this chapter, I utilize a variety of theories that address the interactions of temporality and power, violence, and intimacy. Rob Nixon’s work informs this concept with his ecocritical discussion of slow violence, or the ways that dominant norms of violence as “immediate, explosive, and spectacular, as erupting into instant, concentrated visibility” fail to account for the slow violence of environmental degradation.¹⁹ Nixon’s proposed solution, however, is to do the very thing he seems to critique, to “devise arresting stories, images, and symbols” that can represent slow violence, and it is in a questioning of this process of speeding up slow time, of compressing histories to make them easily digestible, that forms the root of compressive violence.²⁰ Queer theorists Jack Halberstam and Lee Edelman both also suggest the capabilities of time as a tool of power, as Halberstam argues that queering time “disrupts the normative

¹⁸ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 196.

¹⁹ Rob Nixon, “Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor,” in *Environment at the Margins*, eds. Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Meyers (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011): 257.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human” which are so critical to discourses of dominance,²¹ and Edelman reveals how rhetorical deployments of children and ideas of the future for the rejection of queer lives and ways of living.²² I apply their work to Darwin's *Origin of Species* to argue its position as a queer temporal text that is incapable of being wholly subsumed into dominant discourses of time, leading to compressive violence.

With this model of compressive violence, I examine two main visual events that exemplify temporal regression sticking to nonnormative bodies: the Mistick Krewe of Comus's 1873 Mardi Gras parade costume designs on the theme of 'missing links,' and fin-de-siècle freak shows. Both exemplify visual difference as spectacle, and both engage heavily with the idea of missing links as part of broader textual and visual discourses of racial and ability inequalities. At the same time, however, tensions and ambiguities exist within these visual discourses on the place of evolution and temporal power that prevent a simplistic reading. The Comus costume designs rely on visual tropes of racial difference as part of their “joke,” but they also suggest a fascination with the idea of human and nonhuman relation and call attention to seemingly visual links between humans and other organisms (kangaroo pouches and aprons, polyp tendrils and hair) at the same time they are abjected. Similarly, while the rhetoric of missing links within freak shows marked certain bodies as temporally regressive (The Mermaid Girl, The Missing Link, Wild Men of Borneo), these spaces offered audiences encounters with the possibilities of human and nonhuman connection and revel in these anxieties (at the same time that they were safely displaced onto disenfranchised bodies). Crucially, freak shows also created spaces for certain people of color and those with disabilities to move outside of the home and institutions to

²¹ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 152.

²² Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

find livelihoods, suggesting that in the realm of stuckness, possibilities still remain for willful engagement on the part of victimized groups with these depictions of difference.²³

This possibility of a meaningful engagement with stuckness is critical to the dissertation's second chapter, entitled **Wasting Connections: HIV/AIDS, Waste, and Reparative Production**, which pulls focus forward to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s and to forms of more explicitly material stuckness surrounding waste and artistic production. The HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to reverberate within cultural studies in numerous ways and has been addressed through a variety of lenses of analysis such as medicalization, economics, and sexuality. Other works have engaged with the explicitly temporal conditions surrounding HIV/AIDS and its effects on individual and communal experiences of time, but few have addressed the ways in which queer environmental thought might provide new readings and understandings of HIV/AIDS. Where this chapter enters the conversation, then, is in suggesting waste as a useful analytic for engaging with HIV/AIDS as a discursive, cultural, and especially material phenomenon that can be seen in particularly visual ways through dominant discourse and the works of activists and artists working with and alongside HIV/AIDS.

Mainstream media discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and early 1990s consistently connects the set of conditions to conceptions of waste; Leo Bersani's famous essay reminds us that depictions of HIV/AIDS and its debilitating effects on communities of gay men reinforce the notion that "the rectum is a grave," with HIV always-already associated with anal sex, that which is wasteful in its lack of reproductive capabilities.²⁴ This association of

²³ Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 84. Consider also the seemingly anomalous social position held by Chang and Eng Bunker, who found great social and economic success through the freak show, discussed in Cynthia Wu's *Chang and Eng Reconnected* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?: and Other Essays* (University Of Chicago Press, 2009), 6

HIV/AIDS with waste was not solely rhetorical, as the inadequacies of the federal government and medical agencies in effectively dealing with the causes of HIV/AIDS and their lack of action in working towards treating the conditions led to unchecked growth of HIV and hundreds of thousands of deaths by the mid-1990s. Even after death, the remains of persons with AIDS (PWAs) were treated more as toxic waste than human remains, with hospitals marking PWA corpses by wrapping them in black trash bags, while mortuaries across the country refused to deal with PWAs' remains. On a material level, HIV/AIDS was stuck to waste, the material conditions and treatment of waste being applied to those with HIV/AIDS and, more broadly, gay men.

Many discussions of these conditions have bemoaned the ways in which waste and death stick to HIV/AIDS and PWAs and gay men, with some working against these connections on a literal level as Larry Kramer does in his pivotal 1983 call-to-arms “1,112 and Counting” where for him, the connection between AIDS, gay men, and death is a marker of structural inequities that must be fought against.”²⁵ I suggest instead that pondering this connection as more than just an incitement to action may offer us new ways of making sense of HIV/AIDS as well as its effects on embodiment and relationality, and that activists and artists of the time were engaging with waste in their work in just such a way. I call their approaches *reparative production*, to pull from Eve Sedgwick's notion of reparative readings that mine those uncomfortable and negative associations that “become invisible or illegible under a paranoid optic” to embrace and probe the possibilities of these associations.²⁶ These artists and activists utilized visual cultural productions

²⁵ Larry Kramer, “1,112 and Counting,” *New York Native* 59 (March 14-27, 1983). See also Yuvraj Joshi, “Respectable Queerness,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 43, no. 3 (2012): 415-67, for a discussion of the rhetorical use of HIV/AIDS and its connections to death in the 1980s to “civilize” gay men and their behavioral patterns towards heteronormativity

²⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 147.

in the form of gallery art and public political performance to resist the forces that align them with waste not by abjecting waste, but instead expanding its discursive value and altering its deployment. I suggest we read their works as reparative production both in the sense of *performances* of the relations between HIV/AIDS and waste, but also in the sense of *performativity*, with these works producing new ways of considering the cultural and material effects of HIV/AIDS.

To build my concept of reparative production for this chapter, I root my theoretical work within the realm of queer failure and studies of waste and toxicity. In *Touching, Feeling*, Sedgwick offers much in this regard through her concept of reparative readings that is the root of my notion of reparative productions. Jack Halberstam's positioning of failure as inherently queer and offering "alternative ways of knowing and being that are not unduly optimistic" is similarly crucial to the concept of reparative production,²⁷ and I am heavily indebted as well Mel Chen's interrogation of the generative possibilities of toxicity in *Animacies*.²⁸ Chen's interdisciplinary approach to questions of animacy and its discursive function is helpful to my similar investigation of the function of waste within HIV/AIDS art and activism. Waste is a discursively rich subject that is so often reduced to a materially and temporally regressive substance (that which used to be useful and worthwhile) within normative regimes, and reparative production helps us note the ways in which waste leaks out of its bounds, touching all sorts of aspects of culture.²⁹

²⁷ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 24.

²⁸ See in particular Chen's discussion of mercury poisoning and affect in *Animacies*, 189-221.

²⁹ For work doing this kind of interrogation of waste, see also Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010; Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006; Max Liboiron, "Tactics of Waste, Dirt, and Discard in the Occupy Movement," *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3-4 (2012): 393-401; and Daniel Sosna and Lenka Brunclíková, *Archaeologies of Waste: Encounters with the Unwanted*, Oxford and Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2016.

I focus on two specific sets of visual productions within this chapter starting with political actions surrounding HIV/AIDS by New York-based activist group ACT UP. In my discussion of ACT UP's political actions, I focus mainly on their Ashes Action, in which members of the organization marched to the fence surrounding the White House lawn and threw containers of their friends and loved ones' ashes onto the lawn. This action explicitly engages visually and materially with waste, death, and negativity, questioning underlying assumptions about appropriate HIV/AIDS activism and offering alternative ways for PWAs and allies of PWAs to engage with affective experiences of waste and death. It lies in apparent contrast to the much more popular and well-known AIDS Memorial Quilt, which acts as a memorial to the deaths of PWAs in a way that emphasizes peaceful contemplation and aesthetically beautiful memorials, in the space of curated grids of committee-approved images that memorialize an individual. While associations with waste seem clearly denied in the Memorial Quilt, the Ashes Action embraces them through its ephemeral nature and direct engagement with the physical remains of the deceased, using the rhetorically toxic remains of PWAs to fertilize the White House lawn, bringing the deceased into intimate transcorporeal contact with the government that brought about their deaths in the first place. ACT UP's Die-Ins have a similarly direct engagement with waste, utilizing images of death as physical waste to clutter and block access to locations such as St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City to provide material reminders of the institutional failures of the government and other bodies (such as the Catholic church) to support and help PWAs, the irony being that many of those who took part in these actions would eventually die themselves from complications of AIDS, in a sense enacting their future deaths through these actions.

The second set of sources I analyze is the sculptural works of Daniel Goldstein, an artist living with HIV who addresses the subject within his art. As described in the second opening vignette, Goldstein's *Icarian Series* is a series of found art pieces consisting of the discarded leather skins of a shuttered gay gym's workout machines. In these pieces we find an engagement with waste, with Goldstein finding new ways of seeing and feeling the affective repercussions of HIV/AIDS in his usage of scavenging as an artistic technique. These works bring to mind ephemeral, past actions and lives through their use of waste such as a previously discarded gym bench. These pieces engage with Diana Taylor's concept of the repertoire, the space of “embodied memory” and “ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” that permanent written or visual texts tend to ignore, taking the ephemeral, seemingly 'wasted' lives of those with HIV/AIDS and making them stick in our visual memory.³⁰

The third and final chapter of this dissertation, entitled **Trafficking Spectacle: Affect and State Power in Operation Cross Country X**, draws into tighter focus Chapter Two's brief discussion of bureaucracy and state power to analyze contemporary anti-trafficking policy and efforts by the FBI. Within the realm of trafficking studies, a variety of scholars from fields of critical trafficking studies and media studies have addressed the ways in which the most popular forms of anti-trafficking rhetoric continue to almost entirely focus on sex trafficking and utilize archetypal images and narratives of women as sexualized passive victims, state actors like the FBI and police as heroic rescuers, and traffickers as nefarious pimps. In none of these studies, however, has there been an analysis of *why* these signs of trafficking continue to be effective at garnering support, even as they fail to account for the realities of trafficking as a system and the experiences of trafficked persons. This chapter utilizes a methodological approach at the

³⁰ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

intersection of performance studies and critical trafficking studies to address the ways in which popular and state-level anti-trafficking efforts utilize the affective powers of spectacle to reinforce the necessity of state police intervention through particular portrayals of the violence of trafficking.

This chapter also differs from the rest of the dissertation, in that it is a piece co-written with Corinne Schwarz, a fellow WGSS scholar who works in critical trafficking studies, a field in which scholars use the insights of critical theory to emphasize and pull out the operations of power in both trafficking and scholarship on trafficking, bringing to the forefront issues and populations overlooked in dominant historical approaches to trafficking. Schwarz's work fits more into the realm of social science, while my own is firmly situated in humanities and cultural studies, and we found our discussion and interactions across these bounds to be both focused and complicated by having stuckness as a guiding analytic through the process of researching and writing between our disciplines. This chapter performs a very particular and necessary role of emphasizing the ways in which stuckness as a theoretical concept can be deployed as connective tissue between disciplines, bringing together fields and methodological styles that may not otherwise overlap easily. Co-writing requires a dialogical method that pushes at the bounds of each participant's background and level of analytical comfort, encouraging forms of creative thought that are difficult to produce, if not impossible, in individual scholarly work. Of particular interest to this project, I found the co-writing process revealed the inherent difficulties of sitting with stuckness as a method in collaborative work, and provided a glimpse into the nature of stuckness, compromise, and what is left after the end of a collaborative research project.

In order to bring together our separate disciplinary backgrounds and expertise, we begin by discussing the project's situatedness in our respective fields. First, we review the history of

approaches into the study of human trafficking to track critical trafficking studies as a field invested in the dismantling of dominant understandings of trafficking that serve to explicitly and implicitly reinforce neoliberal policy and governing, focusing on pertinent concepts of rescue, recovery, and victimhood. We then cover our theoretical background in performance studies, addressing key concepts of the archive, ephemerality, and spectacle and how Operation Cross Country X, while not explicitly a performance in the theatrical sense, is prime for a performance analysis. We emphasize Amy Hughes' concept of the spectacular instant as our main entry point into trafficking as spectacle, what she terms a "a heightened, fleeting, and palpable moment in performance that captivates the spectator through multiple planes of engagement."³¹ This concept emphasizes the ways that spectacle uses the compression of time and feeling to encourage particular affective and intellectual understandings in an audience, particularly useful for analyzing the social function of Operation Cross Country X and its public presentation.

After then covering the specifics of Operation Cross Country X and the ways it is carried out and presented to the public, we proceed to analyze the operation from both of our respective disciplinary groundings before synthesizing them into a larger argument. Through the lenses of rescue, recovery, and arrest, we show the ways in which the FBI's actions, policies, and presentation of such work against one another, as their rhetoric of heroic rescue and salvation of trafficking child victims is undermined by their actions that destabilize the lives of sex workers and the overall ineffectiveness of the operation in achieving its own stated goals in regards to saving children. We then move into the realm of performance studies, utilizing the concept of the spectacular instant to analyze footage and press release documents to reveal the ways that the FBI relies on the affective function of spectacle and the mediatized presentation of their actions

³¹ Amy Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8.

to reinforce public opinion about appropriate actions to combat trafficking. In the process, a form of compressive violence (echoing Chapter One) takes place in which the complexities of trafficking and its operation and effects are limited to these spectacular moments of rescue and recovery, producing specific narratives of trafficking that stick trafficked persons into material and discursive situations that serve to benefit the FBI and do little to work against trafficking as a social problem. I end the chapter with a newly written secondary conclusion, taking a critical approach to the article and emphasizing alternatives for stuckness in this scenario that lie outside an oppositional, state power-focused perspective.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, **Sitting with Stuckness: Paralyzing Emotions, Queering Trauma**, I bring together insights from the previous chapters to examine particularly affective depictions of stuckness where anger, depression, grief, and even trauma are treated as emotional experiences that serve no productive purpose, that seem to keep us stuck in certain times and places and must be left behind in order to live a full and happy life. While this narrative and method of understanding one's affective experiences seems to work for many people (and clearly has popularity), “letting go” is, in dominant contemporary US culture (and no doubt in many other times and places), the normative way of experiencing emotion and one's personal history, with those who are seemingly unable or unwilling to move past these “*paralyzing emotions*” seen as regressive, tragic, or too stubborn to know better. At the same time, however, depictions of these “stuck” persons are presented on a popular cable television channel and have been profitable enough for multiple seasons of the program to be produced. It is here that this conclusion will make its intervention and tie together previous insights, as I am interested in how the construction and presentation of trauma within popular visual culture, specifically reality television, works to encourage particular understandings of emotionality and

the complexities of trauma for the sake of fitting dominant norms of productive emotionality and what other possibilities may exist.

Contemporary reality television as a genre is heavily invested in these narratives of overcoming paralyzing emotions. Whether it is competition-based shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *The Bachelor* or more documentary-style programs such as *Intervention* or *My Strange Addiction*, individuals on these programs become characters with specific narratives of emotional development. To watch *The Bachelor* is not simply to see what woman the bachelor will choose in the end, but to watch character arcs as the show's production crew films and edits them, to see how these women respond to programmed stressors and move past them (or not) to become the proper and most desirable woman on the program. Documentary-style programs, as well, revel in these narratives, with part of the narrative of each episode of *Intervention* being the question of whether or not the individual will overcome their tragic past to move past their addiction. In the realm of reality television, it is not enough for the viewer to be told about these situations, either; the visual is a key component of these programs, in which emotional issues are seemingly expressed through the body and its visual qualities (such as the pathological fatness of *The Biggest Loser*) or through individuals' adherence or rejection of appropriate bodily scripts and actions (such as excessive crying on *The Bachelor*, or addictive behaviors on *Intervention*).

While these television programs generally associate nonnormative behaviors with nonproductive failure, I suggest that in these explicitly corporeal behaviors we might find alternatives to the model of letting go. In the conclusion, I use the concept of *paralyzing emotions* to interrogate how individuals who seem to have become stuck in an emotional state are constructed by visual culture along temporal and affective norms, taking as my example the reality program *My Strange Addiction* but speaking to broader themes of stuckness. I suggest that

we look closely at the seemingly deviant ways of dealing with difficult, paralyzing emotions presented as counterintuitive within the program (such as the first vignette's description of Casie eating her deceased husband's cremains) and read them instead as explicitly embodied alternatives for engaging with emotional histories and trauma. These images seem to be performing an explicit resistance to standard emotional schema, refusing the abjection of negative emotion in lieu of an incorporation of it into their own bodies. Stuckness here, then, comes to the forefront not as a simple mode of stoppage and the ceasing of production, but an alternatively productive space for making sense of emotional and bodily sensations.

Narratives of being stuck abound within American culture, from the ever-grieving widow unable to “let it go” and seen as a failure, to the nonnormative bodies of freak show performers discursively attached against their will to evolutionary predecessors with names like “The Missing Link” and “The Lobster Boy”. Using insights from queer theory, performance studies, and ecocritical thought, this dissertation puts forth a theoretical model called “stuckness” to make sense of temporal, material, and affective stoppage within American visual culture, and I apply this model at three disparate historical points to suggest its broad applicability. In doing so, I argue that these visuals function alongside and within discourses of proper citizenship and humanity, sometimes in support of normative ideologies of appropriate development and existence (as in depictions of racialized bodies as evolutionarily regressive) and sometime in opposition (as in activist art surrounding HIV/AIDS that embraces waste and toxicity). Each, however, requires us to take our time with stuckness, lest we move too quickly and miss the trees for the forest. In sitting with stuckness, this dissertation works to account for both in its analysis of American visual culture that attends to time, difference, and power.

Chapter 1: Missing Links – The Posthuman, Compressive Violence, and Queer Time

At the root of stuckness and its theoretical backing is time. To be stuck, willfully or otherwise, is to exist outside the driving forward *tick* of societal clocks, to be pushed out of linear temporal experience through great loss. To sit with stuckness as a methodology is to emphasize these experiences of doing time differently, to seek out depictions and narratives that hold on to these stoppages and losses for longer than may be comfortable or apparently useful. In this first chapter, I focus on the theoretical underpinnings of temporality that will inform stuckness as it shifts and morphs throughout this dissertation. Specifically, I reckon with theories of temporality from two disciplines, queer theory and ecocriticism, whose approaches to time have heretofore rarely been put into conversation. As Deanna K. Kreisel writes, “One of the most pressing reasons for a new queer ecology is the need for new models of temporality in light of anthropogenic climate change, work that queer theorists have been doing for over a decade.”³² Through combining and reflecting on queer and ecocritical perspectives on time, temporality, and futurity, we can begin to see new ways of understanding social and environmental justice and the very material consequences of our visions of temporality. I argue that the dialogue between these fields allows us to see in greater detail the complexities and nuances of texts, in ways that open both fields (each of which has been criticized for limited subjects in a number of

³² Deanna K. Kreisel, “Response: Queering Time,” *Victorian Studies* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2018), 241. For queer ecological work that looks at questions of temporality, see Mel Chen’s *Animacies*; Sarah Ensor’s rethinking of queer ecological futurity in “Queer Fallout: Samuel R. Delany and the Ecology of Cruising,” *Environmental Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2017): 149-66; and Nicole Seymour’s *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

ways) to new forms of analysis.³³ In the process, this combination of theories gives us an entry point for bringing stuckness into discussions of systemic oppression: by de-centering the normative human experience, these theories allow us to analyze temporal violence as a burgeoning field of critical inquiry.

I begin with Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence as a starting point for discussing temporal violence. I then move through other theorists of temporality, specifically queer theorists Jack Halberstam and Lee Edelman, to provide other ways of rethinking time, temporality, and the centrality of the human in all of it, before suggesting my own model of temporal violence that focuses on representational compression. Following that I present a case study of Charles Darwin's entrance into the public imagination and how his work was received and altered to fit normative models of race, gender, disability, and the human. I develop this case through my analyses of a set of images from the Mistick Krewe of Comus's 1873 New Orleans Mardi Gras celebration and the institution of the freak show in the late 19th century. In these depictions, a form of stuckness appears that is rooted in the dual losses of a stable sense of what it means to be both a human and a citizen in the United States after the Civil War, both losses that require a dramatic rethinking of cultural time. In sitting with this mode of stuckness, I find it does time by violently compressing these anxieties and the vast temporal and social complexities informing them into depictions of nonnormative racialized and disabled bodies that attempt to reinforce the social positioning of those who are white and able-bodied while still allowing normative subjects to play with the idea of difference. Through analyzing these depictions, I suggest complications

³³ See Timothy Morton, "Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 273-82, the first publication invoking the name of "queer ecology" for this particular theoretical formation. See also Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, "Introduction: A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies" in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1-47.

to a narrative of stuckness as simply another marker for oppression and briefly discuss its capacities as a site for worldbuilding and power to be elaborated in later chapters.

Theoretical Scaffolding: Temporality, Violence

Time has always played a part in environmentalist rhetoric. Ecocritic Rob Nixon points out how time interacts with our understandings of violence, both systemic and personalized. In contemporary culture “we are accustomed to conceiving of violence in terms that are immediate, explosive, and spectacular, as erupting into instant, concentrated visibility.”³⁴ Violence is understood, and most commonly seen, as a punch rather than a long-lasting wound. As texts and activists in ecocriticism and environmental justice have shown us, however, this is not always the case, especially when dealing with environmental issues. Whether it is the lingering decay of nuclear materials in impoverished communities, the long-term effects of pesticides presented in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, or the gradual shifts of climate change, violence in these situations is not immediate, but slow. With this in mind, Nixon suggests the concept of slow violence as one that allows us to better understand forms of violence, especially those connected to environmental issues.

While Nixon's model of slow violence is extremely useful in beginning a temporal analysis of violence and systemic inequality, in some ways it still privileges normative modes of thinking about time. He urges us to consider how slow violence, as a temporal anomaly, must be represented in such a way to encourage action; as he states, “a major challenge facing us is how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the elusive violence of delayed

³⁴ Nixon, “Slow Violence,” 257.

effects.”³⁵ For Nixon, the priority becomes how we might represent slow violence in a culture when immediacy is privileged: how do we make slow violence quick?

