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On the Affective Force of “Nasty Love”

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Abstract

Tackling the mimetic logic of sex-gender that limits the transsexual subject’s sexuality into seeming a poor representation, the author argues that trans pornography and autoethnographic accounts from trans scholars emphasize the affective dimension of trans sex, a material remainder absent from mimetic theories of sexuality. Developing concepts from Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy, in tandem with Morty Diamond’s film Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil (2007) and a selection of trans theorists, this article elaborates on the horizon of affective potential opened by transgender, brown, kinky, and pornographic “nastiness.” The event of “nasty love” solicits a differential becoming, growing the edge of self.

KEYWORDS affect studies, cultural stereotypes, process philosophy, pornumentary, trans entities
Opening *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker suggests that the central epistemological issue that trans theory should address is the “mirror theory of knowledge” (2006, p. 9). This epistemology relies on a base and superstructure that are “strictly, mechanically, mimetic,” in which appearance reflects substance (p. 9). A mimetic epistemology transfers to the transsexual context in that, once exposed as trans (gender or sexual)—that is, someone whose sex (base) apparently does not match their gender (superstructure) mimetically—the subject can be considered to make false representations. Disobeying the law of mimeticism renders the transsexual “bad by definition,” writes Stryker (2006, p. 9). By extension, the transsexual’s sexuality fails to line up and also becomes a poor rendition of hetero or homosexuality as its categorical excesses spill out over the rigid grid of sex-gender concordance. However, in trans pornographer Morty Diamond’s tongue-in-cheek phrasing, this “nasty love” may be generative of new embodied subjectivities that contravene the representational logic in which transness is mimetically bad, false, and thus morally defective.

Building on queer theory’s critique of identity and representation, which points to and celebrates the deconstructive potential in the failure of sex, gender, and sexuality correspondence, one can affirm that the embodiment of trans sexualities belies the logic of mimesis. Nevertheless, we have hit a theoretical dead end with the unreliable and ill-fitting identities that derive from the mimetic logic of sex and gender (cf. Noble, 2006; Shrage, 2009; Valentine, 2007). Judith Butler acknowledges as much in her conceit that, with identity, “trouble is inevitable”; hence, the task is theorizing “how best to make it, what best way to be in it” (1990, p. xxvii). Within trans theory, the task to make trouble might also involve generating adequate descriptors of non-identitarian sexualities. What terms, aside from mimetic theories of gender, might offer the best way of
theoryizing nasty, sexual trouble? In this chapter, I wish to suggest that beyond being troublesome, trans sexualities indicate another logic of subjectivity altogether. The productive failure offered by trans sexualities makes trans studies a privileged site for working through the dead end of representational identity politics. Thinking through “nasty love,” we might, instead, engage with various theories of becoming and affect that insist on departing from the middle, with the relation that generates a subject.

Visualized in pornographies and described in autoethnographic accounts, trans sexualities pose the question: What if, rather than substance and appearance, the subject was a matter of process? My starting point is the film Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil (2007), with its evocative term, “entity,” for the subjectivities of the docu-porn, and the descriptor, “nasty,” for the kind of love generated by these sexual entities. In modifying the concept of “love,” “nasty” evokes contentious, layered stereotypes associated with Papi and Wil. They are both trans, kinky, polyamorous, people of color (POC) and, hence, embody cultural stereotypes for excessive, hypersexual, and thereby “nasty” ways of being. Their embrace of being (and doing) “nasty,” however, critically exposes the whiteness and gender normativity saturating dominant, affective traditions of sexuality, including pornography. Moreover, the film’s cogent vision of “nasty love” captures an affective intensity that seems formative of alternative sexual subjectivities, “trans entities.”

Trans Entities suggests that mimetic modes of identification are inadequate, namely for neglecting the affective force and expanse of erotic relations. First, this article examines the impact of “nasty love” in terms of the genre of the film, a melding of pornography and
documentary conventions. I investigate the ways in which it re-models sexual stereotypes of black and brown bodies, to which the affect of “nasty” seems to stick and that pornography typically reinforces. Second, sexuality for trans subjectivities is considered a part of the general desire for transitioning, for “becoming more,” as Eva Hayward (2010, p. 235) describes it. This process-oriented trans sexuality is briefly expanded through the ontology (theory of being) offered by Alfred North Whitehead (1929/1978), specifically in his concepts of “actual entity” and “superject.” I consider to what extent the film credits technologies available within BDSM practices to transform the subject into an emergent entity. With the assertion of nastiness, and refutation of feeling normatively masculine and white, the film offers a processual subjectivity in the affective shape of what it is to feel brown, kinky, and trans; in other words, to feel and thereby become more.

