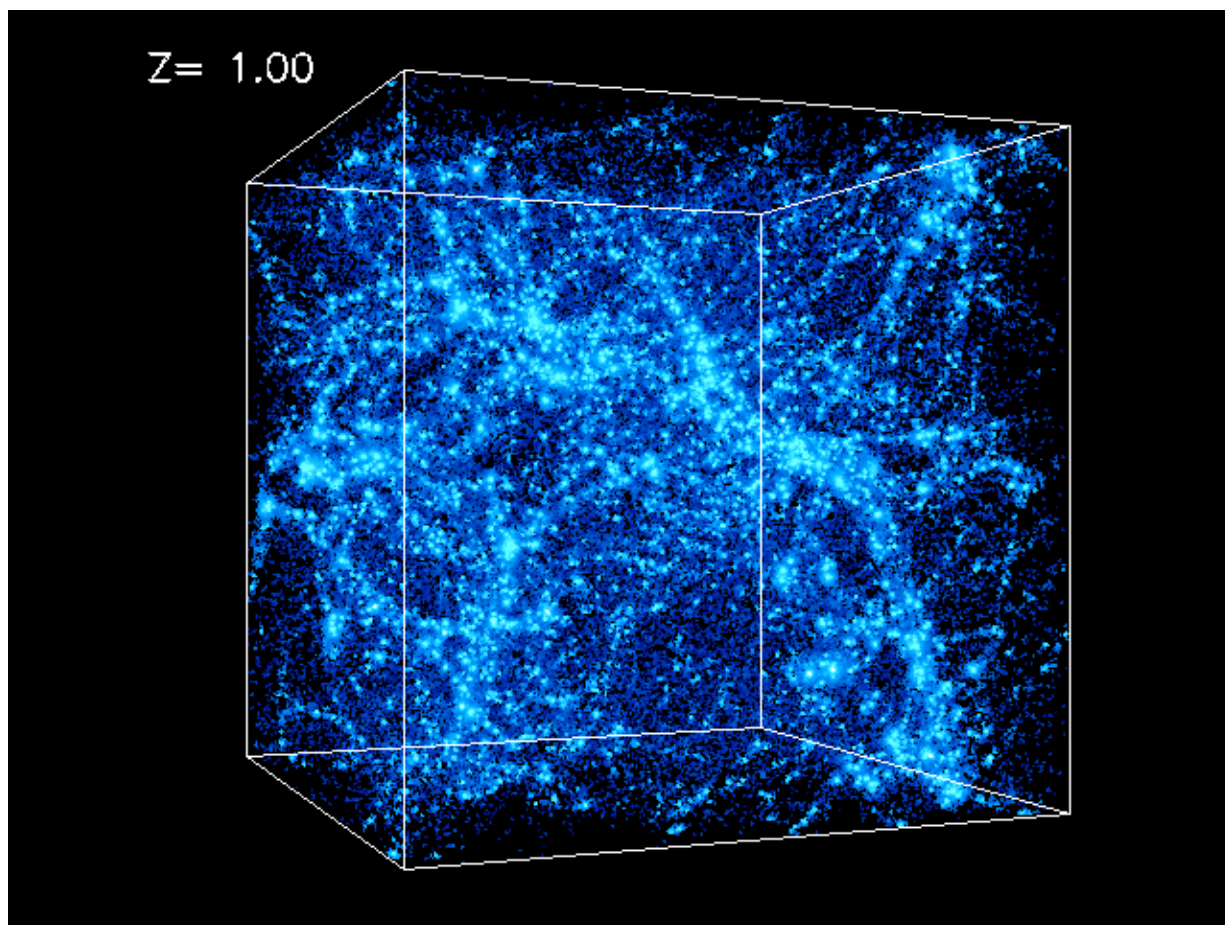


# BOMB THE ARCHIVE!

## A Critical Feminist Approach to Alternative Historicizing

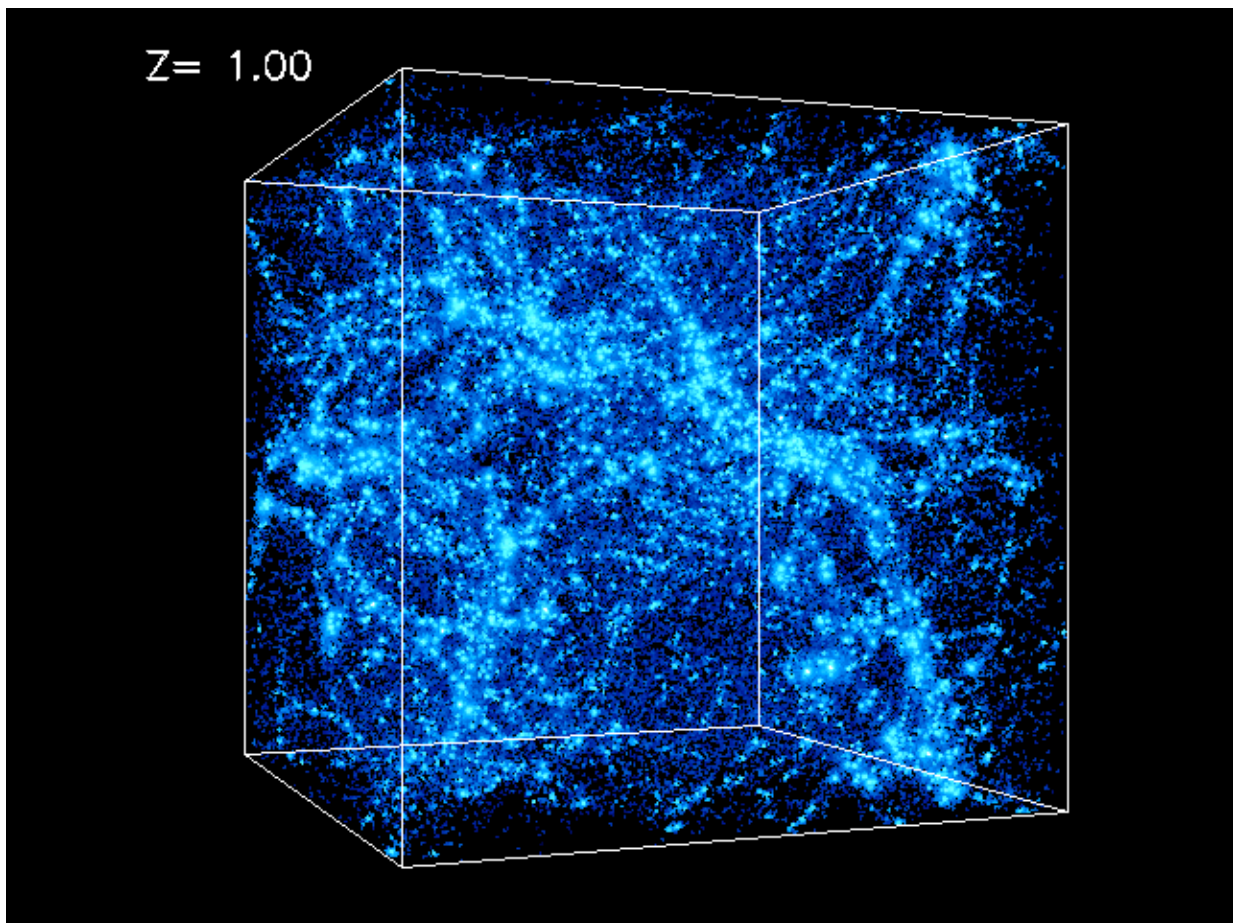


A Master's Thesis in Women's and Gender Studies by Whitney Stark  
Supervisor: Iris Van der Tuin Second Supervisor: Andrea Pető  
GEMMA Erasmus Mundus, 2011-2013  
Submitted at Utrecht University, 2013  
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## Abstract

With the recent slew of efforts to reform museums and construct alternative H/histories and archives of/for traditionally unacknowledged groups, anti-oppression activists and workers have often forgotten to trouble the underlying assumption of H/historicizing itself. This thesis draws from diverse resources such as feminist new materialist quantum physics, posthumanism, anti-oppression organizing, activist practices, postcolonial studies, efforts to dismantle rape culture, queering time, problematics of canonizing and ideas of chosen separatism in order to begin troubling the underlyingly assumed practice (What does H/historicizing do? What structural power stratifications does it uphold? How and does it change when it is from/for typically marginalized groups? Why is this a default strategy?) and to work toward transformative possibilities from/for/with/of difference.

## Acknowledgements

There are slews of constellatory bodies (of people, of movements, of privileges) that have influenced, or rather intersect with and in this thesis, the possibility for this thesis and my positioning herenow as being the named author of this thesis, and I hope to give energy, recognition and solidarity, as well as critique and attention to these forces, people, schools and bodies here and in my politics as responsibly as possible.