Questions of temporality and futurity have come to the forefront in queer theoretical scholarship, and Jack Halberstam provides a useful entrance into this field of critical work. Within *In a Queer Time and Place* he asserts that the tenets of normative culture are upheld by the ways in which time is understood and structured. Proper citizens live and die according to set paths of progression; from birth to school to work to marriage to families to home ownership to eventual death, our lives are oriented culturally towards predefined ways and times of being. In opposition to that, Halberstam suggests that “queer temporality disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding, from the professions of psychoanalysis and medicine, to socioeconomic and demographic studies on which every sort of state policy is based, to our understandings of the affective and the aesthetic.”³⁶ By calling attention to the ways in which normative time and definitions of the human fails to account for nonnormative lives, Halberstam opens up a crucial critical space for analyzing the ways that temporality serves to disenfranchise those who can't keep up the normative pace. Importantly, this critical approach to time is not simply abstract, but also requires us to rethink materiality, as he states “a 'queer' adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space.”³⁷ Here he points towards crucial connections to ecocriticism, as temporality and materiality are intimately connected. Rather than an abstraction, how we conceive of time intimately affects how we understand the physical world around (and within) us.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 152.

³⁷ Ibid., 6

Lee Edelman's work operates under a similar view of normative time, concluding that “queer[ness] must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organizations as such” that are formed through normative temporality.³⁸ Working through a psychoanalytic lens, in his work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Edelman frames his argument around the figure of the Child, arguing that “the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmatic Child, a notional freedom more highly valued than the actuality of freedom itself.”³⁹ To preserve this Child, the social order is formed around a process of reproductive futurity, in which the social order is consistently reproduced “for the good of the Child” in a state that is unchanging and constantly reiterated. Inevitably, this reproductive futurity fails to account for those who get in the way of its ceaseless repetition; queers, for example, as the poster children of non-reproductive sexual behaviors are pushed out of the social order and exist along its fringes for eventual assimilation (through the push of homonormative policies such as same-sex marriage) or denial to its ranks. It is in this space that defies interpellation, in this denial of the social order as a whole that Edelman finds queerness' ultimate purpose; here, “we might undertake the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification.”⁴⁰ We can read in Edelman's model a strong critique of the human as the center of the social order, as he resists the politics of signification (of which definitions of the human play a major part). Similarly, as the normative social order is centered around the human as the pinnacle of evolution reproducing itself as the telos of life, Edelman's model undermines the human as such, instead urging us to undermine such an order that only exists to reproduce itself without change.

³⁸ Edelman, 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

Looking at these various theories of time, I appreciate Nixon's approach, but his privileging of immediacy and quickness in making sense of and representing slow violence leads to new problems. If representation and immediacy become the core of approaches to action, invariably some persons' and populations' concerns have to be more immediate than others. Hierarchies of necessity begin to emerge, privileging some ecological or political events as *more* immediate, *more* deserving of note. For example, the common rhetorical form of the jeremiad in environmental writing exemplifies this danger. In creating a document in which the portended end of the world seems to be literally hanging in the balance of one issue that must be address, one inevitably leaves out and does not do justice to other issues which also have major impacts on the world. Rather than question these normative temporal models and push a systemic restructuring of cultural models of violence and trauma (as I think Halberstam and Edelman encourage us to do), immediacy is still privileged in the end. This is not to say that Nixon's work is necessarily re-inscribing traditional power structures. This critical juncture of slow violence and quick representation, however, presents us with a useful entry point as we begin to think of the effects of re-imagining slow violence or processes in quick time. In condensing expansive time into easily digestible ideas or images, I wonder what new types of temporal violence are taking place, and what types of stuckness come about in these formulations.

Darwin's Evolution and Compressive Violence

To best exemplify the cultural work of this violent compression, I look to the entrance of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution into Western culture in the mid- to late 1800s. Originally published in 1859, Darwin's *Origin of Species* presents a view of time and evolution that displaces the human as the center of the natural world. Darwin's evolution is a constant process

with no end, as there is never a perfect combination of traits that will completely benefit organisms. The only constant to his model of natural selection is “the accumulation of slight modifications of structure or instinct, each profitable to the individual under its conditions of life.”⁴¹ With his model of capricious mutations and biological shifts in organisms over time, Darwin presents a social order that is unstable and always capable of shifting wildly with no telos in sight. Rather than the perfect end-game and the pinnacle of being, contemporary human society in Darwin's model is simply one haphazard step in a long line of evolutionary points. It is this point that I think is most important and most radical in Darwin's theory of evolution. With no endpoint or goal in mind, Darwin's model is a productive rather than reproductive system. In many ways, Darwin's theory as put forth in *Origin* goes along with Edelman's critique of reproductive futurity. Evolution as a process is non-teleological, privileges nothing in its course of action, and provides us with no stable permanent social order. Darwin's evolution, then, suggests a fairly radical restructuring of the social order as-such, and in its de-centering of the human encourages a posthuman understanding of the world a century before many would expect it.

Along with evolution as a non-teleological process, Darwin's theory provides us with a view of time that is almost incomprehensible. As he states:

The whole history of the world, as at present known, although of a length quite incomprehensible by us, will hereafter be recognised as a mere fragment of time, compared with the ages which have elapsed since the first creature, the progenitor of innumerable extinct and living descendants, was created.⁴²

⁴¹ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 383.

In this model, the history of the world is vastly larger than many had previously thought, to such an extent that it is difficult to fathom in comparison to our lifespans and historical records. Looking towards the future, as well, we can imagine a similarly incomprehensible length of time to continue onward. With this temporal expansiveness in mind, the meaning of the human shifts dramatically. While our history of the world as such tends to privilege humans as the pinnacle of existence and the telos of species, Darwin's temporal model makes humanity a tiny speck, if even that, in the overall history of the planet, placing alongside other organisms as part of an unending chain of mutation and recomposition. His theory in many ways aligns with deep ecology and its recognition that “humanness is ecosystemically imbricated” and that our knowledge of the world and species is vastly limited.⁴³ Darwin suggests this himself when he writes, “what an infinite number of generations, which the mind cannot grasp, must have succeeded each other in the roll of years! Now turn to our richest geological museums, and what a paltry display we behold!”⁴⁴

Thinking back to the critical models of time presented earlier, Darwin's deep time has a very radical potential for queering our understanding of time. As mentioned before, his model of evolution rejects a telos and therefore fits well with Edelman's critique of reproductive futurity. For Halberstam, as well, *Origin of Species* would seem to be a useful model of rethinking time; by shifting the scope of our analysis to vast, inconceivable amounts of time, his model implicitly critiques the normative time upon which the social order is constructed and encourages us to rethink how a social order that

⁴³ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 103

⁴⁴ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 232.

truly reckons with the vast history of the planet can be ordered around time and temporality. Although Darwin has rarely been read before as a queer thinker, his models in *Origin* encourage such a radical restructuring of the social order and our ways of thinking about the human that I would be remiss to not place his work alongside similar contemporary critical theory as a possible peer in rethinking the world. Darwin's is a model in which time becomes almost meaningless; stuckness seems to have no place in this ever-changing model of existence.

However, while *Origin of Species* provided a radical entry into our understanding of history, the human, and the world at large, Darwin's 1871 work *The Descent of Man* backtracks or undermines much of the radical potential in *Origin*. While *Origin* left the specifics of the human mostly out of the picture, *Descent* pulls humanity to the forefront and in the process, brings oppressive social systems into the general theory of evolution, specifically related to race. In the seventh chapter of *Descent*, "On the Races of Man," Darwin starts to engage with extremely problematic rhetoric of racial and species difference. Taking for granted that racial difference (a social construction) and biological difference are strongly linked, he suggests that "There is, however, no doubt that the various races, when carefully compared and measured, differ much from each other."⁴⁵ While this statement on its own is relatively innocuous, within the context of Darwin's application of evolution and his articulation of race and species difference it becomes the start of a line of reasoning that leads further and further from the de-centering of the human taking place in *Origin*.

Discussing specific racial differences, we see arguments concerning racial differences in mental acuity, with Darwin matter-of-factly stating that the races' "mental characteristics are

⁴⁵ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 195.

likewise very distinct; chiefly as it would appear in their emotional, but partly in their intellectual faculties. Everyone who has had the opportunity of comparison, must have been struck with the contrast between the taciturn, even morose, aborigines of S. America and the light-hearted, talkative negroes.”⁴⁶ Here we can see where Darwin begins to apply social phenomena to his model, as the common figure of the “talkative” and fun-loving negro (itself a stereotype mired in views of black ineptitude, conceptions of blackness as of the body rather than the mind, etc.) shows up as a marker of inherent difference between races of humans.⁴⁷ Similarly, his suggestion of intellectual differences between 'races' of humans is also based in these socially-inscribed views of racial difference.

His discussion of racial mixing also belies the ways in which his model can never escape social definitions of the human. In his statement that “[t]he inferior vitality of mulattoes is spoken of in a trustworthy work as a well-known phenomenon; and this, although a different consideration from their lessened fertility, may perhaps be advanced as a proof of the specific distinctness of the parent races,” he again engages in racial logics, heavily present at the time, that place racial difference along the lines of biological difference.⁴⁸ As the definition of mulatto is contingent upon social definitions of race based on visual difference and linguistically is rooted in reproductive difference and incompatibility (its roots from the mule), this argument holds very little water and does little but propagate the common scientific racism of the time that suggests the mixing of the races will ultimately lead to a diminishing of humanity. While he ultimately argues against racial difference as cause for humans being seen as different species,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁷ Consider, for example, Christina Sharpe’s discussion of the mammy figure, who performs “*the* maternal function in the white household” but is “denied the rights and privileges of both womanhood and motherhood,” reduced to function and bodily resource for white children, in *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 163.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 200.

Darwin's model still creates a hierarchy of humanity, starting with “the lowest savages” and their inferior mental faculties, and moving upwards towards the white Western man, “a Howard or Clarkson,” as the most evolved.⁴⁹ Evolution, then, becomes not a process of organisms mutating and living or dying depending on the applicability of their mutations to their environments, but instead a process of becoming visibly civilized and white.

One way of conceptualizing why Darwin's model is so inundated with racial logics, even as it would have seemed to critique some of the very ones he cites, is to examine the legacy of slavery in the Western world. As Christina Sharpe states, “all modern subjects are post-slavery subjects fully constituted by the discursive codes of slavery and post-slavery, post-slavery subjectivity is largely borne and readable on the (New World) *black subject*.”⁵⁰ While slavery had been technically over by the time *The Descent of Man* was published, Sharpe convincingly argues that slavery and its logics still informed (and to this day) inform our understandings of what it means to be a subject, to be a human with will and freedom, and that this definition of the subject has been constituted through and against the experiences of black subjects. She suggests that to analyze these subjectivities is to “[think] about monstrous intimacies,” to think about “those subjectivities constituted from transatlantic slavery onward and connected, then as now, by the everyday mundane horrors that aren't acknowledged to be horrors.”⁵¹ In Darwin's work in *Descent*, then, we can see how subjectivities and the definitions of human still rely on these racist logics that are held over from the very-recent days of chattel slavery. One might read

⁴⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁰ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Darwin's hierarchalizing of racial intellects as one of the mundane horrors discussed by Sharpe as constituting and perpetuating the legacy of slavery.

As a result of the inability for culture at large to conceive of such a radically-altered notion of time, history, and evolution as presented in *Origin* that decenters humanity, the complexity of argument and breadth of evolutionary time (and what I would also call queerness) of Darwin's original assertions became violently compressed and displaced onto nonnormative bodies such as “the savage.” In America, specifically, the racialized body is a target of this compressive violence and becomes an unwilling participant in a teleological narrative of human development that begins with apes and ends with whiteness. This instance of temporal violence becomes visually apparent at the time in the figure of the Missing Link, or the intermediate species between man and what came before, that became a fixation of cultural depictions of race and disability as well as scientific discussion of evolution. To this day, the Missing Link (or lack thereof) is frequently cited by conservative commentators to attack Darwin's theory of evolution. In Darwin's own work in *Origin*, he addresses this critique partly by stating that one must recognize “the extreme imperfection of the geological record” in seeing why intermediate species are not generally apparent.⁵² With the vast amounts of time that have passed on the Earth and various weather and tidal conditions, it is rare that recognizable and usable records and fossils exist for examination. Along with this point, he reminds the reader of the general mutability of a species when it is no longer relevant (as one might expect an intermediary species between two more well-defined ones might be), suggesting that “a common but unknown progenitor” likely was briefly involved in mating with and differentiating these species before becoming extinct.⁵³

⁵² Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 227.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

A key point of critique with this common criticism of Darwin's theory also might question at what point a species is considered intermediate enough to fulfill the conditions of those attacking the theory. Almost always in these critiques we find the critique centered around the figure of the human rather than any other species, with commentators doubting the viability of humans being descended from apes, let alone other animals, even when presented with species that could be argued as progenitors of humans such as *Homo erectus*. This search for fine distinctions, for qualities that are just close enough to human but not quite, reveals an underlying anxiety about definitions of the human and the privileged status of such a category. As much of the history of philosophy can show us, humanity has consistently been championed as the top of the existential hierarchy and separate from other beings, the animal that has overcome its own bestiality. Darwin's theory (in *Origin of Species*, at least) undermines this view, placing humanity alongside other animals as simply the random result of beneficial characteristics of a species at an insignificant point in the general history of the universe. In a "process that cares no more for whether humans survive than for the welfare of any other species," the image of the human as pinnacle of existence is shattered and in response to this, the borders of humanity are quickly reigned in to protect what little sanctity may be left, and we see visual spectacle surrounding this border-tightening that inevitably disenfranchises nonnormative humans.⁵⁴

Drawing Out the Missing Link: The Mistick Krewe of Comus's 1873 Costume Sketches

One specific cultural instance in which the Missing Link appears as a highly visual marker of this evolutionary panic is the Mistick Krewe of Comus's contributions to New Orleans's 1873 Mardi Gras parade. The Mistick Krewe of Comus was established in 1857 as one

⁵⁴ Buell, 100.

of the original Mardi Gras krewes in New Orleans that would put on and take part in the festivities yearly with floats and costumed processions, and in their own words, “has always been enveloped in impenetrable mystery.”⁵⁵ In its own published history of itself and New Orleans Mardi Gras, Comus repeatedly emphasizes its place as a secret society based upon wealth, taste, and social position.⁵⁶ The Krewe’s entrance into New Orleans Mardi Gras culture with elaborate theming, costumery, and performance is discussed in the history as an elevation of the city’s carnival culture, in contrast to the celebration’s previous association with practical jokes and “ruffianism,” with the Krewe’s themes usually coalescing around classic European literature and mythology.⁵⁷ In her study of the Krewe’s 1914 usage of Chaucer as a parade theme, Candace Barrington draws a clear connection between the organization’s all-white, all-male membership and its choice of particularly Anglo-Saxon theme in an increasingly diverse New Orleans as attempts to perpetuate “a myth that had been slowly eroding since its first assertion in 1857; the rightful dominance of the Mistick Krewe’s small caste of white, male citizens.”⁵⁸

For the 1873 Mardi Gras celebration, the Krewe chose as their theme “Missing Links.” As the sketches of their costumes from this year suggest, this theme took up Darwin's theory of evolution, having recently been further introduced to a mainstream audience in the publication of *The Descent of Man*, to look at the genealogy of humans and other organisms. Taking Darwin's theory in off-kilter directions, the Mistick Krewe of Comus created a wealth of costume designs that suggest a connection between not only the traditionally conceived ancestors of humans, such

⁵⁵ J. W. Madden, *Hand book of the carnival, containing Mardi-Gras, its ancient and modern observance* (New Orleans, 1874), 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁸ Candace Barrington, “‘Forget what you have learned:’ The Mistick Krewe's 1914 Mardi Gras Chaucer,” *American Literary History* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 808.

as apes, but also plants and other non-animal organisms. In the sketch for “Pineapple,”⁵⁹ for example, we see the way that the artist connects the rotundness of the man in the sketched costume with the roundness of a pineapple, his pink smiling face in contrast with the yellow and bright green of his costume’s midsection and resignifies human legs as the roots of a pineapple. In this and other examples such as “Corn” and “Magnolia,” the Mistick Krewe of Comus provides a fantastical view of organistic kinship that links humans and other organisms in a strange evolutionary bond that suggests boundaries between humans and non-humans are not as discrete as one might think.⁶⁰ Sometimes these bonds draw connections between humans and other organisms' methods of forming and making sense of intimate bonds, such as “Kangaroo.”⁶¹ In this image, the artist reconceptualizes the kangaroo's pouch as an apron in which a mother keeps her young (and I say mother here as Kangaroo is clearly meant to be read as a woman, with her various frills, red and blue ribbons, and implied breasts), suggesting similarities in the mothering practices of kangaroos and humans. While this could be read as an anthropomorphization of the kangaroo, and it’s unlikely the costumed reveler would actually carry joeys or human infants around in an apron, we might instead see it as an unstable point at which possibly uncomfortable similarities are drawn between humans and other animals that suggest we may be more similar than one would like to think. In most of these sketches, done in

⁵⁹ “Pineapple,” watercolor on paper, Comus costume designs, Carnival Collection, Manuscripts Collection 900, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane:8747>

⁶⁰ “Corn,” watercolor on paper, Comus costume designs, Carnival Collection, Manuscripts Collection 900, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. Accessed July 12, 2018. <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A8296>. “Magnolia,” watercolor on paper, Comus costume designs, Carnival Collection, Manuscripts Collection 900, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A9334>.

⁶¹ “Kangaroo,” watercolor on paper, Comus costume designs, Carnival Collection, Manuscripts Collection 900, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A5333>.

pencil and watercolor on paper, the pages also show water and dirt stains from years of storage in a suboptimal location, the wear suggesting the qualities of a long-lost bestiary of secret humanoid creatures

These human-nonhuman similarities and possibilities of not-so-separate humanity are not without their own projections of difference and corralling of the bounds of the human. While some of the Krewe's missing links seem to just be a fanciful take on evolution, others reveal the more sinister effects of racialized rhetorics on cultural views of evolution. When looking at the costumes for “Baboon” and “Gorilla,” for example, some of these visual tropes of difference become apparent.⁶² While racial difference seems to be absent from most of the other costumes (which simply privilege whiteness or make light of other markers of difference, such as gender), these two specifically engage with the racist logics of evolution that place blackness on the evolutionary continuum below the human. In both these costume sketches we see common markers of black men in American culture at this time, specifically of minstrelsy: “Baboon” and “Gorilla,” tambourine and banjo in hand, play on tropes of black men as careless, fun-loving individuals. Baboon stands with a red-and-white-striped cap on his head in an approximation of the classic Jim Crow pose, furred legs bent and stepping to the right side of the sketch, as its back bends to the right and its bent arms hold and play the tambourine, while Gorilla wears a peacock-feathered hat and juts its hips to the left while leaning its upper body to the right, leaning awkwardly as it uses the banjo. Along with these musical tropes, both costumes also

⁶² “Baboon,” watercolor on paper, Comus costume designs, Carnival Collection, Manuscripts Collection 900, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A6627>. “Gorilla,” watercolor on paper, Comus costume designs, Carnival Collection, Manuscripts Collection 900, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, accessed July 12, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A6396>.

have dark fur on their limbs and faces rendered in dark human skin tones and textures, along with exaggerated, caricatured bright red mouths and wide toothy grins.

These images are consistent with other contemporaneous depictions of black men that thrived after the end of the Civil War when, as Erskine Peters states in Marlon Riggs' documentary *Ethnic Notions* on depictions of blackness in American popular culture, "during Reconstruction the black is a challenge to the political system."⁶³ In this climate, then, images of black men as both bestial and lackadaisical serves to simultaneously illustrate the supposed looming threat of blackness, while hearkening to a mythical time when this threat to a dominant racist white culture was kept in check by the structures of chattel slavery. Similarly, the usage of animal traits serves to dehumanize blackness, making a lack of sympathy for black Americans more likely because, as Patricia Turner argues, "if you make that step and say that these [people] are really like furry animals, then it's much easier to rationalize and justify the threat" of acts of violence against a subhuman category.⁶⁴

Examining these depictions alongside Sharpe's model of monstrous intimacies, we can see how tropes of slavery find their way into these visual depictions, implicitly or explicitly. As Chen states, "so many apparently innocuous conjurings of animal-human relating...are underlain or counterpointed by far-from-innocent global histories whose legacies continue through animal-human mappings,"⁶⁵ and this is very much the case in these images that invoke the specter of minstrelsy in their rendering. Depictions of black men as light-hearted buffoons have the double effects of portraying them as harmless and lacking intellect (connected to the trope of the lazy layabout slave), as cultural producers wanted, as Barbara Christian states, "to soothe people,

⁶³ Marlon T. Riggs, et al. *Ethnic Notions*. 1986. Film.

⁶⁴ *Ethnic Notions*.

⁶⁵ Chen, 98.

wanted to make people believe their society could continue” in the face of black entrance into civic life.⁶⁶ At the same time these depictions serve to mask perceived threats of a violent black masculinity, one that threatens to rape white women and destroy the normative family and pure white heritage. Of course, this perceived threat is a displacement of the much more common monstrous intimacy of white slaveowners using female (and male) slaves as objects for their sexual pleasure. However, these are not the narratives in which black men were easily stuck in place through visual culture.

In these depictions, racial difference is transmuted into a spectacle, one that serves not only to entertain and diminish the perceived threat of racial difference (as minstrel-esque depictions are meant to do) but also to shore up the edges of what counts as human, sticking whiteness firmly in the camp of normative humanity. In overemphasizing the visibility of difference, these costumes attempt to set distinctions between white/human and nonwhite/nonhuman in such a way that keeps racialized bodies at the borders of reasonable connection to animals, while white bodies remain safe in the category of pure human; as Judith Butler states, “dehumanization [is] the condition for the production of the human.”⁶⁷ In depictions like “Pineapple” a connection between the human and nonhuman is constructed so that, while able to be read in a radical way, it is mainly a form of play with evolution, as whiteness is at no risk of being read as *really* part pineapple: Darwin's theory does not suggest a link between pineapples and humans as such. In “Baboon” and “Gorilla,” however, racist rhetorics surrounding Darwin's theory of evolution and species difference and the spectacularized costumes combine to create depictions that seem to suggest, “Yes, to be black *is* to be close to animal,” as apes are cited as predecessors of the human. In an effort to keep the

⁶⁶ *Ethnic Notions*.

⁶⁷ Butler, 91.

specter of animality as far from whiteness as possible, the vast amounts of time suggested in Darwin's narrative that are necessary for evolution and speciation are radically compressed, with the excess of species difference being expunged and projected onto the African-American body. As a result, a monstrous intimacy is revealed between blackness and animality, sticking these concepts together as these sketches so easily combine depictions of dark, coarse baboon and gorilla fur with human faces and Jim Crow smiles.