**Genre Nasties**

Featuring a real-life couple, the 2007 film *Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papí and Wil* runs an exhilarating fifty-five minutes, impressing American reviewers from the *Village Voice, Hot Movies for Her, Live Girl,* and *Fleshbot,* and wowing international audiences. It consists of four parts interview-driven discussions on sex and gender expression, and three parts steamy, intimate, creative sex. Like the films of Tony Comstock in the *Real People, Real Life, Real Sex* series, in which the motto is: “Love. Uncensored,” the inclusion of documentary-styled footage of the personal lives of the performers trespasses an expected barrier in watching anonymous porn. Unlike earlier queer and trans sexual representations, this video is forthright about the
topics of non-white and explicitly African-American and Puerto-Rican trans identities as well as kinky desires.\textsuperscript{5}

The popularity of the video is also due to the range of sexual scenes. It begins in the bedroom with an erotic game of Mercy, involving face and chest slapping and, later, sex with a strap-on dildo. The next scene focusing on racial play includes a third partner, Chris, who is white, deaf, and a submissive. Chris joins Papí in being dominated by Wil. Finally, Papí and Wil role-play gangsters in an interrogation scene, the footage of which also shows the couple negotiating beforehand and giving aftercare. During the interviews, we are introduced to Papí and Wil’s individual and collective thoughts on gender transitioning, polyamory, race politics, role-play, and spirituality.

The testimonial nature of their interviews is established through the “talking head” device, their direct address to the camera captured in a medium shot (Figure 1). Whereas this documentary convention can stage distance when the interviewer is integrated, here the interviewer is edited out both visually and aurally. Instead, the eye-line match from the speaker is made with the viewer, bringing the spectator into alignment with the place of the director/camera-person and, thus, sutured in as a peer. The porn scenes’ camerawork differs in that two-camera editing is used to privilege the most generous view for a scopophilic eye (Figure 2).

Despite differences in address, the effect for the viewer in both cases is to be brought into the center of action. From the first interview, the spectator is invited to hear Papí’s and Wil’s touchingly-personal story, and during the sex scenes the partners give intense command performances. My own group viewing experience attests to its efficacious editing choices.
During the discussion after it screened in the 2009 Netherlands Transgender Film Festival, the audience broadly commented on how “intense” it was to watch, and how much they felt like they “knew” Papí and Wil. Because you become submerged, (happily or not) into their world, it becomes difficult to refute their claims. With additional footage intercut into the first interview, we also traverse the New York City subway with Papí and Wil, voyaging to a second-hand clothing store and a picnic in a city park. The establishing shot though places them inside a nondescript room on a couch while funky non-diegetic music plays.

The first line of the film comes from Wil; who, fully clothed and sitting comfortably with his partner, Papí, states: “I identify as a trans entity. I feel very much in touch with both my male and female side. I wish there was something very much in between... I just, you know, found a word for it.” Papí attests to having “always” been perceived as masculine due to his developed musculature and also feeling so, though not exclusively. Wil’s identification with becoming an “entity” suggests a situational identity in process and certainly in transition. Papí also describes himself as a “trans entity,” though came to do so later, after identifying as femme, genderqueer, and on the masculine spectrum. For Papí, especially, becoming a trans “entity” means radical “shifting” back and forth and “playing with” gender expression.

Papí and Wil explain that, at this point, they are not seeking medically-mediated options related to female-to-male gender transition, such as taking additional testosterone or having chest reconstruction surgery (though they explicitly state that they understand why other trans-identified people would wish or need to do so). Wil states that he wants to see how far he can go on his own, with the implication that doing so includes using the tools of sexual practices and
developing his masculinity in the changing context of his open relationship with Papí. For Papí, the decision to not physically transition is “to try to live the idea” that one’s morphology and genitals do not define or foreclose one’s gender. The shift from a butch-femme relationship to trans entities was reportedly not difficult for them, with Papí saying: “We believe in the fact that there is shifting,” and Wil explaining: “We knew that we loved each other no matter what.” Over four years, the relationship also shifted in its formulation from “fuck buddies” to “lovers” to “primary partners” in an open relationship.