Performing the Missing Link: Minstrelsy and the Freak Show

One also needs to consider the function of these sketches beyond their existence as artifacts in their own rights. These sketches were in fact made into costumes for the 1873 Mardi Gras festivities, as the Krewe's printed history of its effort attests, and as such these sketches offer a glimpse into particular acts of not only sketched, but public embodied performances of (black/animal)face minstrelsy. This performance aspect muddies the lines of identity, if but briefly, giving the white male krewe members the chance to perform "Kangaroo," to perform "Baboon," and all the complex attachments inherent in those depictions, as they wandered down the streets of New Orleans. As the first major American popular culture, blackface minstrelsy offered whites an opportunity for affective release, to embrace the "ruffian" qualities dominant culture projected onto black Americans, although Eric Lott argues that "the repellent elements repressed from white consciousness and projected onto black people were far from securely alienated."⁶⁸ He discusses blackface minstrelsy as "something like compromise formations of white self-policing, opening the lines of property and sexuality to effacement in the very moment of their cultural construction;" in those moments of performance, the boundaries of acceptability

⁶⁸ Lott, 36.

were at once torn down and built back up, and their artifice (with material consequences) made manifest.⁶⁹ It is worth considering the possibilities of depiction in the Krewe's performances of these costumes, the ways they may have performed "Baboon" to the tune of Jim Crow, or "Kangaroo" as a doting overly-affectionate mother, in the process making visible the cultural bounds between acceptable actions and physicalities for raced and gendered subjects at the same time they inhabited those very boundaries, or at least cultural understandings of them.

This specific example of a Mardi Gras parade in the American South is far from the only instance of compressive violence exemplified through spectacle around Darwin's entrance into popular culture. The institution of the freak show as a major traveling form of entertainment also takes place around this time and engages in similar manipulations of time and understandings of evolution, disability, race, gender, and nationality. The figure of the Missing Link frequently appeared within popular freak shows in the late 1800s, such as in the exhibition of William Johnson, a "developmentally disabled African-American man from New Jersey" who performed in fur-covered suits and was presented to the public as The Monkey Man.⁷⁰ As Eli Clare relates, P.T. Barnum showmen said of Johnson that "though it has many of the features and characteristics of both the human and the brute, is not, apparently, either, but in appearance, a mixture of both – the connecting link between humanity and brute creation."⁷¹ Johnson is transformed through the Barnum narrative's restructuring of evolutionary time into a Missing Link, an abjected and racialized figure that bears the weight of humanity's connection to other species, stuck in a mythical past as a stepping stone towards human purity. The freak show as an institution "create[d] an Other against whom one could gauge his/her normality" and "both fed

⁶⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁰ Clare, 73.

⁷¹ Ibid.

upon and gave fuel to imperialism, domestic racist policies, and the cultural beliefs about wild savages and white superiority.”⁷²

Anxieties about definitions of the human as presented through the freak show were not limited solely to race; other vectors of identity were similarly present in the shows. Depictions of bearded ladies and androgynous individuals were common, each making a spectacle of the anxiety surrounding gender roles and sexual difference. By displacing this anxiety onto a woman with a beard, gender and sexual differences are put forth as always visible and easy to spot rather than ambiguous, contingent, and unstable. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggests such exhibits “demanded that American audiences resolve this affront to the rigid categories of male and female that their culture imposed,” these visual engagements with difference giving show attendees “dilemmas of classification,” texts of flesh to read, solve and define themselves against.⁷³ Disability, as well, becomes a major arena around which anxieties about difference and evolution become visible. Various figures such as the Elephant Man and the Mermaid Girl embody some of these in their application of animalistic qualities to physical anomalies such as Proteus syndrome and sirenomelia. Within the realm of the freak show, these variations in human bodies “soothe the onlookers’ self-doubt by appearing as their antithesis,” the freak as “safely domesticated” while the audience remains “rational and controlled,” capable of self-determination and holding optic privilege in the encounter.⁷⁴

Rather than uncommon variations on human anatomy, the freak show turns individuals’ bodily specificities into spectacles of difference and the remnants of evolution, as markers of

⁷² Ibid., 74, 84.

⁷³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 59.

⁷⁴ Garland-Thomson, 65. For more on disability within freak shows, see Michael M. Chemers, *Staging Stigma: A Critical Examination of the American Freak Show* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

what came before and what, we might see with a critical eye, is feared to remain latent in our bodies. In *Origin of Species* Darwin reminds the reader of their shared ancestry with other animals, stating that “the framework of bones in the hand of a man, wing of a bat, fin of the porpoise, and leg of the horse, - [...] and innumerable other such facts, at one explain themselves on the theory of descent with slow and slight successive modifications.”⁷⁵ With this fear of reversion to a previous evolutionary form, this anxiety surrounding the loss of one’s humanity, the freak show offers an institution to both revel in these anxieties that one may be more than human while they are safely displaced at the end of the day in disenfranchised bodies. Clare points toward this, stating that “the display of [...] on-disabled people of color and developmentally disabled people [in freak shows] embodied the missing link between primates and humans” and the rhetoric involved at once suggested that humans could become other organisms that are thought of as “less evolved” at the same time that this possibility was wholly concentrated in nonnormative bodies that were also considered “less evolved.”⁷⁶ In the late 1800s when disability began to be increasingly medicalized and organized through organizations like the National Association for the Deaf and the American Psychological Association, the definition of the “normal” human became increasingly salient.

Conclusions: Compressing New Orleans, Doing Time Differently

In discussing these texts alongside Darwin's theory of evolution, I am not suggesting that these depictions of visual difference as species difference or evolutionary development were not around before Darwin's theory became popular; scientists as far back as the 17th century theorized on the biological and special origins of racial difference, and the case of Sarah

⁷⁵ Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 376.

⁷⁶ Clare, 80.

Baartman (referred to in a traveling exhibit as 'the Hottentot Venus') both during her life and after her death reflects the ongoing Anglo-European obsession with perceived visual differences in African anatomy, her public consumption part of an “intricate web of convoluted images that dominated the caricatured creation of a global body aesthetic” at the time.⁷⁷ However, the confluence of Darwin's work entering the popular consciousness at the same time that tensions in America over race took the form of questions of the definitions of citizenship and personhood through the Civil War and Reconstruction created a perfect storm for temporal arguments for species and racial difference. This is particularly important in the context of New Orleans, the home of the Mistick Krewe of Comus and the location where the costume sketches were created and later turned into costumes used during performance. Reconstruction-era New Orleans held long-simmering tensions between black, Creole, and white populations post-Civil War over increasing segregation and disenfranchisement of non-white populations, as well as combative and inciting racist newspaper media, leading to multiple street battles in the late 1800s and reaching a fever pitch in Robert Charles’ shooting of a white police officer and subsequent rioting by white mobs in July of 1900 which resulted in the killing of dozens of black New Orleans residents.⁷⁸ In this climate, the costumes of the Krewe and their attempt to stick black men in the category of temporally-behind racial and animal other through visual culture take on a particularly sinister hue. At the same time political and legal battles were taking place over who

⁷⁷ Carol E. Henderson, “AKA: Sarah Baartman, The Hottentot Venus, and Black Women’s Identity,” *Women’s Studies* 43, no. 7 (October 2014): 950. As Garland-Thomson states, circulated images of Baartman and other black women “expose how gender, sexuality, colonization, race, and pathology interrelate in the process of constructing cultural icons” (71).

⁷⁸ For more on disenfranchisement and race relations in New Orleans and Mississippi in this period, see William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976). More information on race-related street battles during this period in New Orleans can be found in James K. Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and the Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

was a rightful citizen, scientific definitions of the human were being deployed through visual culture to revoke a biological humanity from people of color.

While I have been focusing mainly on systemic views of this compressive temporal violence and the ways in which it turned the rhetoric of evolution against nonnormative subjects, it is also important to consider individual experiences of this violence. Eli Clare ponders “What did the people who worked as freaks think of their jobs, their lives? I want to hear their stories,” shifting the authority for the experiences of those in freak shows from historians (who are generally privileged as the curators of this truth) to the “freaks” themselves.⁷⁹ As he importantly notes, freak shows provided a form of employment for those involved that was a different, if not better, alternative to institutionalization. “The decline of the freak show in the early decades of the 20th century coincided with the medicalization of disability,” a cultural move away from the freak and towards the tragically ill.⁸⁰ Under the mystery of the marker of 'freak' and by taking on the guise of a posthuman subject, many were able to operate outside of a medicalized system and remain independent, turning this rhetorical violence into an opportunity for individual freedom.

Similarly, we might think about the ways in which nonnormative subjects inevitably continued life under normative regimes of time and power. For example, we might consider how the racist trope of the lazy slave, the slave that cannot do his work in time with his master, may instead suggest other ways in which stuckness functions beyond binaristic oppression. By rejecting the temporality of dominant culture, enslaved people created their own individual temporalities that refused to progress in the manner suggested, tinkering the oppressive qualities of stuckness into a form of willful passive resistance in their own doing of time. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I take up this particular line of thought, focusing on a different set of

⁷⁹ Clare, 78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

scenarios in which subjects of systemic state and cultural violence utilize stuckness, in a temporal and material sense, as a form of world-making resistance and critique.

Chapter 2: Wasting Connections – HIV/AIDS, Waste, and Reparative Production

It is Sunday October 11, 1992, and dozens of chanting ACT UP protesters are lined up, linked arm in arm, pushing their way towards the fence of the White House lawn, a number of them carrying small packages in their hands. Police look on as the protesters slowly move towards the lawn, their walking speed increasing as they get closer and closer to the White House. When they finally arrive at the fence, clouds of white dust start to float onto the lawn as the protesters, many of them now sobbing, fling or empty their containers onto the bright green grass. The small packages contained the cremains of their various loved ones whose lives were cut short by HIV/AIDS complications, and who are now intermingled with the President's dirt and grass. As the police realize what is happening and what has been emptied onto the lawn, they quickly move to physical separate the protesters from the fence, through the use of their own bodies as blockades or through physical force.



Nearby at the National Mall, the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is on display. The quilt is a veritable sea of names, each represented on a colorful panel 3' by 6' personalized by their loved ones. The panels serve a number of purposes, both as a memorial to the individual's life and a visualization of the mass deaths brought about by HIV/AIDS. There are no police officers violently preventing activists from carrying out an action here; instead, thousands of attendees listen to words of solidarity from politicians, Hollywood actors, and other public figures while children play in fountains filled with water tinged a pleasant shade of red in reference to the HIV/AIDS awareness ribbon.



How do we make sense of these parallel political actions? Taking place concurrently in the capital of the United States, both events are taking steps to address HIV/AIDS on a national scale but receive wildly differing reaction, from public praise for the AIDS Memorial Quilt to violent opposition against the ACT UP Ashes Action. There are a number of lenses through which we might understand this noted reception of the Ashes Action, lenses which have also shaped much of the academic discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS: legality (illegal encroachment onto private property), medicalization (improper disposal of human remains), sexuality (the remnants of sexual deviants being brought into contact with governmental property). Instead, however, I suggest that using stuckness as an analytic lens here, specifically considering how waste operates alongside and as a marker of stuckness both materially and temporally, can provide a crucial new way of thinking about the functions of HIV/AIDS activism during the primary years of the epidemic within the United States (late 1980s-early 1990s).

In this chapter I argue that utilizing waste (a culturally charged incarnation of stuckness) as a subject of analysis, both materially and discursively, allows us to see otherwise hidden material, environmental, and social repercussions of HIV/AIDS. By sitting with stuckness in this chapter, clinging to the losses of life, control, and health associated with HIV/AIDS and their representation through the lens and time of waste, I suggest that these associations can be used for what Eve Sedgwick termed reparative readings, a form of criticism she suggests works against the typical tendencies of contemporary critical thought. While HIV/AIDS' association with waste is starkly rejected and "become[s] invisible or illegible under a paranoid optic," an optic that is limited in its scope and suspicious of contradictory findings that weren't expected, a reparative reading can embrace and probe the contingency and effects of this association and find

joy in them.⁸¹ I see sitting with stuckness as operating alongside and with Sedgwick's reparative readings, as Sedgwick sees paranoid reading as "closely tied to the notion of the inevitable," operating in a limited view of temporality in which everyone is working along the same developmental path, whereas reparative reading emphasizes contingency and the capacity for difference in life experience and expectations.⁸² A model of reparative reading, then, is a wonderful tool to add to a method of sitting with stuckness, where the ability to recognize and make sense of alternative ways of doing time in stuckness is key.

Reading political and artistic resistance surrounding HIV/AIDS through the lens of waste lets us see the radical capabilities of HIV/AIDS as waste to destabilize cultural norms of subject/object, public/private, and the body. I am also interested in these instances of resistance as reparative *productions*, both on the level of performance, as in theatrical productions, as well as performativity, how these acts produce new ways of considering the cultural and material effects of HIV/AIDS and find spaces for people with HIV/AIDS to engage with dominant discourses in willful ways. Here I am indebted to Mel Chen's interrogation of the generative possibilities of toxicity in *Animacies*, as HIV/AIDS operates in and alongside toxicity and similarly might provide for us, if we take the time to look, complex and sometimes uncomfortable chances to glimpse alternatives to mainstream discourse.⁸³ In addition to Chen, in order to build onto my project of sitting with stuckness through new frameworks of waste and performance, I engage with and put into conversation scholars of queer/ecological thought, bringing reparative readings of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to the antisocial queer work of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman to bear on the relational and ecological work of Stacey Alaimo and

⁸¹ Sedgwick, 147.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 148.

⁸³ Chen, 190.

Gay Hawkins, finding within them a way of considering waste an alternative way of doing material time.

Methodologically, I use this framework of reparative readings to perform a visual and material cultural analysis of two specific instances of HIV/AIDS-related political and artistic action taking place in the early 1990s. First, I look at the two events presented at the beginning of this chapter as shown in archival footage in David France's documentary *How to Survive a Plague*: the ACT UP Ashes Action and the AIDS Memorial Quilt, each taking place concurrently in Washington D.C. in December of 1992. I interrogate how these two political actions, as well as ACT UP's Die-In actions, operate with seemingly different underlying assumptions utilizing a lens of waste built from queer theory, queer ecologies, and performance studies writings that emphasize waste, negativity, death, and ephemerality as productive or informing an alternative worldview. In this analysis I focus on the Ashes Action as a reparative production, in the performance sense, utilizing representation and visibility in specific ways that offer resistant readings of HIV/AIDS and its effects. Next, I use this same framework to examine works by visual artist Daniel Goldstein, whose pieces explicitly relate to and depict personal and communal struggles with HIV/AIDS with unconventional materials and processes. In this section I suggest seeing Goldstein as a scavenger artist is helpful in thinking about stuckness and its generative capabilities in reparative production, actively sticking with and utilizing discarded and devalued materials in their works. I conclude this chapter by reading these political actions and artistic productions together, noting the ways in which they might suggest further political and artistic actions, as well as bringing forward their engagements and destabilizations of normative models of public and private and the notion of loss.

Theoretical Scaffolding: Waste, Toxicity

To construct a lens capable of closely examining how waste operates within these actions and works of art, I engage here with a variety of theoretical formulations of waste and HIV/AIDS, mainly pulling from the fields of queer theory, queer ecologies, and environmental studies. While I engage with other theorists throughout my analyses, these fields comprise the core of my formulation of stuckness here and shape the ways in which I build on my theorization and analysis of compressive violence in the previous chapter.

The most sizable contribution to the discussion of the cultural relationship between queerness and HIV/AIDS comes from Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani, both theorists working out of the psychoanalytic tradition that find notions of negativity and toxicity enticing for political resistance. Bersani's influential essay "Is The Rectum a Grave?," originally published in 1987, addresses the cultural power of HIV/AIDS as seen through Freud. It begins with a provocative statement that serves as the core of Bersani's argument: "There is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it."⁸⁴ Bersani is operating out of a Freudian model where sex is *jouissance*, or a form of pleasure that is painful or damaging, and he sees the rhetoric surrounding HIV/AIDS as aligning queer sex with *jouissance*, as gay male sex is an act always-already connected (physically or metaphorically) with the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Bersani finds radical potential in this view of sex and queerness, as queer sex (unlike heterosexuality) operates outside of a framework in which sex has a (reproductive) purpose; instead, for gay men, Bersani sees sex as

⁸⁴ Bersani, 3.

inherently destabilizing of the social order *because* it lacks some connection to the reproduction of society.⁸⁵

Bersani continues this association of queer sex with negation of the social order when he states that, in terms of HIV, “a public health crisis has been treated as an unprecedented sexual threat,” in the process leaving infected queer bodies to die while politicians and the media frame HIV as an attack on the traditional family by homosexuals.⁸⁶ In response to this cultural association of gay men and anal sex with death through HIV, Bersani suggests that queer men take up this connection through what he sees as a symbolic killing of straightness through gay male penetrative sex; as the article's title puts forth, mainstream culture sees that “the rectum is a grave.” Through these acts, Bersani suggests that traditional power structures are complicated (as “penetrated = female = powerless” in patriarchal culture) and destabilized.⁸⁷ While he sees some connection between gay people and other minority communities, he ultimately suggests that while blacks may redeem themselves in the eyes of the social order, queers (through their inherent destabilizing of society through non-heteronormative sex) have no place.⁸⁸

The effects of Bersani's book on queer considerations of the body and HIV can be seen in the work of Lee Edelman, whose work in *No Future* featured heavily in my formulation of stuckness in chapter one and will continue to stick around throughout the dissertation. At the heart of Edelman's argument is the Lacanian death drive, “the inarticulate surplus that dismantles the subject from within,” its intent solely the destruction of the stabilized subject.⁸⁹ This

⁸⁵ Ibid., 24-25. It's important to note that Bersani and Edelman both operate from a relatively normative subject position, and their theorizing frequently reflects this, as in here where Bersani privileges certain sex acts as more queer and resistant than others. He and Edelman both also lack an intersectional analysis, and race is a lingering issue within both of their pieces.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4, 8.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 9-10.

⁸⁹ Edelman, 9.

destabilization is key to a model that sees queerness as “attain[ing] its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social;” only by associating itself with the death drive, existing outside of reason and commonsense and even the desire to continue life, is queerness truly ethically useful.⁹⁰ An important aspect of this association of the death drive is a critique of futurity. For Edelman, the social order's conception of futurity is built solely around the figure of the child; the “Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics,” and it is through this focus on children (protecting them, ensuring their safety) that queerness is demonized.⁹¹ For this reason, Edelman denounces futurity as inherently reproductive (of children, of the social order) in nature, and argues that queerness, in rejecting the Child and embracing the figural position of the death drive, can move beyond simply trying to gain a place in the social order (in kinship systems, in marriage, in the military, etc.) and begin to exist *outside* of it.⁹²

It's important to keep in mind the historical situation of both Bersani and Edelman when considering their arguments, as they are both writing in periods (the late 1980s and the early 2000s) in which the public perception of (white gay male urban) homosexuality was undergoing a major shift towards respectability. In the late 1980s, large numbers of gay men critiqued the promiscuity and sexual behaviors of others in the community, shifting the blame onto them and places such as bath houses for HIV infections in an attempt to gain at least a modicum of respectability from the mainstream. Bersani's oppositional argument, then, begins to make sense in his historical position. His critical attitudes towards futurity are also supported by his experience that AIDS was discussed in the mainstream as always something that will be cured

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁹¹ Ibid., 3.

⁹² Ibid., 27.

eventually, exemplified in the government's "obsession with testing instead of curing."⁹³ In a similar manner, Edelman's critique of the Child is greatly influenced by contemporary GLB politics, as shown in the work of organizations like GLAAD, that focus on gaining mainstream, "respectable" rights for queer persons (such as marriage, hate crime legislation, or the ability to join the army) without critiquing the institutions granting these and other privileges.

Bersani and Edelman's work does important cultural work in terms of sexuality but lacks an explicit engagement with ideas of waste and engagement beyond metaphor. The burgeoning field of queer ecologies, on the other hand, is heavily invested in the material and environmental aspects of queerness, as well as how it is discussed. Giovanna di Chiro also interrogates associations of queerness with toxicity in ways similar to Bersani, albeit in the realm of environmental toxins, arguing that gender and sexual nonnormativity within human and nonhuman populations has become the emphasis of much political action surrounding environmental toxins, rather than cancers or other effects of pollutants.⁹⁴ As Bersani found that HIV/AIDS was transformed from a medical toxin to a sexual toxin, di Chiro argues that queerness becomes an environmental threat, capable of completely destabilizing ecosystems and dooming species to extinction. Instead, however, these authors encourage us to more carefully engage with these rhetorical deployments of reproductive security (consider Edelman's Child, for example) and toxicity to consider how queerness might operate alongside, rather than against, them.

These rhetorical deployments of toxicity also rely on a simplistic understanding of the body and immunity, as Stacy Alaimo argues in *Bodily Natures*. While culturally the body is

⁹³ Bersani, 4.

⁹⁴ Giovanna Di Chiro, "Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity," in *Queer Ecologies*, edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 201-202.

presented as discrete and separate from others and its environment, Alaimo utilizes the concept of transcorporeality to interrogate how “the human is always enmeshed with the more-than-human world.”⁹⁵ Contemporary science and embodied experience show us how the body is never *not* connected to its surroundings, and this opens up a crucial space for rethinking subjectivity. To think about HIV/AIDS explicitly in the context of transcorporeality, the virus as a material phenomenon “cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial.”⁹⁶ The circumstances surrounding HIV/AIDS influence how it operates on a physical level, as we can see in the critiques of groups such as ACT UP that the administrative failure to address HIV/AIDS led to its rapidly increased virulence and the state of epidemic in a relatively short period of time. Related to Alaimo's transcorporeality is the concept of assemblages, as originally presented in the works of Deleuze and Guattari. As Jane Bennett describes them, assemblages are “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements . . . living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within.”⁹⁷ If we think of HIV/AIDS as an assemblage, waste operates as one of the elements entangled within it and imbricated with issues like legality, sexuality, medicalization, and issues of citizenship.

In thinking about these complex connections between ideologies and ideas surrounding HIV/AIDS and waste, my final theoretical consideration here will be the question of public and private. As Gay Hawkins reveals in *The Ethics of Waste*, “waste mediates the public-private distinction” that is critical to contemporary formulations of the nation-state, citizenship, and

⁹⁵ Stacey Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

⁹⁶ Alaimo, 20.

⁹⁷ Bennett, 23-24.

ethics.⁹⁸ Waste is that which must remain private and abject, but we rely on public institutions (sewage, garbage pick-ups) to make that so, bringing the proper disposal of waste into questions of what it means to be a good citizen and individual; as Hawkins relates, “defecation becomes a technique of the self,” a performative act that acts to constitute one's identity.⁹⁹ While I am not discussing feces or other forms of explicit waste here (although I think a scatological analysis of HIV/AIDS is both possible and highly necessary, in considering its material effects), the issues presented by Hawkins of waste as abjection and an *ethical* issue are extremely pertinent, especially in relation to the Ashes Action.