The film’s composition arranges the sexual scenes adjacent to personal interviews with slow dissolves, voice over, and musical bridges helping the viewer to switch from one format to another as smoothly as possible. They might then see continuities between how Papí and Wil experience their sexuality and reflect upon it. The subtitle, “The Nasty Love of,” unabashedly points to the film’s preoccupation with “nasty” elements becoming contrasted with Papí’s and Wil’s loving relationship. Besides a catchy title, much more is at stake in the ways in which the affective force of the “nasty” aspects of trans sexuality—transness, brownness, kink, and polyamory—enhances their loving practice of becoming trans entities.

Trans Entities can be noted for its unconventional depiction of sexual acts, including oral, genital, and anal intercourse, as well as kinky activities like spanking, bondage, and breath control. The inclusion of a range of more standard lovemaking to “nasty” sexual activities, however, is not the most unusual aspect of how this “pornumentary” presents sexuality. Tristan Taormino’s (2008) review of “the new wave of trans porn” (n.p.) singles out an exciting counterlogic in its pornographic principle. Whereas much mainstream pornography seems to
reify the gendered norms of sexual behavior (Williams, 2004), the deeper we go with the protagonists into these sexually explicit scenes, for Taormino, “their genders become malleable and less significant than their connection to one another” (2008, n.p.).

The trans-sexing of their shared transitions seems to be accomplished in part by their trans sex, by their so-called “nasty love.” The possible conflict between nastiness and love seems resolved by the affective intensity—their connection—during the event of sex. The sex may be nasty, but it is so in a loving way. Through interviews, the sex is known to be consensual. The use of safer sex methods is highlighted with shots of reaching for condoms, gloves, and lube. And each scene is embedded in a seemingly-communicative and honest relationship. We come to associate their love with consent, communication, and care. Hence, the “nasty love” juxtaposition that takes place within the event of physical sex serves to only intensify their sexual, psychic, and physical connections. The shifting of intensities between nastiness and lovingness, visualized in parallel through the seamless editing of interviews and sexual scenes, seems to work in Trans Entities as looping feedback on circuits of desires. The commingling and enhanced resonances of racialized, gendered, polyamorous, and BDSM desires produce a heady charge, which might be examined in terms of their overlapping affective economies.

The mapping of “nasty” components onto declarations of love, such as Papi emphatically saying: “I love the fuck out of you,” not only supports the flexibility of their genders, but also the ways in which they perform racial difference. While the term, “nasty” pops up in the film as a synonym for “sexy,” with positive connotations, it is also attached to their daring practices of on-camera racial role-play. In the culturally-charged environment of pornography, film scholar
Linda Williams points out that “the hypersexualization of the Black body (male and female) in some ways parallels the ‘hysterization’ of the white woman’s body: both are represented as excessively saturated with sexuality” (2004, p.272). In U.S. race politics, “nasty” became synonymous with obscene Black heterosexuality in the wake of 2LiveCrew’s controversial 1989 album, *As Nasty as They Wanna Be.* The taboos of Black power and hypermasculine sexuality are invoked in the three-way scene, the second in the film (Figure 3). This scene stages a racially-charged inverted relation of power in which “Sir Wil” dominates “nothing” (Chris) with the help of “Pet” (Papí). Though old South and plantation culture is not an explicit element of the scene, the use of collars and disciplining instruments to reinforce the dominant-submissive dynamic recalls the shackles and whips used during slavery. Props and power distributed according to racial difference stimulates an erotic charge.

In her discussion of interracial lust in films, Williams is careful to note that the intensity of the taboo relates to *knowing* it, and to being *aware of* the stereotyping, which is quite different from *believing* it (2004, p.275). The tension of the forbidden is explored in this three-way role-play organized by an inverted stereotype of racialized bodies: the lightest skinned person is called “nothing” and is dominated by the second lightest skinned person called “Pet,” who follows orders from the darkest skinned person, “Sir Wil.” Wil explains that the charge in this scene for him comes from converting that which, as he says, is his “animalistic” desire into a controlled and clothed Master who tortures by giving orgasms. Together with his lovers, he develops through iteration a “refunctioned stereotype” of Black and White sexuality that will bring them all pleasure (Williams, 2004, p. 285). *Trans Entities* does not deny interracial lust, or that “pornography acts as a racialized economy of desire” (Miller-Young, 2008, p.266), but mobilizes
it “in historically new ways that are more erotic than phobic” (Williams, 2004, p. 285). In paying attention to racial and cultural difference—discussing openly that they rejected white lovers before to avoid exotification, playing in a sexual scene with a deaf person because s/he has a separate culture, affirming to each other that, “I love your juicy lips”—Trans Entities works against the contemporary goal of “color blindness” operating in U.S. culture (Williams, 2004, p. 285).