Reparative Production as Performance: ACT UP Ashes Action

Political activism surrounding HIV/AIDS has taken many forms and shapes over the years, from well-known examples like public rallies and vigils, to medical lobbying for medications, to more artistic and performance-based actions, like those put on by ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power. Founded in early 1987 in New York City as a grassroots response to perceived inaction by local and federal governments to address HIV/AIDS as it ravaged communities, ACT UP prided itself on its approach of “non-violent direction action” that utilized engaging public spectacles for political purposes, what it terms “dramatic acts of civil disobedience.”¹⁰⁰ Some of the most notorious of these actions were Die-Ins, where protestors would fall down in a corpse-like position on streets or within large establishments, such as in December 1989 at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City that drew over 4,500 protestors, to visualize the deaths brought about by institutional failure (governmental, medical,

⁹⁸ Hawkins, 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54

¹⁰⁰ ACT UP, “ACT UP Capsule History,” accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.actupny.org/documents/capsule-home.html>.

religious) to address HIV/AIDS as a problem worthy of a solution.¹⁰¹ It is this last category of actions that I am most interested here, as I want to return to this idea of a reparative reading to suggest the first aspect of another two-pronged concept: the reparative production. I believe this concept offers us useful ways of engaging with the actions of ACT UP that received much less mainstream praise or historical weight that more mainstream actions like the AIDS Memorial Quilt have received. I argue that these actions, through their explicitly visual and material engagement with waste, death, and negativity through performance, questioned underlying assumptions that fueled much mainstream HIV/AIDS activism and were subsequently seen as less legitimate. In the process, however, we can read these performances as offering alternative ways for persons with AIDS (PWAS) or allies of PWAs to engage with affective experiences of waste and death, alternatives that engage reparatively with these negative concepts and questioned, in very material ways, boundaries of public and private that mainstream models did not.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt is possibly the most well-known instance of HIV/AIDS political action that is explicitly invested in representing the lives and experiences of those with HIV/AIDS. Originally produced in 1987 and exhibited in 1988 in Central Park in New York City, by the fall of 1992 when was displayed at the National Mall in Washington D.C. for a major exhibition it had become a national phenomenon, its increase in popularity echoing a slow increase in public investment in fighting the AIDS crisis.¹⁰² As presented earlier, the quilt itself is made up of thousands of 3' by 6' panels, each dedicated to a person who has died of HIV/AIDS-related complications. These panels are almost exclusively created and designed by

¹⁰¹ ACT UP, "ACT UP/NY Chronology 1989," accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.actupny.org/documents/cron-89.html>.

¹⁰² David Dunlap, "Quilt Unfolds Painful Story of AIDS," *The New York Times*, June 20, 1988, 3.

the loved ones of the individuals, though some have been created by fans for celebrity figures, and the decorations for the panels must abide by certain restrictions that keep them acceptable for public display.

Looking simply at the material make-up of the quilt, there are certain prescribed norms being put into place. Panels all have a uniform size, and relatively uniform standards for decoration (an emphasis on being family-friendly, for instance). Similarly, panels are limited to the inclusion of one individual, or two individuals who may be spouses or siblings. This creates the effect of the quilt as a sea of individuals, but ones that are kept separate except by standards of blood or acceptable relationship status. The quilt is presented on the National Mall, a well-kept and beautified area offering a pleasant backdrop for a relatively somber artifact. To return to the image of the red-tinted fountain surrounded by playing children near the quilt on the Mall, this is a representation of HIV/AIDS that is seem almost tailor-made for Edelman's Child; HIV/AIDS is something represented here in the most abstract way possible (red liquid, a slightly foreboding symbol, to be sure) that makes sure not to destabilize the comfort of the Child, remaining beautiful and aesthetically-pleasing. The ideas of abstraction and beauty are key to the quilt and recur in descriptions of the quilt itself; the quilt offers an abstracted space for those affected by HIV/AIDS to be presented in a beautified manner, one that represents them at what their family determines to be their best or most representable moment.

Looking at the ACT UP Ashes Action, there is a clearly different perspective on HIV/AIDS activism and the role of the individual in the action. Whereas with the AIDS Memorial Quilt there seems to be a lack of actants (or at least a more immobile, stuck-in-place collection of actants), activists and PWAS form the core of the Ashes Action. The quilt offers up a static historical depiction of PWAs, one that privileges a particularly representable aspect of

their lives, while the Ashes Action takes death and brings a certain vitality to it for the purposes of HIV/AIDS activism. In ACT UP's archival footage, as sobbing individuals march arm-in-arm towards the camera, moving across the National Mall towards the White House, eventually throwing their loved ones' ashes onto the White House lawn, death is not static and memorialized, but becomes weaponized in a highly personal and material manner. In this way, the action functions as an attack on the status quo, as it brings material contact and visibility to the forefront of HIV/AIDS discussions. In ACT UP's choice to record these events for posterity, they provide the action with an extra level of meaning, memorializing not only the lives of those lost, but their physical usage for political advancement. These are forms of representation not present in the AIDS Memorial Quilt, where the materiality of PWAs' bodily existences are not so apparent; the Ashes Action instead makes the materiality of death, the move of the human body from living being to waste, its primary focus and performance. The bone chips and ash are themselves, but also act as synecdochic stand-ins for the individuals who have died, as well as a critique of an uncaring government that refuses to take action.

Whereas the AIDS Memorial Quilt transforms the materiality of death into memorial craftwork, the Ashes Action instead utilizes the material waste of HIV/AIDS-related death within its direct political action. I do not mean to suggest here that the Ashes Action is somehow better because it utilizes the "real" consequences of cultural and governmental ignorance of PWAs. The affective remnants and memorials of PWAs are just as "real" as their physical remains, and the utilization of quilting as the form of art chosen for this project engages with important histories of craftwork and accessible creative acts to memorialize one's loved one at the same time it unifies and makes visible the interconnected nature of PWAs beyond individual experience and identity through the suturing together of individual panels. Shortly before the

1992 exhibition of the quilt, a mother of a woman who had died from AIDS complications said that creating her panel is “like making a tombstone for my daughter;”¹⁰³ for her, this process is one that seemed similar to more standard mourning practices, and her participation in its creation was an important commemoration of her daughter’s life. I do suggest, however, that the Ashes Action, along with ACT UP’s Die-Ins, engage with HIV/AIDS, specifically as waste or detritus, in a way that offers a particular reparative reading of waste and negativity.

One of ACT UP’s organizers says as much as he speaks to a crowd in ACT UP’s archival footage from this event, his upper body filling the frame but mostly facing away from the camera, giving the viewer a consistent image of his dangling earrings, a black backwards cap, and the back of his white screen-printed t-shirt that reads “THE GOVERNMENT HAS BLOOD ON ITS HANDS/ONE AIDS DEATH EVERY ~~HALF HOUR~~ 8 5 MIN.,” the half hour crossed out and replaced with black marker to update the quickening time of death. He says to the crowd that “George Bush would be only too happy for all of us to simply make beautiful panels, and I’m not maligning the quilt... We are showing them the actual results of what that White House and this administration has done. They have turned people we love into ashes and bone chips and corpses; that should not be hidden.”¹⁰⁴ The AIDS Memorial Quilt privileges “‘purity’ and ‘cleanliness’ . . . as normative imperatives,” again relying on semi-uniform and beautified depictions of HIV/AIDS that sidestep the cultural associations of HIV/AIDS with waste and death; in this way it could be said to engage in Sedgwick’s notion of the paranoid optic.¹⁰⁵ ACT UP’s actions deny this logic of purity, instead embodying Edelman’s maxim that queerness

¹⁰³ Elaine Louie, “Making a Panel for the AIDS Memorial Quilt.” *The New York Times*, Oct. 1, 1992, 3.

¹⁰⁴ rconradzzz, “ACT UP: Ashes Action – 13 October 1996,” Youtube Video, 29:13, December 1, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfs2jFMsuB4>. I want to note that while the title of the video suggests this footage is from the 1996 Ashes Action, the description states it is from the 1992 Action, and clips from this video appear in the 1992 segments of *How To Survive a Plague*.

¹⁰⁵ Hawkins, 54.

exemplifies negativity, pushing individuals and the government to consider the material and cultural effects of HIV/AIDS and PWAs as waste and suggesting that an engagement and identification with waste, rather than an abjection of it, offers up more meaningful ways to do politics.

ACT-UP's willingness to attach themselves to the specter of death and waste surrounding HIV/AIDS at this point in American history stems from very material roots. For most of the AIDS crisis in the United States up until this point, the federal government and medical industry had shown little public investment in the treatment or curing of HIV/AIDS. From early designations as a gay man's disease that inhibited dominant culture's capacity to sympathize with those with HIV, to the notorious usage of black trash bags in hospitals to label and dispose of the bodies of those who had died from AIDS complications, to funeral homes refusing to service those same bodies due to fear of pathogens, it seems almost impossible to pull HIV/AIDS away from the realm of death, waste, and the abject.¹⁰⁶ By the time of the Ashes Action in late 1992, HIV had become the number one cause of death for men between 25 and 44.¹⁰⁷ In this context, then, ACT UP's approach utilizes spectacles of death to visually relate PWA's ways of doing time, turning their tense and rapidly decaying lifespans into volatile clouds of dust and bone for all to see.

To return to the level of the material within this action, the assemblage can provide a useful heuristic for looking at the complex and multiple effects of this action and the many ways it can be read. In the recording of the Ashes Action, once loosed from their containers the ashes visibly float through the air, mingling with other bodies in mid-air, landing on clothes and skin,

¹⁰⁶ Sharon L. Bass, "Funeral Homes Accused of Bias on AIDS," *The New York Times*, Nov. 15, 1987, 11.

¹⁰⁷ CDC, "Update: Mortality Attributable to HIV Infection Among Persons Aged 25-44 Years – United States, 1991 and 1992," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 42, no. 45 (November 19, 1993): 869-872.

entering protestors bodies through their mouths, before landing with the dirt and grass of the White House lawn; multiple sites of ideological and physical meaning make contact. The individualized subjectivity of the Memorial Quilt has no place here; these bodies cannot escape Alaimo's transcorporeality, in contact with one another and ceasing to be individuals, their uniformity here as ash operating not to keep them as distinct but related individuals, but instead as an amorphous assemblage of bodies. Similarly, the ease with which one can ingest one's own, or someone else's, loved ones calls into question boundaries of self and other, internal and external. The remains of PWAs, which have been seen by governmental and medical bodies as toxic waste, here act as nourishment for the grounds of the very government that denied them worth and meaning. The private realm of death and waste extends into the public realm of government, onto the White House lawn and into clouds of dust in the nation's capital, calling into question the function and meaning of such a distinction of public and private.

All of this, within a political action that lasts a total of maybe five minutes before violent police intervention ends it. The Ashes Action, and to a lesser extent ACT UP's Die-Ins, each exemplify a certain form of reparative production, of performances that offer up reparative readings of negative concepts like waste and death that so frequently are aligned with HIV/AIDS. In their public engagement with them, these performances create a space for individuals to process HIV/AIDS-related deaths in a different manner than the AIDS Memorial Quilt, one that replaces the pure static history of the quilt, a lasting depiction of death, for the messy and ephemeral performance of the Ashes Action, an experience that lacks an explicit permanent material marker besides video documentation. This act of video documentation and an emphasis on archiving actions, however, is an important aspect of ACT UP's political praxis. As Hito Steyerl writes, "[historical] conservation is less about preserving the past than it is about

creating the future.”¹⁰⁸ In documenting these actions, ACT UP is marking them as important and explicitly worth one’s attention, using the tools of the archive to ensure that these actions can continue to be felt beyond the moment of performance.

Even without the existence of archival footage, however, the Ashes Action’s ephemeral nature does not mean that is somehow gone or less meaningful than the quilt, however, but instead that it resides in our bodies in different ways. The Ashes Action offers up a memorial that resides within the repertoire, the space of “embodied memory” rather than physical artifacts of the archive, in the space of “ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” such as that coming from performance as opposed to permanent written or visual texts.¹⁰⁹ The repertoire can help to see how the Ashes Action is bringing waste, something seen as explicitly *not* worth remembering, into the fold of memory, revealing how the ephemeral might still situate itself within our bodies and personal histories. To engage with this area of knowledge can be painful, difficult, or confusing, but as the Ashes Action shows, it can also offer us reparative ways of engaging with negative concepts through the space of performance.

Reparative Production as Performative: Daniel Goldstein

While the space of performance and ephemeral knowledges can provide useful reparative readings of waste and death in regards to HIV/AIDS, material objects can also open up new ways of considering the effects of these associations. While in the previous section I focused on reparative production as performance, here I want to instead emphasize the aspect of reparative production as *performative*, as being generative of new meanings. Through examining the artistic works of Daniel Goldstein, I suggest that he operates as a scavenger artist, utilizing waste both

¹⁰⁸ Hito Steyerl, *Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (New York: Verso Press, 2017), 8.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, 20.

metaphorically and materially to engage with HIV/AIDS and issues of individuality and community that stem from it.

Originally shown in 1993, Daniel Goldstein's *Icarian* series consists of a series of reliquaries, each a simple copper-plated wooden box with black felt lining and a plexiglass window.¹¹⁰ Each reliquary presents the viewer with a leather “skin” from the bench of an exercise machine, with the pieces sharing the names of the machines from which they were taken. Each of the pieces shares a similar base ruddy tan piece of leather, but the size, shape, and markings on each differ based upon the machines’ usage. In the early 1990s, Goldstein, himself a gay man, retrieved these skins from his neighborhood gym in the Castro district of San Francisco when it was closing after most of its patrons (most were gay men with HIV/AIDS) had passed away. The exercise machines' years of heavy use and contact with bodies (Goldstein lists “sweat” as one of the components of the pieces) produced rubbings, imprints, and markings on the leather evocative of human forms.¹¹¹

Some of the skins hold rough facsimiles of body parts in their flesh. In “Icarian V/Hack Squat,” for example, the continuous pressure of men’s backs and shoulders against the leather pad has worked a rougher, slightly darker brown top-to-bottom column in the middle of the skin, while years of sweat have darkened the space around this column into an inky dark burgundy, this combination suggesting a shadowy torso in the skin itself.¹¹² Other skins give the impression of full bodies printed into them. The center of “Icarian II/Incline” holds a scuffed-up light tan oval in its center, surrounded by a slightly larger darker brown aura, that engulfed by a multi-shaded fog of browns that transition from light at the top of the skin to dark at the bottom. On the

¹¹⁰ Daniel Goldstein, *Icarian IX/Decline*, leather, sweat, wood, copper, felt, and plexiglass, 1993.

¹¹¹ Daniel Goldstein, *Reliquaries* (New York City: Foster Goldstrom Gallery, 1993), 5.

¹¹² Daniel Goldstein, *Icarian V/Hack Squat*, leather, sweat, wood, copper, felt, and plexiglass, 1993.

edges of this skin, the leather has started to tear on some of the creases where it was attached to the machine, giving the entirety of the reliquary the feel and look of a recovered ancient parchment with a ghostly human figure in the center.¹¹³

The very process by which Goldstein has created and presented this series represents a direct engagement with waste and a communitarian, rather than individualistic, artistic process. Goldstein's role in the pieces is less as a creator and more of an exhibitor or scavenger; unlike most art that requires singular or multiple creators and an object to create, the *Icarian* series “simply appeared like the Shroud of Turin.”¹¹⁴ Of course, it didn't just appear; Goldstein purposefully pulled what would normally be seen as detritus from his closed gym, finding a personal and communal value within these material artifacts. Goldstein is also not just the scavenger of these pieces; he partially took part in the creation by exercising on these machines along with the unknown numbers of other men who contributed to this work, literally, with their hard work and sweat in this gay community gym. Their combined physical exertion over time is what worked the ghostly figure into *Icarian II/Incline*, their backs working sweat and skin into the striations of *Icarian X/Bench*.¹¹⁵ These works symbolize and represent the bodies of the members of this gym in a way that privileges embodied, communal experience and complicates the relationship between the individual and communal body in ways that echo Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality. HIV/AIDS did not simply tear these men apart, as a paranoid optic would suggest, but encouraged new forms of community and solidarity. These pieces show their bodies interfacing and meshing together in ways that dominant discourses of HIV/AIDS like the AIDS Memorial Project could not represent.

¹¹³ Daniel Goldstein, *Icarian II/Incline*, leather, sweat, wood, copper, felt, and plexiglass, 1993

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁵ Daniel Goldstein, *Icarian X/Bench*, leather, sweat, wood, copper, felt, and plexiglass, 1993

Death and waste is never denied in these pieces; if anything, its presence in the lives of the men involved is inscribed in the shroud-like images. However, these pieces juxtapose funerary images with the rhetoric of the gym and health, especially in the years of the AIDS crisis. These men did not work out because they wanted to die quicker, but rather to keep their bodies healthy and alive, to counteract the effects of wasting as brought on by HIV/AIDS complications and pharmaceutical side-effects; hope for the future is embedded in these pieces' scuffs and sweat stains as much as a lament for the men who have passed. In a similar paradoxical vein, the gym has acted in gay culture as a meeting site for men to socialize and meet other men, frequently for sex. Again, the viewer is prompted to think of both the dangers *and* joys of gay sex in the 1980s in San Francisco, the public and private distinctions that are confronted through practices of cruising, and the culturally unacceptable idea that PWAs were still having sex in a time when culture saw their bodies, as Bersani argues, as almost biological weapons. In all of this, waste is central; the bodies of queer men with HIV/AIDS did not simply fall and die so simply, but instead found new ways of living and working within their new affective and embodied situation.

A number of factors contributed to the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS in San Francisco, particularly on its gay population that called the Castro home, some of whom were members of the gym where these pieces were sourced. Many young queer military veterans remained in San Francisco after World War II, the Californian port city providing an urban solace for those who may have not been accepted back home. This had the effect of creating communities that then attracted more queer people, with much of this population focused in the Castro.¹¹⁶ Many of the young queer men also lacked financial support and health insurance, making healthcare in

¹¹⁶ *We Were Here*, directed by David Weissman and Bill Weber (Docurama, 2012), film.

general difficult to acquire, let alone for a disease that at the time of its outbreak was an unknown for the medical profession.¹¹⁷ In this scenario, then, the gym provided a space for socialization as well as an attempt to regain, if not health, then at least the appearance of health through exercise and muscle gain in the face of wasting away.

The image of Icarus evoked in the title of this series is yet another example of a paradoxical longing and despair, as Icarus is characterized by both his desire to fly as close to the sun as possible, as well as his plummet into the sea. This evocation of Icarus becomes most visible in *Icarian IX/Decline*, in which the combination of sweat and pressure has worked into the skin a blood-red humanoid figure in the center of the leather, to its left and right the slightly brighter hintings of outstretched wings. Looking towards the top of the skin, the head of the humanoid appears as if its neck is stretched out, head facing upwards, as if in pain. The skin itself has been inverted within the frame from its original orientation on the exercise machine, meaning in its original form it would have looked as if this figure was falling through space, rather than rising up through it, its decline inverted through Goldstein's presentation of the skin in the reliquary box.

The choice of the word "reliquary" especially reworks the idea that these exercise machine leathers are simply waste worth discarding, and again reinforces the reparative production of Goldstein's artwork. As reliquaries are traditionally the containers of holy relics, his choice of this word brings the men who have lived and died on these benches to the level of saints and puts a heavy emphasis on the role of memory and remembering in queer culture. The men who left their mark on these benches are not to be forgotten; instead, the reliquaries sanctify their bodies and create a physical embodiment of their significance and a catalyst for the constant

¹¹⁷ John M. Luce, "A Strange New Disease in San Francisco: A Brief History of the City and Its Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic," *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* vol. 10, no. 2 (April 2013): 143-47.

remembering of their lives and the period in which they lived. In this way, Goldstein's piece combines the imperative both to look backwards and to look forwards; through remembering their embodied communal struggle to live, the viewer is called to imagine ways in which they might also relate to their (non)queer communities. His vision is one of a future where bodies work towards health and survival, free from the ravages of HIV/AIDS, or at least able to live *with* it, rather than die *from* it. While in a traditional view of the archive “the flesh is given to be that which slips away” in lieu of documents or more permanent remains, these leathers bring embodied experience to the forefront.¹¹⁸

These themes continue into Goldstein's later work *Medicine Man II*, where he again engages with the metaphorical and material waste of HIV/AIDS.¹¹⁹ This hanging sculpture of a man is formed out of orange and white bottles of medication that Goldstein himself and his partners, past and present, have taken to try and control their HIV/AIDS. The bottles are hanged on wires and arranged in a three-dimensional configuration that suggests a single human form with its arms and legs hold close. Again, we see in Goldstein's work a complication of self and other and a communal understanding of HIV/AIDS; his insistence on using the bottles of himself and those he has been most intimate with privileges a form of communal embodiment. The paradoxes present in his *Icarian* series are here as well; surrounding the medicine bottle figure is an aura of syringes pointing inwards, each tipped with shiny red plastic. The syringes at once imply constriction and freedom, as these medications allow Goldstein and others to continue living, but also limit the ways in which he lives, forcing him to measure his life by the daily pill or weekly injection. They, as well as the title of the piece, also bring religiosity into play, as the

¹¹⁸ Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 100.

¹¹⁹ Daniel Goldstein, *Medicine Man II*, steel wire, syringes, empty medication bottles, plastic, 2010.

syringes form what looks like a holy aureole around the subject, reminiscent of religious iconography. The combination of religious imagery here once again raises those with HIV/AIDS to the level of saints, or perhaps martyrs. The title of the piece, *Medicine Man II*, also encourages a religious association with indigenous cultures and non-Western religions, complicating a simplistic religious reading and expanding the range of religious citation seen in the *Icarian* series.

In each of these works, waste is the crux of Goldstein's operation. In both the metaphorical terrain he is engaging with and the physical reality of the origins of his pieces, his functions here as a scavenger offers up resistant readings of HIV/AIDS and its role in the lives of queer men. His work is filled with paradoxes and complications of seemingly simple oppositions between sick and healthy, free and constricted, safe and unsafe, religious and profane, all of which rotate around the ways that waste operates to undermine many of the basal assumptions of contemporary culture. In aligning HIV/AIDS with waste, and in using scavenging as his method for production, Goldstein exemplifies a reparative production that is expanding the thoughtspace of HIV/AIDS and its role in the lives of PWAs and culture at large. For Goldstein, art is critical to an understanding of HIV/AIDS; in 1989 he was one of the founding members of Visual Aid, a San Francisco-based organization dedicated to “help produce, present, and preserve the work of professional, visual artists in need,” originally created to assist artists living with HIV/AIDS in the Bay Area.¹²⁰ In Goldstein's work the time of HIV/AIDS is past, present, and future, his cultural works showing the capacity of stuckness for rethinking connections to and between bodies and community and undermining binaristic thinking.

Conclusions: Flesh, Bone, and The Question of Loss

¹²⁰ “About Us,” *Visual Aid*, accessed November 13, 2018, http://visualaid.org:80/?page_id=217.

Gay Hawkins writes of mainstream culture's abundance of “disenchantment stories” concerning waste, those narratives that suggest how we have abjected waste and separated it and nature from ourselves.¹²¹ HIV/AIDS rhetoric is heavily indebted in these types of stories, as well; it can be difficult to think of HIV/AIDS as outside of a framework of loss and toxicity. Through these political and artistic practices, however, I think we can begin to see the possibilities of seeking out and bringing to light more reparative readings and productions of HIV/AIDS that engage with issues of loss and toxicity to show their generative effects, to reveal how the tragic deaths and illnesses of persons with AIDS have not only been seen as unfortunate statistics within a downtrodden history of queerness, but as points of contact between individuals, and producing new ways of connecting that may be inconceivable outside of this framework. The forms of intimacy and affective outpourings taking place in the *Ashes Action* and Goldstein's *Icarian* series find in loss and destruction the possibility for a future; while Edelman and Bersani have found in HIV/AIDS a call for the anti-relational, we can see in this instance a hyperrelational consideration of HIV/AIDS, one that reveals its abilities to bring people together (metaphorically and physically, as in the *Ashes Action*) and form communities (socially and materially, as in the *Icarian* skins) in radical ways. Similarly, these are actions and works that are heavily invested in the future, bringing past experiences to bear on future political actions and ways of relating that show queerness to be a vital thing, even within an association with death, waste, and negativity.

In emphasizing the material and affective aspects of these HIV/AIDS-related actions, in revealing the capacities of scavenging and rethinking the archive and questions of permanence, we can see that loss is not an absence or void, but in the Deleuzian sense, a push to production,

¹²¹ Hawkins, 8.

to generating new meanings and embodiments. I wish to return briefly turn to the material, the literal flesh and bone forming the core of each of these actions or artworks. As Rebecca Schneider argues, the cultural archive privileges that which is fixed and seemingly permanent; “only bone speaks memory of flesh,” and not the other way around.¹²² In these examples, however, this binary is destabilized; in the Ashes Action bone is that which slips away and is ephemeral, while Goldstein's work shows how flesh and embodied action leave residues that stick.

Waste operates as an intervention to destabilize how we think of the archive and memory, to suggest that permanence and impermanence may be less static descriptors than shifting conditions of being, morphing states of stuckness and doing time. The ashes within the White House lawn and bodies of the Ashes Action activists continue to operate and exist within the world, and Goldstein's skins are a curious sort of permanence, one in which human bodies and physical acts are imprinted and mingled with the cured skin of a cow (hide its own form of bodily waste that becomes re-appropriated). In these examples, waste evades simplistic meanings, and HIV/AIDS gains new meaning within a framework of reparative readings, where the specter of death is not a point of stoppage, but instead an inspiration for considering the complexities of being.

¹²² Schneider, 100.

Chapter 3: Trafficking Spectacle – Affect and State Power in Operation Cross Country X

The first shot of an uploaded collection of FBI b-roll footage (termed “raw video” by the uploader) shows a group of law enforcement officers meeting inside of a Southfield, MI police station office marked “COMMAND POST & TEAM LEADERS ONLY.” What follows could appear in any number of police procedurals on network television, as we see archetypal images of law enforcement teams researching and planning out a sting operation. The camera cuts quickly between close-ups of computer monitors showing bits of text and charts (“Child Victim Recovery,” “Child Prostitution - Innocence Lost,” a chart showing “Age Breakdown of Child Victime[sic] Recoveries”), maps with pinpoints on targeted locations, ads showing targeted operations (“\$50 \$50 Special [kiss emoji] Im Kinky & READY NOW [strawberry emoji] [kiss emoji]”) and people sternly working at computers and writing on notepads as diegetic sound pops in and out. In the audible snippets of sound, we hear a feminine voice state, “25 out of 28 were 16... I know, 16,” among more muted murmurings surrounding the operation.



This film segment, along with the one presented in the introductory vignette in which white FBI officers conduct a sting on a location of possible sex trafficking, is from the FBI’s Operation Cross Country X website, where media— press releases, videos, still photography— about this annual sting operation is aggregated for public access. Upon visiting the website, this “raw video” is the first image visitors can access, setting the tone for the rest of their time on the web page. If they scroll further, they can watch the entire FBI press conference detailing the numbers of arrested criminals and rescued survivors of domestic minor sex trafficking, read press releases from regions across the country, and hear interviews from both federal officials and individual survivors. According to the website, “One of the goals of Operation Cross

Country is to raise public awareness about the seriousness of child sexual exploitation and how it takes strong partnerships to protect young people from being trafficked.”¹²³ Across all aspects of accessible materials, the visual hallmarks of human trafficking—particularly the emphasis on rescued survivors and arrested criminal actors—are centered and emphasized, sticking in the minds of the viewing audience.

The Operation Cross Country X website offers a timely and useful example of how visual culture—and most pertinent for this dissertation, stuckness—is intrinsic to shaping public thought and policy. Subconsciously or not, the curation of media by the FBI perpetuates a normative understanding of human trafficking as contingent upon particular markers of violence and passivity that center active law enforcement officers rescuing survivors. In this chapter, we argue that the moment of rescue depicted in Operation Cross Country X operates as a spectacular instant, a performative moment of heightened emotionality, that obfuscates the surveillance and labor of a criminal sting operation and the complexities of post-trafficking life for survivors. By compressing all visible, laudable anti-trafficking efforts into one moment of spectacle, state power—to determine who qualifies as a trafficking survivor or a criminalized sex worker—is rendered invisible. Stuckness here centers around losses of a purported national sense of safety in the face of increasingly volatile immigration rhetoric, as well as the loss of control of women’s bodies, both leading to spectacular instants surrounding trafficking and its victims. In utilizing this concept to analyze Operation Cross Country X, we can more easily see the power of affect in masking both the systemic violence of criminal justice interventions in anti-trafficking work, as well as the slow violence of trafficking itself.

¹²³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Operation Cross Country X: Recovering Underage Victims of Sex Trafficking and Prostitution,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/operation-cross-country-x>.

This chapter is an expanded version of a collaboration between myself and fellow KU WGSS PhD scholar Corinne Schwarz. While we both entered the KU WGSS program with English undergraduate degrees, our paths and subsequent scholarly training have diverged, with Corinne pursuing methods-focused social science work through socio-legal studies and critical trafficking studies and myself moving into American studies with an emphasis on cultural studies and critical theory. This research project allowed us to combine our expertise in critical trafficking studies and cultural studies and analyze the ways that visual culture operates within the realm of trafficking. The concept of stuckness was a key figure as far back as the original discussions of a jointly-written article, as Corinne was familiar with my dissertation project and interested in bringing stuckness to bear on trafficking. Stuckness as an analytic provided us throughout this process with a point of focus on how organizations utilize temporal and emotional narratives to define trafficking culturally, as well as encourage policies that ensure the continued existence of funding for these same organizations and their actions. In its function as an object of analysis, stuckness similarly presents itself in the narratives told by both state actors and trafficked persons, albeit in very different and, as we will show, frequently counterintuitive ways. I believe the exploration in this piece of the murky discursive entanglements of policy, spectacle, and lived experience in particular exemplifies some of the ways stuckness operates at the intersection of temporality, materiality, and affect.

In preparing and updating this article for inclusion as a chapter in the dissertation, I have woven in new writing and sources that tie some of the argumentation through to the rest of my dissertation and expand upon the functions of stuckness within this piece, and how it goes along with, and occasionally even works against, my method of sitting with stuckness. Most importantly, there are two conclusions at the end of this chapter. The first conclusion is the

original co-authored one written for our initial collaboration, while the second conclusion is new to the dissertation and focuses on extending the method of sitting with stuckness throughout and beyond our writing of the article, returning in order to complicate and contest some of the findings from the original conclusion. This chapter holds importance for me within the dissertation at large as it is a collaborative work that shows the capacity of stuckness as a theoretical model to work in fields like critical trafficking studies and policy-focused work. At the same time, it also reveals the effects of using stuckness as a theoretical concept without using sitting with stuckness as a method and the different types of results to be gained from the two, as well as crucial insights into the stuckness of collaborative research itself.

Linking Performance and Affect Studies to Critical Trafficking Studies

Theorizing Trafficking

Human trafficking research generally reflects the growth in awareness and policy around the passage of the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and the UN Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons in 2000. While these legislative documents establish categories of sex and labor trafficking—and in the case of the Palermo Protocols, organ trafficking—public discourse tends to focus primarily on sex trafficking. This focus is not a recent phenomenon. At the turn of the 20th century, “white slavery” panics linked the desire to protecting young women from abduction and forced sex with more pervasive fears of immigration, female sexuality and independence, and nationalism.¹²⁴ Current anti-trafficking

¹²⁴ See Jo Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women,” *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (1999): 23–50; Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005); and Jon Spencer and Rose Broad, “The ‘Groundhog Day’ of the Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation Debate: New Directions in Criminological Understanding,” *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 18, no. 3 (2012): 269–281.

efforts echo this historical trend, as many scholars have noted the similarities between these anti-prostitution advocates and modern abolitionists.¹²⁵

However, this current wave of anti-trafficking efforts is not an exact replica of earlier eras. As Elizabeth Bernstein writes on the relationship between sexuality, regulation, and the state:

But whereas a focus on “sex panics” can suggest a cycle of moral combustion that is destined to be endlessly repeated, [...] present-day attention to “trafficking” has emerged at the juncture of cultural and political formations that are only partially entrenched and self-replicating. [...] [M]any dynamics pertaining to the current wave of interest in “sex trafficking” are in fact quite new, including economic and cultural agendas which reimagine “women’s human rights” in terms of women’s insertion into (legitimate) market economies, and their protection by state apparatuses of criminal justice.

These approaches to sex trafficking may be understood as part of “the still undertheorized sexual politics of neoliberalism,”¹²⁶ which use tools of incarceration and governance to regulate, protect, or punish individuals engaged in sexual commerce. The ongoing moral panics—once understood to be the dominant frame within which trafficking could be critiqued—are now embedded in newer state projects that perpetuate punitive approaches to justice for exploited

¹²⁵ See Laura Agustín, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (New York: Zed Books, 2007); Elizabeth Bernstein, “Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 1 (2010): 45-71; Kamala Kempadoo, “The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man’s Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns,” *Journal of Human Trafficking* 1, no. 1 (2015): 8-20; and Ronald Weitzer, “The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade,” *Politics & Society* 35 (2007): 447-475.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Bernstein, “Introduction: Sexual Economies and New Regimes of Governance,” *Social Politics* 21, no. 3 (2014): 347.

women and criminal prosecutions for those deemed outside of the parameters of exploitation. Bernstein defines this as carceral feminism, “the commitment of abolitionist feminist activists to a law and order agenda and [...] a drift from the welfare state to the carceral state as the enforcement apparatus for feminist goals.”¹²⁷ With respect to human trafficking, carceral feminist approaches may take many forms: positioning the arrest and prosecution of traffickers as the ideal solution; linking anti-trafficking social services to criminal justice interventions; and increased police surveillance as protective of women who may be at risk of exploitation or trafficking.

In describing research that seeks to unsettle the dominant discourses and perceptions of trafficking, Jennifer Musto uses the phrase “critical trafficking studies.” She writes, “What is ‘critical’ about critical trafficking studies is its theoretical consideration of that which is elided, concealed, and obfuscated in dominant scholarly treatment of the issue.”¹²⁸ Critical trafficking studies interrogates the public discourses that shape trafficking, the structural factors that perpetuate systems of domination and exploitation, and the potential effects—intended and unintended—of policy and other anti-trafficking interventions.¹²⁹ This project sees itself as building upon this scholarship, especially with respect to interrogating the social constructions of human trafficking and the ramifications of reactive, criminal justice-centered anti-trafficking

¹²⁷ Elizabeth Bernstein, “The Sexual Politics of the ‘New Abolitionism,’” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 5 (2007): 143.

¹²⁸ Jennifer Musto, “Domestic minor sex trafficking and the detention-to-protection pipeline,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 37 (2013): 261.

¹²⁹ See also Rutvica Andrijasevic, *Migration, Agency, and Citizenship in Sex Trafficking* (London: Palgrave, 2010); Kimberly Kay Hoang and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, eds., *Human Trafficking Reconsidered: Rethinking the Problem, Envisioning New Solutions* (New York: International Debate Education Association, 2014); Kamala Kempadoo, Jyoti Sanghera, and Bandana Pattanaik, eds., *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2005); and Elena Shih, “Not in My ‘Backyard Abolitionism’: Vigilante Rescue against American Sex Trafficking,” *Sociological Perspectives* 59, no. 1 (2016): 66-90.

efforts. In its refusal of simplistic understandings of victimhood and its emphasis on the construction of discourse surrounding trafficking and what constitutes it, I find that a critical trafficking studies perspective is informative in enacting a methodology of sitting with stuckness.

As trafficking involves hidden populations, and thus is notoriously challenging to quantify,¹³⁰ much of the awareness and public discourse of trafficking, as well as conversations on anti-trafficking policy, reflects a constructed notion of an ideal victim. In this dominant narrative, sex trafficking is human trafficking, and labor trafficking is frequently deemphasized or even removed from the conversation. There is growing scholarship critiquing and interrogating this understudied side of human trafficking. For example, Denise Brennan places trafficking into forced labor “on a continuum of exploitative labor practices that low-wage migrants regularly experience in work sites throughout the United States.”¹³¹ Additionally, a recent report from the National Domestic Workers Alliance highlights the experiences of women engaged in domestic labor in the United States. This sector of work—which employs primarily undocumented women and women of color in the private sphere of the home—may not be as visible as the public concern over commercial sex work. But “[d]omestic workers are often paid very little, have few or no benefits, no access to workplace protections, and often face exploitative work conditions, with unclear and often verbal contracts and wide employer discretion to fire or discipline workers who complain about these conditions.”¹³²

¹³⁰ Sally Engle Merry, *The Seduction of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence, and Sex Trafficking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹³¹ Denise Brennan, *Life Interrupted: Trafficking Into Forced Labor in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 12.

¹³² Sameera Hafiz and Michael Paarlberg, *The Human Trafficking of Domestic Workers in the United States: Findings from the Beyond Survival Campaign* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies and National Domestic Workers Alliance, 2017), 8.

Jayashri Srikantiah describes the dominant depiction of trafficking as an “iconic victim”—a young, female survivor of sex trafficking whose actions support and bolster law enforcement officers’ investigation and prosecution of traffickers. She writes, “These attributes, taken together, contemplate a victim of sex trafficking who passively waits for rescue by law enforcement, and upon rescue, presents herself as a good witness who cooperates with all law enforcement requests.”¹³³ The iconic victim is subject to value judgments of worth—of being a “good” witness, an asset to a prosecutor’s case—that may run counter to her material reality, her needs, and her own desires on how she wants to proceed from her victimization.

Similarly, Wendy Chapkis discusses the “model victim” of sex trafficking mobilized in “gothic portrayals” of extreme violence and isolation, “while leaving in place policies that continue to punish the majority of ‘ordinary’ abused and exploited migrants.”¹³⁴ In retelling victims’ stories, those who are deemed worthy, innocent, without agency in their experiences are also described in ways that center the exploitation they experienced in graphic terms. Those whose experiences do not stick to the model victim narrative—be it through the work they performed outside of commercial sex, their identity as a migrant or an undocumented person, or the level of complicity they have in the sexual labor they are performing—are omitted from the discourse. They are either migrants engaged in invisible labor that is somehow outside of the protection of anti-trafficking discourse or sex workers willfully engaging in criminalized acts of prostitution.

Additionally, public media discourses hold a great deal of power in framing and defining human trafficking. As Melissa Gira Grant describes, “For someone exposed to stories of

¹³³ Jayashri Srikantiah, “Perfect Victims and Real Survivors: The Iconic Victim in Domestic Human Trafficking Law,” *Boston University Law Review* 87 (2007): 160.

¹³⁴ Wendy Chapkis, “Trafficking, Migration, and the Law: Protecting Innocents, Punishing Immigrants,” *Gender & Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): 930.

trafficking through blockbuster movies and Sunday night cable news specials, the image would probably be one of a woman, perhaps alongside images of someone who has done something awful to her.”¹³⁵ This replicates the dominant narrative of ideal victims in a broader domain, generating awareness primarily for sex trafficking while simultaneously perpetuating the aforementioned social constructions. In some media discourses of trafficking, individuals engaged in commercial sex—who may be interpreted as victimized trafficking survivors or criminal sex workers—are publicly outed, while the state is able to protect its interests by positioning itself as a saving force.

Annie Hill interrogates this discourse in her analysis of a UK police raid at the Cuddles massage parlor in 2005. Upon police seizure of the site, women working at Cuddles were photographed as they exited in the building, attempting to cover their faces and hide their identities from reporters and photographers covering the raid. She draws attention to the double standard present in this narrative:

That police thought the women were trafficking victims raises questions about the rationale for presenting them to the media. Publicly associating women with criminalised prostitution, as sex workers or as trafficking victims, threatens reputational ‘innocence’ as well as violating the right to privacy. If they are trafficking victims, forcing them to face the media is an unconscionable state action. If they are sex workers working illegally in a brothel, then the UK, under the guise of its anti-trafficking agenda, is in fact conducting ‘perp walks’. By contrast, people accused of crimes were protected from the media’s gaze—no images circulated of police

¹³⁵ Melissa Gira Grant, “Human Trafficking, After the Headlines,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://psmag.com/news/human-trafficking-after-the-headlines>.

apprehending the owner or managers of Cuddles—yet police enabled publication of victim photographs.¹³⁶

In the act of “saving” women from the exploitation of sex trafficking, UK police officers betrayed their right to privacy, placing their image into public circulation online and in print media. Additionally, this savior narrative provided the backdrop for the investigation of these women’s citizenship statuses, as six women who did not have European Union citizenship status were deported. Here, state interests take the form of immigration interests, even though the raid was ostensibly positioned as a victim-centered, anti-trafficking project.

Performance and Affect Studies

While scholars have critiqued visual depictions of trafficking, both fictional and nonfictional, through the lens of media studies and critical trafficking studies,¹³⁷ little to no research has utilized the insights of performance studies in these endeavors. As key performance scholar Peggy Phelan writes, “Performance approaches the Real through resisting the metaphorical reduction of the two into the one,”¹³⁸ forcing the audience to reject an easy association of what is seen and what is being represented. Performance studies, then, urges scholars to examine the ways in which a production is constructed and presented to create knowledge, keeping in mind the gaps and disconnects inherent in the transmission of information and knowledge. While Operation Cross Country X is not a performance in the explicitly theatrical sense, its existence as a heavily choreographed, finely orchestrated, and thought-out action presented to the public through a variety of public media venues suggests an attempt to

¹³⁶ Annie Hill, “How to Stage a Raid: Police, media and the master narrative of trafficking,” *Anti-Trafficking Review* 7 (2016): 43.

¹³⁷ See Carrie Baker, “An Intersectional Analysis of Sex Trafficking Films,” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 12, no. 1 (2014): 208-226; and Jamie L. Small, “Trafficking in Truth: Media, Sexuality, and Human Rights Evidence,” *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 415-443.

¹³⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 152.

create and communicate meaning. Here, the meaning is about victimhood, criminality, whose engagement in commercial sex requires saving and whose requires state correction.

In order to make sense of this meaning-making, our analysis utilizes performance studies scholar Amy Hughes's discussion of the "spectacular instant" as a crucial theoretical link bridging performance and critical trafficking studies. In an analysis of the function of spectacle within 19th century US theater, Hughes theorizes the spectacular instant, "a heightened, fleeting, and palpable moment in performance that captivates the spectator through multiple planes of engagement."¹³⁹ These instants, defined in part by some sort of excess within the performance (bodily excess such as the freak show, emotional excess as in melodrama), engage the viewer visually, but are also intimately connected to embodiment through processes of sensation, perception, and identification. It is through this intense captivation of the body and mind, this circuit through sensation and emotionality, that theatrical productions were able to influence audiences and communicate social and political meaning in ways beyond just text or propaganda. Hughes suggests that spectacle is important to study because historically, "Americans were attuned to images, to spectacle—to seeing sensation."¹⁴⁰ While in the nineteenth-century this visual training came from new widespread print media, over the course of time this understanding of the capacity of images to transmit sensation has made its way through digital media. As we will discuss later, the FBI's deployment of these spectacular instants in the presentation and performance of Operation Cross Country X and its moments of rescue similarly deploys specific emotional and bodily components of trafficking in digital visual media to put forth a particular self-serving and limited visualized narrative of human trafficking while obfuscating state power.

¹³⁹ Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

Performance is commonly thought to be ephemeral and temporary, but the material and affective repercussions of performance linger far beyond the moment of performance or reception. Interrogating these aspects and their place within cultural knowledge production has been key in the past decade of performance studies research, perhaps exemplified most clearly in Diana Taylor's work on the archive and repertoire. In dominant culture and scholarly research, quantifiable and easily communicable data, what Taylor terms the archive, generally takes precedence over the knowledge produced within oral histories, "embodied memory," and performance, what Taylor terms the repertoire. The repertoire's "ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" can be difficult to communicate through traditional means, but rather than attempt to bluntly translate that knowledge into the language of the archive, in the process losing its unique qualities, it is imperative to try and make sense of the repertoire on its own terms in the realm of affect, the body, and memory.¹⁴¹

Inherent in this line of thought is an underlying critique of the archive and the preeminence of its texts, as the effects and language of performance and personal narrative do not simply disappear once the performance is over or the person is no longer speaking. The complex discursive webs and meanings continue to reverberate through the performers, the audience, and the spaces in which they've taken place long past the moment of performance, suggesting that it is not the permanence of the archive that has given it such cultural power and weight, but instead an inability to reckon with the body and its effects in space over time in dominant culture.¹⁴² Within Operation Cross Country X, the cracks throughout the supposedly stable, permanent meaning of the archive start to appear particularly during attempts at translating the repertoire to the archive, namely the narrativization of trafficked victims'

¹⁴¹ Taylor, 20.

¹⁴² See Schneider for more on the complexities of lingering performances.

experiences into the FBI's discourse of what constitutes trafficking, when the complexities of trafficking are instead reduced to talking points and filmic narratives of victims in need of rescue and recovery.

Operation Cross Country X

Operation Cross Country is a joint venture between the FBI, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), and law enforcement officers at the local, state, and federal levels. The first Operation Cross Country occurred in June 2008, with the October 2016 Operation Cross Country X marking its tenth iteration and its first international partnership with law enforcement in Canada, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Per the FBI's website, Operation Cross Country's goal is to focus "on recovering underage victims of prostitution and drawing the public's attention to the problem of sex trafficking at home and abroad." In order to achieve these goals, the FBI coordinates major sting operations: "Hundreds of law enforcement officials took part in sting operations in hotels, casinos, truck stops, and other areas frequented by pimps, prostitutes, and their customers."¹⁴³ Upon completing the sting operation, identified domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) victims are routed to victims services and identified criminal actors—described in the press releases as "pimps," "traffickers," and "other individuals"—are arrested.

In October 2016, Operation Cross Country X resulted in "the recovery of 82 sexually exploited juveniles and the arrests of 239 pimps and other individuals"¹⁴⁴ across all partners. When parsing this out amongst the local partnerships, regional offices had a range of numbers and categories of quantification. For example, three regional offices did not identify any DMST survivors; two mentioned identified adult survivors of human trafficking; 13 mentioned

¹⁴³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Operation Cross Country X."