The affective charge of “nasty” also suffuses the third scene between a backstabbing “criminal business partner” and “crime boss,” who gets even through interrogation techniques that involve knives and rough sex (Figure 4). The racial stereotype of Black people as a criminal underclass bucks what Miller-Young discusses as the “politics of respectability” in which Black women and men seek to gain racial respect by forming heteronormative, domestic, and bourgeois family relations (2010, p. 222-223). In addition to acting out non-normative sexualities of queer, contractual, public sexuality, this scene adds a “nasty” class component to the racial profile of their roles (Miller-Young, 2010, p.223).

In this regard, throughout Trans Entities Papi and Wil explore the terrain of Sara Ahmed’s “affect alien,” who does not reproduce the line of what a community has determined is a “happy object,” such as the family (2010, p.30). For Ahmed, affect “is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects,” thus affect’s economy can be mapped onto a moral, value-laden sexual economy (2010, p.29). In an encounter—for instance, the interrogation scene we watch—“[w]hat we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival”

The drama of this entanglement with other affective histories lies in our dependency on others. *Trans Entities* invites contingent viewers to feel from a specific angle. It invites us to become affect aliens who, like them, are out of line with the dominant affective community and thus “alienated” in the sense of being unable to feel pleasure from normative, happy objects (Ahmed, 2010, p.37). From the vantage point of *Trans Entities*, nastiness brings love. Though love, like happiness, might be one of the most normatively-moral affects, their means to seek it takes them far from bourgeois family relations and deeply into the realm of “bad” and morally-suspect practices (genderfuck, BDSM, non-monogamy).
The Affinity Politics of Excess

In “Feeling Brown” (2000), Jose Esteban Muñoz analyzes the world-making of a theatre play that presents a reality structured by the affective overload of Latina/o latinidad. Like this play, Trans Entities eschews the cultural logic of heteronormative white respectability for the pleasures of its own affective performances of excess. As Muñoz stresses, the failure of Latinos/as (or other POC) to perform a moral affective citizenship is in relation to the “hegemonic protocols of North American affective comportment” (2000, p.70). From the point of view of the Latina/o, “the affective performance of normative whiteness is minimalist to the point of emotional impoverishment” (Muñoz, 2000, p.70); it appears underdeveloped, if not a lack, in relation to latinidad fullness. Given the “angle” of the U.S. racial atmosphere, Muñoz argues that seizing the stereotype of excess enables us to see the ways in which the presence of POC affective “excess” irritates, and undermines the affective base of whiteness (Muñoz, 2000, p.70). Hence, redirecting the stereotype vents fumes from a toxic characterization, creates an erotic charge, and resists feeling properly.

The contingent experience of excesses in Trans Entities runs along numerous community lines and against multiple cultural mandates. The doing of “nasty love” involves feeling “affective difference” that suggests affect might better account for the affiliations and identifications between radicalized, gendered, and ethnic groups that are in opposition or alien to other affective groups. It marks an affinity of resonance between racial and gendered outlaws. Their social experience can be described as “in process,” yet nonetheless historically-situated, contingent on the objects, values, and ideas that are circulating and stuck together with affect. The excesses of
wanting, doing, and feeling more, a voracious desire to experience more pleasure, love, and life events, thus mark the affective overload of *Trans Entities*.

Beyond re-drawing racial and sexual stereotypes, the film’s affective register of excess draws gender and sexuality into a new theoretical position. The concept of a trans entity entails a departure from sexuality studies that relies on a stable identification with those whose sex or gender either mirrors or is inverse to one’s own. Trans sex and its affects, those forces that render the “mutability and specificity of human lives and loves” (Stryker, 2004, p. 215), invite us to examine what falls outside or moves beyond the static framework of gender identity. Therefore, transgender studies may be well positioned to account for what Brian Massumi describes as the movements between the “grid system of identity” that relate to the body’s affects, sensations, and to the corporeal and incorporeal looping of the virtual and actual (2002, p. 1-4).