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

identified sex workers; and six mentioned other crimes beyond prostitution and sex trafficking, including the seizure of weapons or money and arrests for DUIs, auto theft, child pornography, assault, and murder. Only one press release from the Atlanta FBI office lists the names of specific arrested individuals, their ages, and the crimes for which they were arrested.¹⁴⁵

This chapter analyzes the written and visual material produced by the FBI and its state partners after the Operation Cross Country X sting from October 13th to 16th, 2016. These materials were published from October 17th to 20th, 2016. These primary documents include one national press release, 14 regional press releases, FBI-published photography, FBI-produced videos and transcripts, and website copy all housed on the Operation Cross Country X website, a public-facing digital repository nested within the news section of the larger FBI platform. Social media sharing links scattered throughout the website imply that these materials are designed to be distributed amongst casual readers in informal settings.

In the sections below, we first analyze these materials through a critical trafficking studies lens, followed by an exploration of the affective repercussions of these documents utilizing performance and affect studies.

Tools of the State

Rescue

The rescue is one of the most iconic demonstrations of state power in “saving” trafficked persons from situations of violence and exploitation. Upon rescue by law enforcement, victims are carefully channeled to services ostensibly tailored to their needs as a trafficked person.

Agustín describes this as the “Rescue Industry” of human trafficking: a network of social service

¹⁴⁵ To see how Operation Cross Country X compares to earlier stings, Emi Koyama has extensively detailed and compiled the numbers across the FBI’s national and regional press releases until 2014 at <http://eminism.org/blog/entry/429>.

providers targeting those engaged in stigmatized commercial sex or sex trafficking, reliant upon “a class of victims that mandated a class of rescuers.”¹⁴⁶ These rescuers often offer material supports—for example, according to the state-level press releases in Seattle, “job training, housing, counseling, and medical and education assistance”¹⁴⁷—but there is also a disciplinary function. This may be through more formal punishments like arrests, as described later, or informal tools of control to regulate behavior and gender norms. As Grant writes about anti-prostitution advocacy, “When sex workers are ‘rescued’ by anti-sex work reformers, they are being disciplined, set back into their right role as good women.”¹⁴⁸ “Good women” must be rescued and set on a path away from the deviance of commercial sex.

The rescue of DMST survivors relies upon the dominant narrative of trafficking, with easily defined victims and criminals that can be readily identified by the saving eye of the state. Operation Cross Country X press releases reinforce this structure. In Denver, the press release quotes District Attorney Mitch Morrissey: ““This task force approach is the only effective way to save children and put these despicable criminals behind bars.””¹⁴⁹ In this equation, children and criminals are two separate categories, which ignores the complexities of US anti-trafficking law. Per the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), youth under the age of 18 engaged in commercial sex are automatically considered victims of human trafficking. However, individuals above the age of 18 must prove force, fraud, or coercion. 10 press releases mention adult sex

¹⁴⁶ Agustín, *Sex at the Margins*, 136.

¹⁴⁷ Ayn Dietrich-Williams, “10th FBI-Wide Operation Cross Country Recovers Five Juvenile Victims in Washington State,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/seattle/news/press-releases/10th-fbi-wide-operation-cross-country-recovers-five-juvenile-victims-in-washington-state>.

¹⁴⁸ Melissa Gira Grant, *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2014), 57.

¹⁴⁹ Amy Sanders, “Cross Country Operation X Recovers 82 Children from Being Trafficked for Sex,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/denver/news/press-releases/cross-country-operation-x-recovers-82-children-from-being-trafficked-for-sex>.

workers, but there is no indication about their experiences with force, fraud, or coercion that would make them victims instead of criminals engaging in illicit commercial sex. Only Knoxville, San Francisco, and Western Michigan explicitly name identified and rescued adult survivors of sex trafficking.

Part of rescue involves disclosure on the part of the apprehended victim. When the line between forced sex trafficking and criminalized sex work is blurred, the act of rescue becomes more complicated than visually identifying who looks like a survivor. The FBI Salt Lake City press release offers an example of failed disclosure and, subsequently, failed rescue of adult women identified during their raid: “Some of the women may have been forced into engaging in prostitution since they were juveniles or trafficked but it’s not uncommon for them to refuse to disclose that information to authorities.”¹⁵⁰ In the act of rescue, the state power of police officers and FBI officials is positioned as a saving force, but only for those who can conform to the dominant trafficking narrative—reinforcing Srikantiah’s point that iconic victimhood hinges on deference to law enforcement requests.¹⁵¹

In contrast to Hill’s description of the Cuddles raid and images of rescue,¹⁵² the Operation Cross Country X website and press releases offer limited visual depictions of rescue. Only the Knoxville press release provides photographs of their Operation Cross Country X team in action. The main FBI website offers two images that could arguably depict the moment of rescue. First, at the top of the page, a white-presenting woman sits on a hotel bed with a male police officer, a member of an unidentified Exploitation Crimes Task Force. Her face is not

¹⁵⁰ FBI Salt Lake City Press Office, “Operation Cross Country X Expands Efforts to Recover Sexually Exploited Juveniles, Multiple International Countries Included for the First Time,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/saltlakecity/news/press-releases/operation-cross-country-x-expands-efforts-to-recover-sexually-exploited-juveniles-multiple-international-countries-included-for-the-first-time>.

¹⁵¹ Srikantiah, “Perfect Victims and Real Survivors,” 187.

¹⁵² Hill, “How to Stage a Raid,” 44.

visible, as only the back of her head has been photographed, but viewers can see part of the police officer's face. Further down on the page, a white-presenting male FBI officer is caught in an action shot, the frame blurred around him, as he leads an arrested man of color to a police vehicle. The caption describes this man as a "suspected pimp." In both images, the dominant rescue narrative is reinforced. The woman is presented as a victim separated from a victimizer—whether that is a pimp or a client is left to be inferred by the viewer. The man is constructed as a criminal on his way to justice. In both images, the state power of law enforcement officers is highlighted and centered, in the intimacy of a conversation on a hotel bed or an arrest of a purported criminal.

Recovery

In the national press release, the FBI explains how youth identified through rescue are directed to services: "Minors recovered during an arrest are engaged with state protective services and victim assistance. Depending on the level of need, a law enforcement officer and, if available, an FBI victim specialist will accompany the survivor to obtain these services."¹⁵³ This stock phrase appears in six regional press releases as well. The language here is passive and somewhat vague, and individual offices vary in their level of specificity in describing this engagement with services. These law enforcement/social service partnerships are a critical example of carceral protectionism, "a carceraly oriented, collaboratively inspired system of protection."¹⁵⁴ Recovery seems to require this collective effort, but the core protection is spurred on through law enforcement interventions.

¹⁵³ FBI National Press Office, "FBI Announces Results of Operation Cross Country X," accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-announces-results-of-operation-cross-country-x>.

¹⁵⁴ Jennifer Musto, *Control and Protect: Collaboration, Carceral Protection, and Domestic Sex Trafficking in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 4.

Even though DMST survivors are ostensibly not arrested, they are recovered by law enforcement officers and directed to services under their purview. Recovery still operates within a carceral framework, which Musto describes as the “detention-to-protection” pipeline for DMST survivors. She writes:

Whether the result of a lack of services or instead the outcome of historic precedent of detaining youth for their involvement in prostitution, some front-line police officers and NGO advocates have come to a general consensus that due to the lack of options for youth, arresting them remains the best way to assist them.¹⁵⁵

In the face of an anti-trafficking framework focused on prosecutorial approaches to justice, arresting youth seems inevitable, even logical. However, it woefully underestimates the damage and violence of the criminal justice system and further perpetuates reactive rather than preventive anti-trafficking efforts. Even if the outcome of Cross Country X is ostensibly victim-centered—directing to services DMST survivors may not have been able to access before, working with youth individually through the use of victim advocates—the process reinforces the power of carceral justice and may only result in short-term assistance.

For adult survivors of trafficking or sex workers identified in this process, recovery may or may not involve access to services. In Southeast Michigan, for example, “46 adults involved in prostitution were temporarily placed into custody,” and it is unclear if they could subsequently access the Salvation Army-led community resources.¹⁵⁶ FBI in San Francisco stated that “the

¹⁵⁵ Jennifer Musto, “Domestic minor sex trafficking,” 267.

¹⁵⁶ Tim Wiley, “Operation Cross Country X, Southeast Michigan,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/detroit/news/press-releases/operation-cross-country-x>.

adult women involved in prostitution who were contacted during the operation were also offered victim and support services.”¹⁵⁷ Portland’s press release creates the impression that all adults, regardless of need, are first coded as criminals: “Any adult arrested pursuant to state charges will be processed by state and local law enforcement partners assisting in Operation Cross Country.”¹⁵⁸ If state charges are taking precedent here, then it is important to question if and how victimhood is addressed, if adults engaged in commercial sex are immediately read as criminal and thus exempt from services.

Recovery is frequently mobilized in ways that emphasize the immediacy of direction to services while failing to address the long-term, structural programs and needs that more effectively address exploitation and trafficking.¹⁵⁹ Some local Operation Cross Country X press releases specifically name the organizations with which law enforcement are collaborating: longstanding social service providers like the Salvation Army, government agencies like state-level Departments of Family and Children Services, and anti-trafficking NGOs like Love Never Fails. However, outside of this naming, there is little understanding of how services will be administered, how long these identified victims will be allowed to access services, or what long-term goals will be achieved outside of this short-term recovery.

Arrest

While Operation Cross Country X is nominally an anti-sex trafficking effort to protect DMST victims, it also clearly produces a substantial number of arrests for those who are not

¹⁵⁷ FBI San Francisco Media Office, “FBI, Partners Complete Operation Cross Country X,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/sanfrancisco/news/press-releases/fbi-partners-complete-operation-cross-country-x>.

¹⁵⁸ Beth Ann Steele, “FBI Announces Results of National Child Sex Trafficking Operation,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/portland/news/press-releases/fbi-announces-results-of-national-child-sex-trafficking-operation-1>.

¹⁵⁹ Alexandra Lutnick, *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Beyond Victims and Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). See also Grant, *Playing the Whore*; and Musto, *Control and Protect*.

identified as victims. On their main website, the FBI states that Operation Cross Country X “concluded with the recovery of 82 sexually exploited juveniles and the arrests of 239 pimps and other individuals.”¹⁶⁰ This language erases the fact that sex workers, purchasers of sex, and other vaguely defined associates are part of this group of 239 criminal actors. A few state-level press releases are not as vague; for example, Portland’s press release goes so far as to break down arrests and citations for prostitution by gender.

When looking at the numbers provided in the state-level press releases, 98 market facilitators were arrested; 111 purchasers were arrested; 208 sex workers were arrested, cited, or detained; 67 sex workers were identified or contacted; eight adult survivors of human trafficking; and 34 DMST survivors were identified. These numbers omit the combined categories in some press releases; for example, Newark lumps together their 29 arrested “prostitutes and pimps.”¹⁶¹ The San Francisco press release named 135 adult women “contacted/arrested/cited for prostitution,”¹⁶² making it unclear how many of those women faced criminal justice penalties. Regardless, by including the results of both identified DMST survivors and arrested criminal actors, Operation Cross Country X blurs the boundaries between its stated mission—an anti-trafficking effort to assist trafficked youth—and its implicit focus on incarceration. As Emi Koyama states, “Contrary to the supposed purpose of exposing and prosecuting trafficking of children in the sex trade, Operation Cross Country routinely punish[es] adult women in prostitution to much greater degree than any other group.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Operation Cross Country X: Recovering Underage Victims of Sex Trafficking and Prostitution.”

¹⁶¹ Doreen Holder, “FBI Newark Announces Results of Operation Cross Country X,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/newark/news/press-releases/fbi-newark-announces-results-of-operation-cross-country-x>.

¹⁶² FBI San Francisco Media Office, “FBI, Partners Complete Operation Cross Country X.”

¹⁶³ Emi Koyama, *War on Terror & War on Trafficking: A Sex Worker Activist Confronts the Anti-Trafficking Movement* (Portland: Confluere Publications, 2011), 14.

Additionally, some regional press releases also mentioned investigations unrelated to domestic minor sex trafficking but related to commercial sexual activity in their results. For example, the Portland press release references a “state search warrant conducted in Salem at Cheetah’s Strip Club as part of an ongoing Beaverton Police Department investigation.”¹⁶⁴ Even though it is unclear how this investigation fits into larger anti-DMST efforts, it is still included as an outcome of Operation Cross Country X.

Only one press release uses language that seems to place a value judgement on sex work: in Seattle, officers “contacted 67 adults being exploited through prostitution.” They also refer to “14 subjects suspected of commercially exploiting children and/or adults and related crimes,” not pimps or traffickers.¹⁶⁵ The phrasing here arguably conflates sex work and sex trafficking, implying that prostitution is by definition exploitative. The Atlanta press release—while avoiding a value judgement on sex work—does use the term “pimps/traffickers,”¹⁶⁶ while the East Michigan and West Michigan press release echoes this by using “traffickers (or pimps).”¹⁶⁷ These examples fit with the perspective of abolitionist feminist anti-trafficking efforts, which conflate sex trafficking with sex work and classify sex work as exploitation and violence under all circumstances.¹⁶⁸ The press release goes on to note that all identified victims were offered referrals to services within the community, but it does not specify if these victims include sex

¹⁶⁴ Steele, “FBI Announces Results.”

¹⁶⁵ Dietrich-Williams, “10th FBI-Wide Operation Cross Country.”

¹⁶⁶ Stephen Emmett, “FBI Announces Results of Operation Cross Country X,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/atlanta/news/press-releases/fbi-announces-results-of-operation-cross-country-x->.

¹⁶⁷ See Wiley, “Operation Cross Country X, Southeast Michigan”; and Tim Wiley, “Operation Cross Country X, West Michigan,” accessed August 4, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/detroit/news/press-releases/operation-cross-country-x-west-michigan>.

¹⁶⁸ See Sheila Jeffreys, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Feminism: An Update on the Debate,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 32 (2009): 316–320; Catherine Mackinnon, “Trafficking, Prostitution, and Inequality,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 46 (2011): 271-309; and Janice Raymond, “Prostitution on Demand: Legalizing the Buyers as Sexual Consumers,” *Violence Against Women* 10, no. 10 (2004): 1156-1186.

workers. If sex work and sex trafficking are truly being conflated here, then these adults “exploited through prostitution” are victims. But as Heather Berg writes, “Because of the enduring conflation of sex trafficking and prostitution, it becomes impossible to disentangle the damages of anti-trafficking policies from those of antiprostitution policies.”¹⁶⁹ If these individuals were just contacted, it is unclear whether or not this engagement with law enforcement led to positive outcomes or simply further engagement with the carceral state.

There is only one document where a survivor is allowed to speak for themselves (so to speak): a video titled “Survivor of Juvenile Sex Trafficking Shares Her Story.” In looking at this video through the lens of performance studies, it is key to consider that through performance “the performer actually disappears and represents something else—dance, movement, sound, character, ‘art.’”¹⁷⁰ The woman we see in the video is shown in a close-up interview shot, her features mostly hidden through shadow but some markers remain visible: a pair of glasses, a purple hairtie holding back a loose ponytail, hints of facial features. While she is ostensibly a “woman who was trafficked in Detroit as a juvenile,” as related in the video’s YouTube description, in this video she is a representational object, her presence and performance functioning to communicate meaning.¹⁷¹ Her words appear next to her in white font, popping in contrast to the dark background. The narrative is short, as the video is only four and a half minutes long. She describes her childhood abuse at the hands of her father, a drug addict and alcoholic who raped her multiple times. Her friend introduced her to a man who claimed he could help her get into modeling; this quickly shifted to forced sex work. She was able to get

¹⁶⁹ Heather Berg, “Trafficking Policy, Meaning Making and State Violence,” *Social Policy & Society* 14, no. 1 (2015): 148.

¹⁷⁰ Phelan, 150.

¹⁷¹ FBI — Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Survivor of Juvenile Sex Trafficking Shares Her Story,” Oct. 17, 2016, <https://youtu.be/mrgokIbGGNY>.

away from him and this violent situation, rebuild her relationship with her mother, and become a certified nursing assistant.

While the police are absent from most of this story—in her own words, she simply states that she left without any elaboration or description of a rescue—they appear at the end. She says, “If you’re a victim and you went through this, there is justice for you, definitely. Not only is there justice for you, you don’t have to be scared anymore once you elaborate and go to the police, because they will be arrested. To where it’s neat, you can breathe.” Her retelling up to this point focused on her own feelings, her own experiences—“I didn’t want no longer to be a prostitute. So I had to ask myself, ‘Is this something I still want to do? Or do I want out?’ And if so, I had to chance leaving and risking him coming after me and killing me”¹⁷²—which makes the appearance of the police somewhat jarring. They are positioned as a saving force, who facilitate a direct line to justice for survivors by arresting perpetrators. As Melissa Grant states, “The war on trafficking...has placed trafficking in a vacuum, to be ‘combated’ far from other political and economic realities,” and this separation is reinforced by depictions that fail to account for the ways carceral systems operate to still control trafficked persons.¹⁷³ This depiction masks multiple forms of violence that can exist for survivors—if police interpret some level of complicity or agency and arrest survivors of trafficking; if police cannot gather enough information to legally arrest a perpetrator; or if police simply do not believe survivors and refuse to act. But because these words are spoken by a survivor who is ostensibly telling her own story, viewers may not interrogate the inevitability of arrest in human trafficking narratives. The affective component of this survivor’s story may mute the questions raised by the continued

¹⁷² FBI Video Repository, “Survivor of Juvenile Sex Trafficking Shares Her Story,” accessed August 4, 2018, https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/interview_101716.mp4/view.

¹⁷³ Grant, “Human Trafficking, After the Headlines.”

presence of state power. Butler suggests the possibilities of “effacement through representation,” for the particular ways things are represented to simultaneously exclude them from cultural narratives.¹⁷⁴ Through the representational choices made in the production and distribution of this video, one might argue that the FBI is doing just that, locking off alternative trafficking narratives through their adherence to a rescue narrative. Musto goes so far as to call out “the psychologizing, therapeutic regimes through which trafficked persons are discursively situated in order to be designated as trafficked and offered protection” as “other forms of incarceration,” alternative ways state power works to control and inhibit trafficked persons.¹⁷⁵

However, this video illustrates the fissures and gaps in the curated collection of text, video, and images that fails to embrace the totality of these trafficked persons’ experiences and narratives. To bring Musto’s conception of discursive incarceration alongside stuckness, this video illustrates the doing time of “doing time,” of a kind of carceral time, the ways that the FBI attempts to use this and similar visual devices to construct and reinforce a carceral temporality for trafficked persons. While the Operation Cross Country X site as a whole places the FBI and other state powers as the agents of rescue and saviors of survivors of trafficking and replicate that narrative through structure and content, and even the YouTube description for this clip privileges the police’s place in her own escape from trafficking, they play no part in the story of the survivor interviewed until she conjures them as a tool for others to use to escape trafficking.¹⁷⁶ As the woman in the video states, “I have learned I was a victim.”¹⁷⁷ Within this narrative of her own self-driven escape from trafficking, she is highlighting (if accidentally) the

¹⁷⁴ Butler, 147.

¹⁷⁵ Jennifer Lynne Musto, “Carceral Protectionism and Multi-Professional Anti-Trafficking Human Rights Work in the Netherlands,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* vol. 12, no. 3-4 (2010), 390.

¹⁷⁶ FBI — Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Survivor of Juvenile Sex Trafficking Shares Her Story,” Oct. 17, 2016, accessed August 4, 2018, <https://youtu.be/mrgokIbGGNY>.

¹⁷⁷ FBI Video Repository, “Survivor of Juvenile Sex Trafficking Shares Her Story.”

work involved in making her own complex experience of trafficking fit into the hardline, simplified definitions and procedures used by law enforcement agencies, those whom she later suggests others utilize. When she does mention law enforcement and states “You don’t have to be scared anymore once you elaborate and go to the police,” she reveals the centrality of carcerality in this framework of anti-trafficking, where fear of trafficking is only removed once you have confessed to the police, and at the same moment the fear and possibility of being arrested yourself for trafficking is introduced.¹⁷⁸

Her narrative also presents a sort of challenge to viewers of the Operation Cross Country X site. Within the viewing of the video, the audience is stuck in her particular narrative of trafficking, one that lies outside of the bounds of the carceral frame laid out by the rest of the site and the FBI’s material on trafficking. Hughes argues that “When extraordinary bodies or sensational scenes appear on film, television, and the Internet, we are invited to stare; and, staring, we make conclusions about life in general.”¹⁷⁹ In creating this sensational space for an audience to sit, the FBI’s video offers up a bit of agency for the viewer. Someone expecting the heroic appearance of the FBI would ultimately be disappointed with the offhand mention of state services at the end of the video, left to reconsider dominant trafficking narratives, however briefly that stare may continue, and perhaps consider that carceral intervention may not be as necessary as previously suggested. Even with the controlled editing and presentation of the clip, this remains an unwieldy narrative object for Operation Cross Country X, one that cannot help but reveal the instability of their presentation of trafficking.

Affective Repercussions

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*, 166.

The previously discussed video provides an entry point into the affective repercussions of the FBI's documentation of Operation Cross Country X. The process of documenting, archiving, and making sense of trafficking through Operation Cross Country X's website attempts to simplify trafficking to carefully curated moments and narratives, but the performance leaks outside of these bounds, hinting at the more complex and nuanced meanings beyond the careful curation of the site.¹⁸⁰ The jarring introduction of the police at the end of the woman's narrative may attempt to confine her narrative to one of rescue and recovery, but in actuality highlights their inability to deal with the complexities of trafficking. The place of the body and performance, the affective repercussions of the discursive constructions of trafficking and trafficked victims by the FBI and other governmental and administrative bodies, has not been reckoned with. This section will attempt to grapple with these processes of elision and undertone by explicitly bringing discussions of affect into Operation Cross Country X, beginning with the use of spectacle within the operation.

Spectacular Instant

The social function of spectacle and, per Hughes, the spectacular instant, is fundamental to Operation Cross Country X and its approach to trafficking on both a media and action level. As related in the opening description of the FBI's "raw footage" from one of its operations, the visual and discursive language reiterates key images of trafficking in the cultural imaginary: bundles of money, guns, seedy motel rooms, partially obfuscated young women comforted by police officers. As Doezema relates, these iterations of "sensational descriptions and emotive language" echo and perpetuate trafficking as a cultural myth, trailing back to narratives of white slavery centuries ago.¹⁸¹ In the offices before the operation, we see other instances of discourse

¹⁸⁰ Schneider, *Performance Remains*, 103.

¹⁸¹ Doezema, 31.

that call on and reiterate popular culture understandings of trafficking and police intervention: statistics bemoaning the victimization of young women, a Panopticon-esque command center pinpointing tactical strike locations, emotionally-charged language (“Innocence Lost”). In reducing the complexity of trafficking to these spectacular visual and linguistic cues in their editing, cues that emphasize both the immediate efficacy of their operation as well as the emotional and affective charge of the situation, Operation Cross Country X relies upon a cultural shorthand for trafficking to buttress their own position as a policing operation and offers viewers the reassurance that important work is being done and lives are being saved. Hill discusses the ways law enforcement raids in the UK function similarly, stating that “raids function as a form of persuasion and a spectacular performance of state power that purport to show evidence of trafficking and the need for proactive policing.”¹⁸² As Hughes notes in her discussion of 19th century theater, this tactic is not new, but the effects of this sort of spectacle within DMST sting operations offer an opportunity to better understand how spectacular instants function in contemporary culture.¹⁸³

Using the sting operation as a mechanism against DMST calls upon a larger history of criminal justice actions reducing the complexities of commercial sex to a spectacular instant. For example, Grant analyzes vigilante videos, where citizens without law enforcement credentials conduct informal stings against sex workers. In these videos, sex workers and their clients—or supposed clients—are filmed in conversation or exchanging money, engaging in the mundane acts that occur prior to sexual exchange. She writes, “These videos capture and relay the moment—an agreement made and money exchanged—that is nearly universally understood as defining prostitution [...]. In this prevailing view, this is the moment to which nearly all sex

¹⁸² Hill, “How to Stage a Raid,” 43.

¹⁸³ Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*.

workers' lives are reduced."¹⁸⁴ The spectacular moment functions here to create a universalized image of what sex work should look like, to set the bounds of what it means to visualize trafficking, what markers and cues can be interpreted as the precursor to commercial sex.

The spectacular instant also facilitates a feeling of closure, even as these raids often perpetuate longer-term engagement with the state through social services (if provided to individuals) or criminal justice processes (if individuals are arrested or must engage in prosecution of traffickers). Hill writes, "Raids appear to produce happy endings, displaying the climactic moment of women's liberation, but it is through narrative closure that they cloak discrimination against sex workers and the repressive mode of control."¹⁸⁵ The costs of these state-inspired normalized narratives with happy endings are paid by sex workers and the individuals being made into meaning through these narratives, while administrative bodies reap social and political benefit. In the next section, we will address exactly which forms of violence exist alongside the happy ending of the packaged, produced trafficking narrative from Operation Cross Country X.

Compressive Violence, Slow Violence

The usage of moments of rescue as spectacular instants within Cross Country X shows the ways in which "temporal and spatial density" are inherent in spectacle.¹⁸⁶ Through these images, video, and press releases, the complexities of trafficking, the extensive spans of time that occur before and after these operations, the emotional lives of everyone involved, are condensed into easily digestible, culturally salient, and politically sanitized moments that conform to a central narrative about DMST and how it is best approached. This condensation, however, is not

¹⁸⁴ Grant, *Playing the Whore*, 8.

¹⁸⁵ Hill, "How to Stage a Raid," 44.

¹⁸⁶ Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*, 16.

without its byproducts; as discussed in the video of the woman's narrative of her escape from trafficking, the excess from her narrative that exceeds the bounds of Cross Country X is almost painfully visible. This condensation ultimately serves to harm those not in control of the narrative apparatus, in a process I call compressive violence. This not only silences the complexities of trafficking and those who experience it, but also works to trap them into political and discursive models that are both incapable of making sense of their experience beyond spectacular talking points, and also actively ignores those complexities in favor of a unified, simplified message and narrative. This is a very particular type of violence, another sort of compressive violence as presented in Chapter One of this dissertation, that is inherent to deployments of the spectacular instant.

Interventions like Operation Cross Country X tie into and reverberate our pop culture understandings of trafficking because of their narrative and moral simplicity. It is easier and comforting to consider that trafficking can be ended through the precise application of force to evil persons than to consider the much more nuanced, obfuscated, and perhaps even boring ways that trafficking most often plays out in everyday life. The violence of trafficking is commonly not one of immediacy, not the moment of exchange, but rather a series of processes, systemic structures, and relations between people that take place over long periods of time, a sort of slow violence. This is a type of violence "that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental or accretive,"¹⁸⁷ violence that is difficult to see when our eyes are attuned to the drama of a sting operation. Slow violence is one that resists identification and serves to hide itself in plain sight, in gestures and phrases and policies rather than gunshots or punches. Compressing the slow violence of trafficking into the spectacle of rescue, then, can serve to

¹⁸⁷ Nixon, 28.

mask how it tends to actually play out in people’s lives—as well as the role of the state in dealing with, and in some cases perpetuating, the structures that lead to trafficking.

Invisibility of State Power

In the conclusion to her work on the spectacular instant, Hughes points towards the role of spectacle in 21st century life, stating, “Contemporary performance culture still harnesses the affective dynamism of sensation scenes to inspire and discipline US citizens.”¹⁸⁸ This power to discipline citizens runs throughout Cross Country X, both in the power of the state to discipline through the justice system, as well as the disciplining power of the images and policies surrounding these sting operations. By compressing larger systems of violence and trafficking into one moment of rescue, the carceral state power that motivates these endeavors is masked—even muted—and the images of trafficking as spectacle, as sudden, as easily dealt with through highly-publicized annual FBI sting operations, persists. The compressive violence of Operation Cross Country X continues to teach citizens that trafficking looks a particular way, that it makes itself known through easily-discernible symbols, and, most importantly, that if those symbols are not present, trafficking is not present. The heavily circulated images of the false efficacy of heroic state-sponsored police actors saving young women from trafficking serve both to misinform audiences of trafficking and elide its slow violence, as well as cover up the ways these trafficking responses serve to further discipline marginalized populations. Importantly, as Musto argues, organizations are invested monetarily in “marketing” trafficked persons who use their services as victims, as these narratives are the kinds that are appealing and, more importantly, easily understandable to donors and other funding sources.¹⁸⁹ Through this trafficking of the

¹⁸⁸ Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Musto, “Carceral Protectionism,” 387.

spectacle of trafficking, organizations ensure their continued existence, but fail to account for the diverse experiences of trafficking.

Operation Cross Country X is not unique in its use of state control underneath the umbrella of justice and safety. It is in fact part of a larger pattern in anti-trafficking efforts that have less publicized consequences for those individuals not discerned as victims or survivors through practice or policy. Berg writes:

Anti-trafficking initiatives have proven to be successful avenues for increased surveillance and incarceration of consenting sex workers, enhanced state management of migration, the exclusion of sex workers from HIV prevention efforts and the promotion of urban gentrification, among other sites of policy impact.¹⁹⁰

These disparate mechanisms of state power serve to discipline already-marginalized populations: individuals engaged in commercial sex, migrants, and lower-income community residents. While there may be overlap between members of these populations and trafficked persons, there is nothing inherently anti-trafficking about policy measures that increase risk of policing and surveillance while decreasing access to health or social services.

As Erik Doxtader explains in his analysis of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), “the horrors of our times demand action not idle proclamation; human rights discourse is simply a horde of words affording thin cover for imperial aspirations.”¹⁹¹ Operation Cross Country X—while certainly a different case study than the UDHR—functions in a similar way. The press releases and visual imagery produced by the FBI and its law enforcement

¹⁹⁰ Berg, “Trafficking Policy,” 148.

¹⁹¹ Erik Doxtader, “Coming to Terms with a Declaration of Barbarous Acts,” in *Re/Framing Identifications*, ed. Michelle Ballif (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2013), 117.

partners effectively cover the carceral aspirations of Operation Cross Country X. The horror of human trafficking, especially DMST, must be addressed through swift action and subsequent justice, a narrative perpetuated by the formulaic “rescue and recovery” model present across each of these presented documents.

Conclusion 1: Beyond Spectacle

The FBI’s website copy on Operation Cross Country X concludes with a quote from then-director James Comey:

“This is a depressing day in law enforcement,” Comey said, announcing the number of juveniles who had been rescued, “because this is the world we live in and the work we have to do.” But it is also a proud day for law enforcement, he added, “because there are people who spend every day worrying about how to rescue these children. They are true heroes.”¹⁹²

Law enforcement gets the final word, positioning themselves and their work as heroic, necessary, and ongoing. There is still work to do—and, within the current purview of anti-trafficking efforts, that work is carceral.

Solutions to human trafficking must move beyond the current frameworks of spectacle and carceral protectionism. These are reactive approaches to fixing (and creating) harms rather than preventive approaches to stopping violence and exploitation from occurring. Musto encourages the decoupling of social service supports from law enforcement interventions. As it currently stands, “in some situations, the criminal-justice system is one of the only available safety nets, an unfortunate reality, yet still a practical way to provide victims with some modicum of support—whether services or shelter—and help get them out of exploitative

¹⁹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Operation Cross Country X: Recovering Underage Victims of Sex Trafficking and Prostitution.”

situations.”¹⁹³ The potential for harm is embedded in the tools of the criminal justice system. While detention, arrests, and even temporary incarceration may get survivors routed to services, they still have to experience the violence of those carceral mechanisms. If funding was used to meet exploited or trafficked persons’ immediate needs—like emergency housing or healthcare—instead of massive, multi-sector sting operations, then perhaps survivors would be able to access services without the coercive hand of a criminal justice intervention.

Similarly, as Alexandra Lutnick writes, “If national and state policies were more strongly focused on meeting young people’s self-identified needs instead of on trying to catch the ‘bad guys’ and prosecute them, we likely would have a better chance of being of service to these youth. None of the federal or local responses adequately attend to the root factors that are associated with young people trading sex.”¹⁹⁴ After a trafficker is successfully identified, investigated, and prosecuted—which requires a victim’s testimony, itself a sometimes disruptive or retraumatizing process—structural inequities like poverty, housing insecurity, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia still exist in survivors’ lives. These root factors are allowed to proliferate, even after a case is closed and justice has ostensibly been served. Policies must address a stronger social safety net through living wages, affordable housing, and increased access to well-funded education and job training programs as part of a holistic anti-trafficking platform.

Conclusion 2: Beyond Spectacle?

That was the conclusion of the original co-authored article, which I have kept here as it served the purpose of putting forth a clear suggestion for directions in anti-trafficking policy and

¹⁹³ Musto, *Control and Protect*, 22.

¹⁹⁴ Lutnick, *Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking*, 46.

endeavors. While this is helpful for a piece that aims to intervene in institutional responses to trafficking and creating strong, more easily publishable conclusions, it is curiously at odds with the aims of this dissertation to sit with stuckness, rather than shun it.

In some ways our original conclusion works along the types of paranoid readings suggested earlier in chapter two, in which a problem is presented that has a solution requiring the outright rejection of what has been done incorrectly. As Sedgwick says regarding reparative readings, however, “the desire of a reparative impulse...is additive and accretive [emphasis mine],” rather than subtractive and decreasing.¹⁹⁵ I want to take some more time to sit with the spectacle of stuckness as it takes place within this chapter, then, to see what additions and accretions may be gained from a longer look at trafficking and spectacle. This is a line of investigation that seems fully in-line with a critical trafficking studies approach. As Musto suggests, critical trafficking research “eschews facile presumptions that all anti-trafficking efforts are inherently ‘good’ or helpful,” instead taking a closer look at their effects; to riff on this perspective, then, I would argue that we similarly should be careful about quickly assuming any anti-trafficking effort is inherently “bad” or unhelpful.¹⁹⁶

Crucially, the process of writing and rewriting this collaborative piece has given me pause to consider the capacity of sitting with stuckness as a method with multiple researchers on the same project. In the many conversations and working meetings of collaborative work (deciding on what course to take with an image’s analysis, how to make sense of a video clip), there is a constant push and pull of ideological and political goals. Even when those goals are shared, there exist alternative strategies for creating change and addressing the shared concerns of all participants, from advocating for policy changes to suggesting longer observation of

¹⁹⁵ Sedgwick, 149

¹⁹⁶ Musto, “Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking,” 261.

phenomena, and these all test one's limits to sit with stuckness when presented with alternative methods that move quicker. The pull to contribute to the academic conversation is strong, as is the pull to have a strong and extensive publication record, and both these forces seem at odds with sitting with stuckness as they encourage one to move quickly, find the connective tissue and get to work making it visible, turning it into an easily-readable representation of your fields' connections. While I am satisfied with the conclusions that were drawn in the original article iteration of this chapter, I cannot help but note that throughout the writing process I could feel the intellectual leftovers, the stuckness I could not sit with as I was too busy running towards a conclusion, the compromises both Corinne and I made becoming more noticeable as our decisiveness in argument grew. While I may have wanted to sit with stuckness longer and ruminate on these videos and websites to search for different types of arguments, this was not necessarily the case for my proactive and productive co-writer who was eager to contribute to policy discussion and kickstart an academic career. While we shared a commitment to critiquing trafficking discourse through analyzing stuckness in depictions of trafficking rescue narratives, this did not guarantee that we shared strategies for "doing the time" of collaborative work.

Theatre director Anne Bogart discusses the violence of articulation, the way that making a choice in creating something "destroys every other possible choice, every other option;" in order to move forward and decide on anything, she argues, this violence is necessary.¹⁹⁷ In choosing to focus on an argument emphasizing state violence and suggesting strong conclusions in opposition to dominant anti-trafficking rhetorics, we articulated a choice that killed the possibilities of sitting with stuckness further within the piece, to engage in the ways I have suggested here in the conclusion with our archive. At the same time though, this collaborative

¹⁹⁷ Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45.

work has curiously produced its own type of stuckness, its own form of doing time. Without this co-writing, without the need to produce a salient result in the form of a co-written article, the lost possibilities of this piece would have never become visible. It is through the violence of articulation that the possibilities of *other* articulations have even entered the realm of possibility, and here become an opportunity to discuss stuckness and its role in collaborative work and sit with the stuckness of trafficking and spectacle further.

What is the cost of moving beyond spectacle, both in general and more particularly regarding trafficking? Spaces of visualization, representation, and affect are crucial to an understanding of trafficking as it exists in contemporary American culture. Trafficking is inherently a spectacular subject, as it operates at the crux of so many highly charged discourses and systems of meaning-making: economics, politics, sexuality, embodiment, and gender, among others. Discussing trafficking is to call into existence our cultural assumptions about it, which have historically been imbued with spectacle to the core, from white slavery to Operation Cross Country X's emphasis on child sex trafficking, a choice that plays into dominant cultural narratives about children and their utmost prioritization (as Edelman so skillfully has shown). While the co-authored article and this chapter focused mainly on systemic usages of stuckness and spectacle to support state power and carceral frameworks, moments also appear where individuals or communities utilize spectacle to their benefit. The unnamed woman's video narrative focuses on moments that seem drenched in spectacle (her rape by her father, the moment of being forced into sex work, heroically freeing herself) because these are formative moments for her story.¹⁹⁸ These moments force the viewer to reconsider the FBI's narrative not because they lay outside of spectacle, but because they inhabit it. The carceral time, the

¹⁹⁸ Which, of course, is presented to us in an edited form by the FBI's website.

stuckness of “doing time,” that the woman is being edited into through the FBI’s video is the very thing that provides access to her anti-trafficking-undermining narrative. Similarly, in considering local and micro-level responses to trafficking as more effective than state-level approaches, these projects can only come about by making more immediate and visible local contexts and needs for trafficked persons. Spectacle is not a cage here, but a possibility for becoming visible, becoming able to be visualized in new ways.

To attempt to move past spectacle in association with trafficking and treat it as a somehow tainted or less-than-useful subject enacts the types of perspectives that this dissertation is trying to write against in the first place, narratives of uselessness or impracticalness that encourage us to leave patterns of thoughts or behavior behind us, where we have successfully moved past them or analyzed them away without grappling with them consistently. Instead, I want to cling to the “critical” aspects of critical trafficking studies, even if the draw to push for strong, confident solutions for trafficking is tempting. Butler discusses how dehumanization can occur not just through the labeling of something as less than human but through “a refusal of discourse” in the first place, the limiting and reducing of discursive activity acting as a barrier to connection and understanding of others.¹⁹⁹ In regards to stuckness and spectacle-as-stuckness, then, sitting with stuckness encourages a proliferation of discourse around its subjects to avoid these all-too-easy simplifications. As I move into the conclusion, these are concepts that will come to the forefront as I consider the capacities of living with stuckness for expanding perspectives on selfhood and an inciteful question posed by Judith Butler: “Whose lives count as lives?”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Butler, 36.

²⁰⁰ Butler, 20.

Conclusion: Sitting with Stuckness – Paralyzing Emotions, Queering Trauma

As the immense popularity of a song from a recent Disney animated film can attest, contemporary American culture is very invested in a narrative of “letting it go.”²⁰¹ Emotional distress and trauma are seen as what we might call *paralyzing emotions*, affective experiences that serve no productive purpose, that keep us stuck in certain times and places, and must be left behind and abjected in order to live a full and happy life. While this narrative and method of processing one's affective experiences seems to work for many people, “letting go” has become the unquestioned normative way of experiencing emotion and one's personal history, with those who are seemingly unable to move past these paralyzing emotions seen as regressive, tragic, or too stubborn to know better.

It is in this space of stuckness, doing time in alternate ways that may seem as if one is unable or unwilling to move forward, that I have made my intervention in this dissertation. In the first chapter, I argued that the limited, human-centric scope of model of Darwin's evolution that caught hold in the American visual imaginary took the form of compressive violence, marking nonnormative bodies as stuck, subhuman points in an evolutionary timeline leading towards whiteness and able-bodiedness. Here, stuckness and its representations coalesced around the loss of a stable definition of the human and the citizen. The second chapter's examination of ACT-UP and HIV/AIDS-related art showed that the space of stuckness, in the form of an association with waste, offers up opportunities for reparative productions with negative or undesirable subjects, and new possibilities for resistance to dominant models. The loss of life and control formed the root of stuckness and the ways artists and activists working with HIV/AIDS did time. My and Corinne Schwarz's examination of Operation Cross Country X in chapter three built on

²⁰¹ “Let It Go,” from *Frozen*, directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee (2013; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2013), film.

the previous chapters to show how dominant visual culture's emphasis on the spectacular instant in depictions of human trafficking influences policy decisions and affects the material lives of trafficked persons, while victims' own stories frequently undermine these heroic narratives of spectacular state intervention and weasel out of these sticking patterns. Purported losses of a national sense of identity and the control of women's bodies inform the stuckness here.

Throughout this dissertation I have lingered around questions and subjects of performance, reality, and representation, from the "Missing Link" to ACT-UP's sadly prescient die-ins and the FBI's filmic depictions of trafficking. In this conclusion I grapple directly with these concepts and relationship to stuckness through the lens of reality television in order to consider more intently what it might look like to live with stuckness, to consider more fully the effects of sitting in moments of stoppage.

In this conclusion, I return to the TLC reality show *My Strange Addiction* segment featuring Casie, the woman who is seemingly stuck in the act of eating her husband's ashes, as presented in the final vignette of my introduction, as well as another segment from the show in which a woman named Kailyn is presented as addicted to eating plastic. For both of these women, their depictions in stuckness revolve around a loss of personal control, the aforementioned "addiction" of the show's title, as well as personal losses. These segments are a helpful site for synthesizing the multifaceted and shifting ways that stuckness functions as an object of analysis and an analytic, and also animate some of my concluding thoughts about how to make reparative sense of narratives and counternarratives of "moving on" from affective histories. In examining these performances and their discursive constructions of emotion and trauma, I bring out various iterations of stuckness that have been discussed previously in the dissertation and suggest further ways we might sit with stuckness in the future.

I re-emphasize the temporal aspects of stuckness within *My Strange Addiction*, reiterating the ways that certain affects and emotions become linked with various ways of being in or out of normative time. I engage with seemingly deviant ways of dealing with difficult, “paralyzing emotions” that are presented as counterintuitive (such as eating one’s husband’s ashes to cope with his passing), but that I argue operate as alternative ways of doing time—explicitly embodied ways of engaging with emotional histories and traumas. Rather than living out the narratives of “letting go” so frequent in popular culture, Casie and other subjects of *My Strange Addiction* seem to be performing an explicit resistance to these schema, refusing the abjection of negative emotions in lieu of an incorporation of it into their own bodies.

This conclusion makes a number of key interventions in its synthesis of the previous chapters. It follows and brings to the forefront my dissertation's utilization of temporality as a primary lens for understanding power and its deployment through the concept of stuckness. Here, narratives of “paralyzing emotions” create affective hierarchies and pathologize those who refuse to “move on” from certain emotional experiences, and especially those who seem to have no desire to leave past traumas behind. In this respect, this conclusion also suggests how stuckness contributes to conversations in trauma studies. So frequently trauma is discussed as a wholly negative experience, but I argue that we must also engage with the possibilities trauma presents for engaging with and understanding affective experience, especially as related to time and the recursion of affect. Finally, engaging with “real” performance of affect and emotion offers a useful direction for queer performance studies in making more space for the analysis of quotidian, everyday performance.

I begin with a brief overview of some of the key theoretical concepts needed for my discussion of *My Strange Addiction* within the fields of performance studies and queer studies,

pulling from the work of scholars like Philip Auslander, Ann Cvetkovich, and Sara Ahmed that build upon previously-presented theories: namely, reality television as performance and queer approaches to trauma and trauma studies. While these are by no means the only theoretical approaches used here or within this dissertation, they inform my particular engagement here and are necessary as a final bit of framework for the conclusion. Next, I perform an analysis of the general structure of episodes of *My Strange Addiction* through the lens of stuckness, suggesting how the presentation style of the show frames a reductive version of time and trauma, revealing the inability of normative narrative to make sense of these experiences and how individuals become stuck in temporal narratives not of their own making. I then move into more focused analyses of narratives from the show, focusing on those that involve the consumption of items not normally considered food items. As stated previously I specifically look at two instances, one in which Kailyn eats plastic and another in which Casie eats her husband's ashes, to argue that their performances of consumption can be read as queering dominant narratives of trauma. Feminist and queer affect studies come into play in this section as I interrogate normative constructions of happiness and emotional health. I end by moving towards conclusions both about these subjects and the dissertation as a whole, suggesting the capabilities of trauma for rethinking intimate attachments and to consider future directions for stuckness as a theoretical model and object of analysis.

Theoretical Scaffolding: Performance, Trauma

The question of the real and its place in performance is key for understanding *My Strange Addiction* and the individuals presented within. In order to make sense of this archive of reality television within the framework of performance studies, a discipline historically interested in the

live rather than the recorded, Philip Auslander's work on mediatization is extremely helpful. Auslander is concerned with the relationship between live and mediated performances, questioning whether the categories are still so easily kept separate. He argues that the dominance of television within contemporary culture has shifted the terms of performance, stating that “the televisual shapes the conditions under which performance is now perceived.”²⁰² In Auslander's view, the live has become affected and altered by the increasing dominance of the televisual within culture and been forced to acknowledge itself as a part of the broader media landscape, a process he refers to as mediatization.²⁰³ Within this formulation, the distinction between live and mediated becomes more and more difficult to clearly make, as increasingly productions on both sides of this supposed gap are engaging in the visual styles of the other, creating a situation where “in a culture dominated by the televisual, live and recorded images are not perceived as intrinsically different.”²⁰⁴ Operation Cross Country X provides a perfect example of this, as the FBI's approaches to trafficking and popular cultural depictions of trafficking become increasingly difficult to tell apart.