### Affective Pathways for Becoming More

The singular “relation of movement and rest” conveyed by sensation and affect, claims Massumi, “is another way of saying transition” (2002, p. 15). Such relations of movement form the basis of gender transitions, which are usually only thought of in terms of the take-off and landing points of the crossing, as in male [becoming] woman. When conceptualized from the point of view of mimesis, such change is seen as “fantasy,” failure, and false. Undermining this mimetic logic by starting in the middle with the bracketed experience, Eva Hayward asks whether it might be that “a transsexual woman becomes a woman for reasons other than simply being read as woman?”
(2010, p. 234). She answers by offering potential aesthetic and affective pathways: “a transsexual lives out the responsive potential of the flesh; through sensuous reaches, intensification of corporeal boundaries and energetic states, the body becomes simply more” (2010, p. 235). Whereas transsexuality is typically limited to transgressions of mimetic gender/sex categories, Hayward suggests that trans-becoming speak to making use of one’s flesh as a resource for experiencing the profuse potential of bodily change (2010, p. 227).

The more of trans-becoming might be achieved through hormone replacement therapy or hair removal, but Hayward’s concept of “transpositions” (2010, p. 237) contends that limiting trans-becoming to certain ways of trans-sexing would form exclusions and circumscribe the spatial and temporal forces with which a transsexual (or any subject) enacts a morphing of embodiment. The very particular, situated act of changing something into another form “oriented” by forces (or Ahmed’s “angles”) cannot be predicted in advance, nor categorically defined: “Transposes can as well be perversions or deviations, misdirections that discompose order and arrangement” (Hayward, 2010, p. 238). From the perspective of trans-becoming as more, sexuality theory might swerve from queer theory’s stress on deconstructing the hierarchal relationship of object-subject, sex-gender, hetero- and homo-sexuality to constructing trans sexualities’ felt sense of more. This is to stress the excess and fullness of subjectivity that resist capture through the logics of mimetic theories.9

Whitehead’s constructivist philosophy asserts that everything we experience must matter. Therefore, to construct greater coherence in our grasp of experience we must add to concrete experience both its abstracted interpretation and its felt affective intensity. The constructivism
thesis rejects the “bifurcation of nature” insofar as the object’s “realness” is equal to the *realness of our perception* of that object; hence, it rejects dualism’s splitting of objects into substance and appearance. Whitehead diagnoses the bifurcation of nature as “a case of radical incoherence which literally plagues modern thought” (cited in Stengers, 2008, p. 98) in the sciences, but also clearly in the humanities and social science, which divorce or subtract the force of affect from the material constitution of the emergent subject. Reading the constructivist philosophy of Whitehead (1929/1978) in conjunction with the subjectivities conveyed in *Trans Entities*, I seek to change the stress on theorizing trans sexualities as a problem of where to fix the points on a grid, and to extend the recent spate of interest in more process, aesthetic, and movement-orientated theorizing (e.g., Crawford, 2008; Davey, 2011; Hale, 1997; Hayward, 2008, 2010; Stryker, 2008).

**Immanence and Trans Entities**

The protagonists describe themselves as “trans entities” and, in so doing, offer a conceptualization of their erotic practices and experiences that refuses stable or referential identity categories for sexuality. An “entity” refers to a particular and discrete unit; in other words, it is self-contained in its distinct existence and can change internally and differentially in quality without ceasing to be. In attaching the qualifier, “trans” to the term, “entity,” Wil and Papí refuse to participate in gender identity naming based on static positions of identity. Instead, they point out that the transformative process of everyday gendering continuously modifies self. Consequently, *Trans Entities* shifts the discourse on sexuality away from identity and scarcity towards feeling entities that are immanent to their changing material and virtual locations.
Whitehead similarly insists on singularities emerging from the experience of events; organisms that grow, mature, and perish—what he terms, “actual entities” (1929/1978, p.18). “Drops of experience,” Whitehead sees them as complex, interdependent, and real: “there is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real” (1929/1978, p.18). The discontinuous nature of becoming—the event occurs and then perishes continuously—means that the event of becoming is always unique; it produces a novelty, introducing a radical break with what was before (Shaviro, 2009, p. 19-20). Following Whitehead, with each new event (for instance, the experiences of the performers, the video, or the viewer) an actual entity strives “not to persist in their own being, but rather to become other than they were” (Shaviro, 2009, p. 20 fnnt 3). The endurance of an entity depends on renewal, on creating itself afresh; therefore, the notion of a subject having a constant, self-same underlying substance is rejected. The “actual entity” that is in a continual state of *discontinuous becoming* can hardly be considered a constant subject—other than constant in its process of change achieved through contrast to all prior and subsequent becomings.