Auslander does not discuss reality television (and at the time of this publication it was barely on the cultural landscape), but it presents a perfect case study for his work. Through reality television, the concept of *reality itself* becomes mediatized, pushing us to consider the metanarratives of real life and how they relate to other forms of media and performance. Here, reality as real becomes reality as performance, as we must read all of the events within reality television, a genre that is supposed to represent the real, as mediated. Within studies of reality television this is not necessarily a new idea, as scholars in television studies have discussed the

²⁰² Philip Auslander, “Liveness, Mediatization, and Intermedial Performance,” *Degrés: revue de synthèse à orientation sémiologique* no. 101 (Spring 2011): 6.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

presence of metanarratives and tropes within reality television for years.²⁰⁵ However, this framework of mediatization offers a way for performance studies to make different sorts of interventions within reality television, emphasizing the performances and performative nature of “real life” in a way that calls attention to the quotidian as embroiled in broader cultural circuits of power.²⁰⁶ While the events taking place within reality television happen within “real time,” they are always mediated in relation to acts from the past, as well as their future reception in the form of television. Similarly, the structures of television ultimately construct the “real time” we see in the programs, as editors, producers, and camera operators construct the vision of continuity and forward movement of time that we, as viewers, perceive.

This discussion of performance and its relationship to reality is important to make sense of the depictions of emotional distress and trauma presented within the show. Generally, the framework we have for discussing trauma is one that is based in psychological and medical discourse of the mind and body, discourses that rely on the perceived reality of experience. While reality television is representing what might be “real life,” though, it is always just that: a representation, a performance of real life constructed in a mediatized landscape for television viewing. This, then, encourages a view of trauma that is not based in pathology, but rather cultural critique. My questions here circulate not around the reality of the emotional experiences of the individuals within *My Strange Addiction*, as this is information to which we have no access. When examining a reality television show, it is important to note that their narratives are ultimately created through the actions of producers at the scene of filming, as well as story

²⁰⁵ See David S. Escoffery, ed., *How Real is Reality TV? Essays on Representation and Truth* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006); Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn, eds., *Understanding Reality Television* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

²⁰⁶ Obviously, this is not necessarily a new insight; Butler in philosophy and West & Zimmerman within sociology, among others, have called attention to the place of performance in everyday life and identity in very well-known works. What this reading of Auslander offers, however, is a similar argument that is clearly emplaced within performance studies.

writers and editors working with footage after the fact in post-production. Instead, I am examining the cultural work that the presentation of these individuals' experiences *as trauma* and *as real* is doing and how we might read it as a cultural artifact, how it reiterates normative narratives or opens up alternative views of emotionality, and how these can contribute to a continuing investigation and understanding of stuckness.

The work of Ann Cvetkovich provides a vital framework for examining trauma within cultural contexts, as she is similarly interested in “resist[ing] the authority given to medical discourses” in regards to trauma and emotional distress.²⁰⁷ Working from a position firmly entrenched in queer studies of affect, Cvetkovich offers a model of analysis that critiques normative experiences of trauma as only meaningful when related to large-scale national events, instead privileging “a sense of trauma as connected to the textures of everyday experience,” focusing on trauma at the level of personal relationships.²⁰⁸ Whereas mainstream discourse surrounding trauma and distress is of the “let it go” variety, encouraging people to either move on from trauma or be the victim of it, Cvetkovich suggests that instead we might “forge a path between a debilitating descent into pain and the denial of it,” finding alternative ways that trauma has a place in culture and the lives of individuals.²⁰⁹ Her model reiterates many of my ideas surrounding reparative production presented in chapter two and offers a way of seeing trauma that is personal, cultural, non-medicalized, and generative of new ways of relating to the world and others, and these will all prove useful in making sense of the narratives presented within *My Strange Addiction*.

Structuring Trauma's Time: TLC's *My Strange Addiction*

²⁰⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

Originally premiering in late 2010, TLC's *My Strange Addiction* presents a reality television view of the lives of individuals who have what the show deems to be a "strange addiction." Addiction is used in a generous manner here, as the strange addictions on the show range from alternative lifestyles and sexual proclivities (being a furry, enjoying infantilization) to physical behaviors and hobbies (working out constantly, picking at scabs, doing taxidermy) to the addiction most frequently presented on the show, consumption of strange objects (urine, drywall, ashes, plastic, etc.). The show is similar to many of TLC's and other networks' stable of reality television series that depict nonnormative subjects, in that it draws on personal experiences of hardship and otherness to create narratives of personal growth or stoppage. This emphasis on nonnormative subjects is key to *My Strange Addiction* and other documentary reality programs in the 2000s and 2010s. In a discussion of her network's plans to change their scheduling lineup in 2015, TLC network chief Marjorie Kaplan herself used the phrase "freak show" to describe the type of programs they were trying to move away from, calling attention to the lineage of sensational entertainment this show is a part of.²¹⁰

In particular, the show shares a similar overall structure to one of the most popular reality television shows of the past decade, *Intervention*, a consistent ratings-grabber for the A&E network, which is similarly invested in a therapeutic narrative as it follows addicts through a process of their family members holding an intervention for them.²¹¹ In creating these narratives, however, time is manipulated and stuck in certain ways that appear to limit the perceived complexity of the experiences of the show's subjects, as well as reinforce problematic narratives

²¹⁰ David Bauder, "TLC Abandoning the 'Freak Show' to Find Some Heart," *The News-Herald* (April 30, 2015), accessed December 6, 2018, https://www.news-herald.com/entertainment/tlc-abandoning-the-freak-show-to-find-some-heart/article_4533eb51-b8ef-5b22-94e1-4bb5c8be72de.html.

²¹¹ Gina Bellafante, "They Drink, They Drug, and You Are There," *New York Times* (Aug. 17, 2008), accessed October 29, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/18/arts/television/18seri.html>.

to make sense of these individuals' behaviors that rely on pathology and teleological narratives of well-being.²¹²

Each 22-minute episode generally focuses on two separate individuals with varying afflictions. Occasionally, as in the case of the woman who is addicted to eating her husband's ashes, one individual can take up the entire episode. In either form of the show, with one or two narratives, the overall structure of the show remains the same. Each episode begins with a title card, white text on a black background, reading "This program depicts addictive behaviors that are dangerous and risky in nature. Viewers should not attempt" while discordant music plays in the background. From the beginning, then, the viewer is alerted that behaviors contained within the show are already lying outside of the norms of everyday life, as well as given the genre cues of a horror or thriller production. After the title card, we see a brief montage of the episode that introduces us to the individuals as addicted to something (we have not yet learned their names), emphasizing the dangers and unfortunate nature of the behaviors through intense background music. Each individual narrative then begins with a brief introduction to the individual, usually name, age, and location, followed by an admission of their addiction, a format reminiscent of addiction counseling services like Alcoholics Anonymous. The individuals then describe the frequency of their personal addiction, whether that might mean how many times per day they do it, how long they've done it, or how many instances of the behavior have ever taken place.

After this, individuals offer up their own reasoning for engaging in the behavior that generally lie along the lines of affect, emphasizing how the behavior makes them feel both physically and emotionally. If the person's addiction is about consumption, generally an in-depth discussion of taste and texture comes in here; someone might enjoy the crunch of plastic remotes

²¹² For a general study and introduction into the social function of reality television, see Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield): 2004.

or the refreshing flavors and burn of powdered laundry detergent. At this point any sense of agency of the individual is lost, as another title card cuts from the individual to show the perceived dangers of their addiction, generally focusing on the medical and psychological toll of the substance or behavior. The narrative then shifts to family and friends of the individual, who offer up their own reading of the situation and why the individual is engaging in the questionable behavior. Almost always, these explanations reach back to some form of childhood trauma or emotional distress to make sense of the behavior. The family member or friend will then have an intervention-style conversation with the individual, bringing up what they perceive as the dangers of the behavior based on warning labels or common knowledge, and the conversation then ends with them agreeing in all instances to see a medical or psychological professional, depending on the nature of the addiction.

Once again the nature of authority within the show shifts, this time from the family member or friend to the medical professional. The knowledge of the medical or psychological professional is authoritative, bringing scientific facts into this discussion of the behavior and laying out a path of devastation for the individual, should they continue the behavior. The professionals reinforce concepts of health and safety, showing how improper attachments to objects or behaviors stop them from becoming healthier versions of their selves. The individuals then generally adopt an apologetic or stubborn stance, committing to stopping the behavior and allowing medical intervention, if necessary (to replace a damaged hip from constant cycling, for example), or rejecting the authoritative knowledge of the professional and recommitting themselves to their behavior. Either way, a final cut to a title card shows us the aftereffects, letting us know whether the individual has succeeded in overcoming their addiction, or has given in to the temptation once again.

The temporal logic of the show reinforces a teleological narrative of redemption, one that is exceedingly popular in this type of television.²¹³ The show begins with the enunciation of the individual's behavior, a starting deficit that through the show's introduction of emotional trauma, individual responsibility, and medical intervention can be overcome in a move towards overall health and well-being. This type of linear narrative, one that finds a pathologized beginning (past emotional trauma) that is then expressed in an unacceptable middle point emphasized with a spectacular instance of the behavior (bathing with bleach, for example) to then be cured for the purposes of full selfhood and health, is aligned with the standard model of human progression as elucidated by Halberstam in his discussion of straight time. As Halberstam argues, heteronormative culture "chart[s] the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation;" in the redemption narrative of *My Strange Addiction*, the ending of the unacceptable behavior is ultimately what moves the individual from a childhood into adulthood, from their history into their future.²¹⁴ This is a very specific future, however, one which sees "longevity as the most desirable" over all other considerations, such as pleasures or comforts individuals might find in their attachments to their sometimes-painful past.²¹⁵

Within the temporal logic of the show, however, an attachment to the past is always-already negative and traumatic, and always at the behest of the show's producers. The structure of the show pathologizes the behaviors and attachments of its subjects, linking contemporary behaviors inexorably to painful past emotional experiences or traumas through the usage and editing of interviews, title cards, and childhood photographs. Of course, the lingering present

²¹³ See Brenda R. Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

²¹⁴ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 152.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

absence within the show's depictions, what we might call its "dark matter," to pull from Andrew Sofer, is that *all* of an individual's behaviors are influenced by their pasts.²¹⁶ As Sara Ahmed shows us in *Queer Phenomenology*, however, some attachments are more taken for granted than others. Ahmed argues that "the body gets directed in some ways more than others," with some orientations being perceived as more moral or ethical than others.²¹⁷ Using geometric metaphors, she suggests that "the lines that allow us to find our way, those that are 'in front' of us, also make certain things, and not others, available;" the front-facing time of *My Strange Addiction* makes complex engagement with the past unavailable, as it would orient us away from the promise of the future.²¹⁸ In this way, past experiences become simplified to a reductive model of trauma, one that sees emotional distress as forming a lack that one tries to unsuccessfully fill through addictive behaviors that lie outside of normative time, and that must ultimately be paved over and filled before continuing toward true happiness.

Embodying Trauma: Case Studies in Plastic and Ash

I have mainly spoken about *My Strange Addiction* on a structural level up to this point, and a consideration of specific narratives will tease out the ways in which we can read alternative experiences of trauma and embodiment through a show which seems to be explicitly against nonnormative attachments and behaviors, in the process seeing what it might mean to embody stuckness. With this in mind, I turn to the most dominant mode of narrative within the show: consumption. These narratives form the bulk of *My Strange Addiction*'s collection of addictions. Varying from the drinking of bodily fluids to the eating of drywall, these behaviors provide the viewer with a visceral viewing experience, the show's presentation utilizing instants of spectacle

²¹⁶ Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 3.

²¹⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 15.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

that engage explicitly with the body in ways that are presented as dangerous and unhealthy. I will look at two specific narratives here, Kailyn who eats plastic and Casie who eats her husband's ashes, to examine the affective experiences within and how we might read them through a queer affect studies lens.

Kailyn's narrative fits the standard structure of a *My Strange Addiction* narrative. After introducing herself, she reveals that she has eaten countless plastic items over the course of eleven years. While the camera leans into a deep angle and holds a tight closeup on her face in profile to show her eating a number of tiny plastic cocktail swords, she explains her own reasons for eating plastic, stating that "it's the way it crunches and feels and it's a rough but at the same time smooth texture," emphasizing the ways in which plastic physically feels in her mouth.²¹⁹ While her words seem matter-of-fact, the visual language of the shot implies instability and anxiety through its use of a canted angle. She does not shy away from explaining her emotional reasons for eating plastic, either, going against the narrative of repression the show is invested in as she states that plastic comforts her, "it made [her] feel happy and not so empty."²²⁰ In this section, the show cuts quickly between tight closeups of her hands holding various items she likes to eat—a bundle of cocktail swords, a remote control—effectively using the camera to make any statement she may be saying about herself intimately connected to the plastic she is eating. Through the editing of the show, a narrator connects her statements about the affective reasons she eats plastic to childhood abuse and contemplative close-up shots of Kailyn's face as she is looking out of a window, creating a narrative that might have questionable veracity. However, within the logic of the show, this type of clearcut teleological link between childhood trauma and

²¹⁹ *My Strange Addiction*, season two, episode seven, "Bathes in Bleach/Eats Plastic," aired August 7, 2011, on *TLC*, digital copy.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

risky addictive behavior is reasonable and fit the goals of a redemption narrative. When Kailyn visits a medical professional she learns that her liver is enlarged, with the doctor relating to her that the toxins within plastics have been damaging her body over the past decade. She then commits to stopping her consumption of plastic, with the title card at the end reinforcing this commitment.

While Kailyn's narrative fits the normative model of the show, we can see within it numerous ruptures where the temporal and affective logic of the show fails to completely contain the complexities of her narrative and experiences with plastics. As she herself states, eating plastic brings her comfort and pleasure, with certain affective experiences that she cannot find outside of it. Sara Ahmed relates that "happiness puts us into intimate contact with things," brings us closer to certain individuals or objects, although as we have seen "the objects we encounter are not neutral" and come with certain investment in moral and social worth: to derive pleasure from chewing gum is acceptable, but not so much from cocktail swords.²²¹ Kailyn's queer investment in plastics, while socially unacceptable and leading to a possible liver condition, offers her a space of happiness and comfort outside of the normative model of progress and a striving for longevity. She is able to find one of those paths between rejection and outright pain that Cvetkovich is searching for, finding in an engagement with her past of sexual trauma a seemingly paradoxical place of emotional, if not physical, safety.

Casie's narrative differs slightly from the standard *My Strange Addiction* narrative, in that it takes up an entire episode and because it seems as though her original reason for applying, that she is addicted to carrying around her husband's remains, was superseded once the producers discovered that she was eating his remains, as well. The narrative begins with Casie

²²¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 23, 34.

describing how she carries her husband's ashes around with her everywhere, a behavior that might be seen as socially awkward but not necessarily addictive. The episode cuts between shots of her engaging in everyday activities (shopping, cooking, walking around, sleeping) all from a medium close-up or closer, each shot in a fairly naturalistic way, while dramatic percussion-driven music plays. Already, aspects of these shots call attention to the constructed nature of this reality. When Casie goes to sleep with her husband's ashes, she is fully dressed in daytime wear. Throughout these clips, we see her wearing one of only three outfits. While her narration over these clips talks about her interactions with other people, she is visible in zero interpersonal interactions, aside from with her husband's ashes.

After describing his tragic death from an allergic reaction two months before filming, however, the show begins to set up a new narrative. Casie says in a talking head interview that her husband's death was "the day my world stopped turning," signaling a temporal shift in her life, a narrativized entrance into stuckness. Casie reveals that she has been eating her husband's ashes. Relating the first time it happened, she says that while transferring his ashes a bit spilled on her finger and she was resistant to washing it off, stating "That's my husband, I don't wanna wipe him away."²²² As she speaks, we see an extreme close-up shot of her putting the bag of ashes into his urn/box, followed by a quick dissolve into another extreme close-up of her fingers coated in ash followed by a slow pan up to her putting her fingers in her mouth, the camera and editing re-enacting her story. The editing of the show once again reveals its artifice when shortly thereafter, as it cuts between multiple medium closeup shots of Casie with her finger in her mouth and we hear a sloppily edited-together sentence made from multiple different recordings over the clips stating "I'm eating/My husband." Through its repeated invocation of Casie's

²²² *My Strange Addiction*, season two, episode eight, "Carrying My Husband's Urn," aired August 7, 2011, on *TLC*, digital copy.

eating habits and the repetition of the same ash-eating clips with voiceover about her deceased husband, the show's editing creates Casie's addiction within the frame of the episode, manufacturing a visual space in which the viewer might inhabit such an emotional experience.

Casie at one points sits on her bed and acts out her ritual for the camera, narrating along the way:

First I lick my finger. And I don't just dip it in, I swirl it around to kind of feel and get it caked on their good... And then I just eat it. It taste like rotten eggs, sand, and sandpaper, but I've grown to love that taste.²²³

This is one of the few sections in which the show has slower cuts, the camera lingering for longer on Casie's individual actions in close-up: the swirling of the finger in ashes, the raising of the finger to the mouth and an extended shot of her holding the ashy finger in her mouth. These choices, along with the camera's perspective as being in Casie's room with a preponderance of extreme close-ups, have the simultaneous effect of providing a sense of intimacy, eroticism, and possibly identification with Casie as it atomizes her into her actions and body parts and how they make up her ash-eating ritual.²²⁴ Casie then goes through the standard narrative beats of *My Strange Addiction*, with a confrontation from her mother leading her to a visit with a therapist where she learns that the embalming process leaves psychosis-causing chemicals within the body that can last through the cremation process. After discovering this and realizing that continuing to eat her husband's ashes will mean she will lose him in another sort of way or will lead her to take her own life, she agrees in the end to rehabilitation in a treatment facility.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ For more on the complex interplay between women's subjectivity and frequent depiction within filmic media as atomized body parts, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 833-44.

Casie's story, like Kailyn's, reveals queer forms of attachment that seem to resist dominant models of trauma and emotional health. Similar to Kailyn's story, Casie is completely upfront about her reasons for eating her husband's ashes. Through eating her husband's ashes, Casie is able to experience a feeling of physical closeness to him that brings her comfort and keeps her connected to him and their history together. This physical closeness is part of why the reactions within the episode from her friends and family (and reactions on the internet to this episode, as well) are so strong, as Casie is engaging in a certain type of queer intimacy that is in some ways closer than one can have in life. If we think of intimacy as "that which is normally not apparent, accessible, or available," to know someone on the level of taste, to know what their ashes feel like in one's mouth, is to be heavily intimate.²²⁵ While not a socially appropriate intimacy, it generates new ways of knowing and interfacing with other bodies and objects. This is a queer temporal intimacy, as well, as in the process of eating her husband's ashes Casie is accessing the literal and figurative residue of their past encounters. Casie seems to enact Rebecca Schneider's critique of permanence in the archive, as she is eating the "material presented as preserved, . . . as 'authentic'" to gain access to a more ephemeral place; to use Schneider's model, she is destroying (or at least consuming) the bone, rather than keeping it around, to access the flesh-memory.²²⁶

In these examples, through sitting with stuckness it is clear that rather than being stuck in a state of unproductive stoppage, these narratives complicate such a simple "stuck/moving on" dichotomy. If, as Butler argues, our personal narratives are undone by the processes of grief as our reliance on relations with others for self-constitution is made painfully visible, then this

²²⁵ Staci Newmahr, *Playing on the Edge: Sodomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 171.

²²⁶ Schneider, 100.

undoing might result in expansion of personal narrative possibilities.²²⁷ Casie's shift from mourning her husband to carrying around his ashes to eating his ashes is most definitely a type of progression, a doing of time, albeit one that does not fit into standard cultural models. Similarly, Kailyn's plastic-eating habit pushes her body into new forms of growth that trade overall physical health with the emotional and tactile satisfaction of plastic. Instead of the clear moment of stoppage, the visible sutures in the shows editing and creation of the women's narratives and characters reveal how much work goes into presenting their experiences as abnormal, how much work is done by background music, narration, and editing to loop their experiences, make them appear as if they are locked in compulsive spectacular patterns to fit the whims of the production. It could be said that in these scenarios, the show itself is stuck in the time of moving on, trying to at once to present these experiences in a way that makes sense in a model of normative motion while unable to truly represent and communicate the great losses within the stories.

Towards Conclusions: Intimate Failures, Sticking with Stuckness

Looking at *My Strange Addiction* as a whole and these examples presented in particular, failure lingers as that which defines these individuals. The narrative of trauma presented by the show tells us that these individuals have failed to align themselves with normative time and progress past their histories, failed to process their emotions properly and move on, and are stuck in a temporal rut. As we can see, however, these "failures" might be unable to live up to normative models, may seem to get individuals stuck in emotional ruts, but in the process they reveal alternative ways of approaching trauma and working with, rather than past, one's emotionally distressing histories. As Jack Halberstam argues, "failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior," opens up spaces for accessing negative affects that we

²²⁷ Butler, 23.

are told to reject in light of the ever-present promise of happiness.²²⁸ While *My Strange Addiction* presents these individuals and their emotional lives as suffering from a lack, a reading centered around stuckness can instead show how their desires are productive of new subject-positions and ways of forming connections with human and nonhuman others.

Rather than “paralyzing emotions,” then, the emotional distress and personal traumas of these two women act as points of generation for them, offering them personal and embodied ways of finding comfort and solace in a world that sees their attachments as unhealthy, childish, or even deathly. While the reality or truthfulness of these experiences is up for debate, as they take place within the mediatized realm of reality television, these performances of embodied trauma offer viewers narratives that seem to push beyond the structures in which they rest, moving past the somber title cards and warnings of imminent doom to push us to consider more closely how our emotional histories can influence our contemporary lives and what trauma can offer, not simply how it can destroy us.

In its refusal or inability to lie within dominant cultural narratives, trauma and the other manifestations of stuckness discussed throughout this dissertation can offer other paths for being and being with others. To look for moments of stuckness as our objects of study and to emphasize stuckness in our analytic frameworks is to build on the works of queer theory, environmental thought, and visual culture to call to attention the normative drives that push us towards a particular version of the future, community, and self at the expense of expansive fields of meaning otherwise considered unproductive. Sitting with stuckness in this dissertation, representation becomes a site at which time, difference, and power interweave within visual culture through spectacular instants to empower and dishearten, to revel in the joys and sorrows

²²⁸ Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 3.

of stoppage or bring about pain and hardship. Sometimes this manifests as compressive violence or paralyzing emotions, methods and definitions deployed to control nonnormative populations; while at other times reparative production offers opportunities to rethink negative associations and work towards a more capacious understanding of being.

In providing these glimpses into the possibilities of stuckness as a theoretical model in this dissertation, with such seemingly disparate case studies in fanciful Darwinian costumes, PWAs' ashes, spectacularized trafficking, and eating plastic, stuckness contributes to cultural studies more broadly a widely applicable object of analysis that is inherently invested in the ways in which time, materiality, and feeling are intimately connected. I also hope it encourages a slower, more wary form of critique that is less interested in jumping to conclusions and leaving behind the parts of complicated topics that are difficult to parse cleanly, those parts that may seem incompatible with our ways of being or thinking. With stuckness in mind, instead of letting go, we might consider what holding on can do.

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