Supplanting the paradigm of identification with actual entities is not to argue that Wil and Papí’s “trans entity” identities are sorely mistaken and need correction. It is to stress, instead, that self-identity can only persevere through time; that is, through the serial nature of events that are strung together by the propensity of having similar character. As Steven Shaviro explains, an object’s persistence through time involves retaining a certain “identity” in the continuous flow of becomings (2009, p. 30). This is by virtue of what Whitehead calls “a genetic character inherited through a historic route of actual occasions” (1929/1978, p. 109). In simpler terms, if the creation of actual entities is repeatedly similar enough, they hang together, giving the impression of
collective identity. Wil’s continuous experience of masculine personal and social perceptions, for instance, sustains a “genetic character” of trans masculinity. This is true to the extent that the historic route is continually and actively taken up from the immediate past as the foundation for the present. In Shaviro’s words, “My self-identity, or the manner in which I relate to myself, is the expression of such an inheritance: the process by which I receive it, reflect on it, and transform it, again and again” (2009, p. 30).

The subject is radically defined not by any universal human essence or substance, but according to the place of emergence. Unlike Kant, “for whom the world emerges from the subject,” Whitehead’s subject becomes a “superject” that emerges from the world (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 88). The feeling superject shares with Ahmed’s affect alien an attention to contingency and the “angle” of a space in which the affective subject emerges. However, Shaviro explains that phenomenology’s intentional subject projects towards the world whereas Whitehead’s entity is born in the course of its feeling encounter with the world, a “feeler” superjected out of this encounter (Shaviro, 2009, p. 21). The process of self-constitution places the superject on the cusp of past “datum” of events, tipping over and emerging into a changed future.

Transformation in Whitehead’s process philosophy also addresses the open-endedness of Hayward’s transsexual, who becomes more, that is more compared to what he, she, ze or they, was. More, here, being akin to potentiality. The trans entities also speak to the significance of unknown futures Futures in which, as Wil says, “who knows,” he may want to experience his body after top surgery, or not feel an intense enough need to. What is certain for them in these futures is that, individually and together, their genders, their love, their relationship will shift. In
the logic of mimesis, the mirror-play of resemblances can only double like and like; it cannot account for the new, or for creativity (Shaviro, 2009, p. 35). Therefore, to comprehend the reworking, refreshing, and transforming of self-identity for trans entities and those “becoming more,” we need the virtual—a principal of emergence.

Papi’s closing affirmation of what they feel is the strength of their relationship is explained as Wil’s capacity to understand the openness of potential futures: “Who I am as a sexual being, intellectual being… [who] can just flow with me.” Similarly, Wil affirms that with Papi he loves the way that they “grow together,” suggesting an intrinsic relationship between flowing and growing into constantly-evolving futures of actualizing trans entities. The event of becoming hurters towards the dimension of Gilles Deleuze’s “virtual,” or what Whitehead terms, “potential” in contrast to the actual of the entity. The “virtual,” in either case (according to Shaviro’s study of the two philosophers), is like “a field of energies that have not yet been expended, or a reservoir of potentialities”; it names the unknown, that which cannot be predicted or determined in advance, but serves as a condition for generating the actual (2009, p. 34).

This “impelling force” (Shaviro, 2009, p. 34) forges new relations among bodies. For Hayward, the virtual tapped into with a transposition accesses the body’s potential for growth: “the cut is not so much an opening of the body, but a generative effort to pull the body back through itself in order to feel mending, to feel the growth of new margins” (2008, p. 72). More than a concrete action, the surgical cut accesses the virtual realm of the body’s on-going materialization, the matrix of sensations and emergence. Though Hayward theorizes “the cut” as possibility, Trans Entities weights sex—nasty love—with the capacity for accessing the virtual and generating
transpositionings. Hence, “the cut” into the future can be rendered through other aesthetic techniques for feeling the mending and growth that decenters the subject, allowing it to emerge elsewhere. In each scene, the film emphasizes the key component for growth resides in BDSM practices of sensation play (slapping, punching, pinching, etc. with hands or instruments) and role-play (complexly-gendered, classed, raced formations of Dominant and submissive).

Kinky Matrix Technologies for Growth

C. Jacob Hale’s (1997) groundbreaking essay, “Leatherdyke Boys and Their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men,” describes the subject of kinky sexual events emerging through relationality. Hale singles out daddy-boy role play that “sometimes functions as a means of gender exploration, solidification, resistance, destabilization, and reconfiguration” (1997, p. 226). Like Papí’s and Wil’s use of sexual play to grow themselves, Hale’s interview subject (Spencer Bergstedt) describes SM as “a resource or means of learning more about myself and growing,” and elsewhere states that sex is a “tool” (1997, p. 227, emphasis added). Used as a “gender technology,” SM enables the phenomenon Hale calls “retooling” and “recoding” of bodies, which like Hayward’s “cut,” generates a transposition or departure from the expected sexual mapping of use and meaning (1997, p. 230). Through these reconfigurative practices, the aesthetic experience of erogenous body parts can become transferred to other parts and even inanimate objects.\footnote{14}

The usefulness of sex for trans people (or entities) is that, regardless of surgical or hormonal transformations the body has undergone, sexual practices are an available means to differentiate
(and re-grow, perhaps) otherwise “off-limits” body parts (Hale, 1997: 230). “To change our embodiments without changing our bodies,” (1997, p. 233) is how Hale describes the potential plane of sexuality, a virtual condition in trans sex for growing multiple, context-specific, and purpose-specific sex/gender statuses. Hale emphasizes that SM practices can function as a gender technology for re-orienting oneself to the space/place of one’s body, to oneself as an entity.

Less often explored, however, are the ways in which “nasty” or problematic racial embodiments for affect aliens might become altered through BDSM practices. In the largely-white dyke/trans BDSM communities, Robin Bauer (2008) notes that practices of transformative gendered sexual practices are immensely favored over engagements with consciously racialized transformations. The “subcultural skills” of renaming/reassigning that enables participants to “stitch together imperfect gendered selves” often comes at the price of overemphasizing stereotypes around age, class, but especially race (Bauer, 2008, p.241-244). This does not foreclose the ability to create new racial relations or affective affiliations, but does underscore the pressures and constraints of the “angle” of affect’s configuration of ideas, values, and objects that shapes the play space. Calling out white privilege in BDSM, such as addressed by Papi’s and Wil’s racial role-play, may create discomfort for those who are not equally affect aliens, out of line with an affective community. Their exposure of the unhappy effects of interracial lust, for Ahmed, would be affirmative because it “gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what might count as a good or better life” (2010, p. 50).
Change without Guarantees

*Trans Entities* insists time and again on aligning with the angle of love, which could seem sentimental or naïve. However, the expression, practice, and embodiment of “nasty love” prevaricates from the romantic, white-washed, heteronormative, vanilla connotations that most often stand as proxy for “love” in the media. Papi’s and Wil’s love connection forms a feedback loop into experiences of “becoming more” and growing as trans entities. It suggests a perverting, differentiating, affective force closer to that described by Lauren Berlant: “I often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different… It’s change without guarantees, without knowing what the other side of it is, because it’s entering into relationality” (2012, p.8). The potential grasped by “entering into relationality” also enforces a suspension of moralist judgment. Feeling happens whether one desires it or not. Judgment after the fact inadequately captures the fullness of the experience. Hence, thinking with Whitehead about trans sexualities offers an adventure in what Shaviro has dubbed “critical aestheticism” (2009, p.xv). As Shaviro sees it for the singularity of art events, and in my analysis, for sexual events, a refocusing on aesthetics becomes critical because it offers no guarantees, no foundation: precisely because “judgment is eclipsed by aesthetic delight” (Whitehead cited in Shaviro 2009, p. 1;). Whether delicious or nasty, or nastily delicious, the affective force of the event tips an entity over into experiencing potentiality, of what might then become a better life.
References


Rivera, I. Poly Patao Productions (P3). Personal website. Posted online at <http://polypataoproductions.com/>


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INSERT FIGURE 2: Still from first sex scene. © [Mortakai Diamond]. Reproduced by permission of Mortakai Diamond. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
INSERT FIGURE 3: Still from three-way. © [Mortakai Diamond]. Reproduced by permission of Mortakai Diamond. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
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INSERT FIGURE 4: Still from interrogation. © [Mortakai Diamond]. Reproduced by permission of Mortakai Diamond. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.
Notes

1 My assertion here follows Halberstam’s (2011) argument that queer theory should embrace and exploit the “failures” of the gender and economic systems, but not only for points of deconstructive potential. These failures suggest other kinds of (counter) logics at work, and often theories for understanding them.

2 Autoethnography is employed by Crawford (2008), Hale (1997), Hayward (2010), and Stryker (2008), amongst other trans theorists; it refers to a methodology for theorizing one’s carnal embodiment and attendant politics insofar as corporality “situates more generalizable knowledges” (Hayward 2010 p. 225).

3 I follow the film’s language in employing trans (and not trans* or transgender) as an umbrella term for gender variance, genderfuck, and transitioning genders, including transsexual-identified people. “Kinky” refers to those sexual proclivities, desires, and practices that are not “straight,” but experienced with a “kink.” It is a shorthand community term that also refers to the recently coined term, “BDSM.” BDSM and SM refer to “a diverse community that includes aficionados of bondage, [D]omination/submission, pain or sensation play, power exchange, leathersex, role-playing and fetishes” (Weiss, 2012, p. vii). Formally, it is an acronym for bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, and sadomasochism. “Polyamory” is a term for
“many loves” and widely used to refer to practices and theories of non-monogamy or non-exclusive partnering.

4 During the fifth Netherlands Transgender Film Festival (2009), I selected this film for our “Sex Positive” program and facilitated the post-screening discussion with director Morty Diamond and Judy Minx, a trans partner and French porn star. It was a sold-out screening (90+) and evaluated very highly.

5 Diamond describes himself as a “Jewish, transsexual, writer, artist and filmmaker” (personal webpage). The documentation of trans POC in New York City by non-trans and white people includes Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingston, 1990) and The Aggressives (Daniel Peddle, 2005). Recently, trans and queer POC documentary makers produced Still Black: A Portrait of Black Trans Men (Kortney Ryan Ziegler, 2008) and U People (Hanifah Walidah & Olive Demetrius, 2009). Nevertheless, the intersection of POC, trans, and kink has not been documented before, at least not from within these communities.

6 While Black scholars like Henry Louis Gates Jr. defended their artistry in court, Black feminists like Crenshaw (1993) heard in the sexual content of the lyrics intra-community sexism.

7 For popular coverage of race play, see Hernandez (2004).

This line of argumentation follows in the tradition of phenemonological writings in transgender studies, chief among them being recent works from Salamon (2010), *Assuming a body*, and Davy (2011) *Recognizing transsexuals*. Rather than working within the strict canon of phenomenology, I seek to expand the critique of mimesis with aesthetic theories of embodiment from philosophies of radical empiricism, or “new materialism.”

When it is asserted that there exists, on one side, “objective” nature (substance) and on the other secondary “subjective” properties (appearance), mimesis bifurcates nature.

The film contributes to the discussion in trans theory around conceptualizing sexuality beyond hetero or homo-normativity. Recent literature collections also reflect on the new language and sexual narratives for acknowledging and desiring trans people in a sexual context. See *Take Me There: Trans and Genderqueer Erotica* (Taormino, 2011) and *Trans/Love: Radical Sex, Love, & Relationships Beyond the Gender Binary* (Diamond, 2011).

Hayward writes: “I suspect that as the structures of most ontologies remain evolving and relational, so too are trans-ontologies” (2010, p. 238). I include here other pronouns (“ze” and the plural “they”) that are also used in genderqueer and trans communities to indicate other subject positions in language. For instance, Papí Coxxx prefers the singular use of “they,” which I have followed accordingly in this chapter (Email correspondence February 24, 2012).
For an expanded argument on the therapeutic, generative quality of the surgical cut, see my forthcoming article, “The violence of the cut: Transgender homeopathy and cinematic aesthetics.”

See Weiss’ (2011) chapter, “The toy bag” for an insightful analysis of ways in which objects commonly called “toys” become a vehicle for connection, a connection produced through commodity exchange that enables power exchange. Her attention to the classed and capitalist dimension of contemporary BDSM practice corrects the overly-celebratory view of BDSM as purely transgressive expressions of desire that exists outside of economic circuits.