I give gratitude to the people who have shifted me and this thesis: Iris Van der Tuin and Andrea Pető have helped me immensely as supervisors, treating my thoughts with care, offering suggestions, troubling and brightening my political possibilities. Chris Hill, Iveta Jusova and all the teachers (in community and school) along the way. My mother and Virginia Virtu for their feedback. My fierce friends and community, my allies in anti-oppression struggles, having locatedness in places from Utrecht, where I write this thesis, to Budapest, where I spent last year learning and loving, to Chicago, to around the bay, to Yellow Springs, to Manhattan, to Sofia, to places I have never been-- for pushing me, challenging me, calling me out. For showing me love by engaging (with) me in complicated conversations. For teaching me about self-care, solidarity and the beautiful possibilities of adorning anger and scar tissue. And my family for multiple and unconditional forms of care, love and support-- even when I can be a joykill.

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## **Bomb the Archive! A Critical Feminist Approach to Alternative Historicizing**

*If warriors are sought, they are here* (Towle and Morgan, 491).

### **Introduction, Accountability/Methodology**

*In February of 2012, at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, I sat navigating the online database of the Visual History Archives (VHA), the largest video archive of ‘complete oral histories’<sup>1</sup> of survivors of the Shoah/WWII Holocaust. I was writing a paper for a class toward my MA, and since I have a background in social justice work with/about sexual assault survivors (and, it seems relevant to say, being one myself), I thought I would start there. So in the ‘keyword’ section of the search tool, I typed ‘rape/sexual assault’. Several videos were listed. Watching a few clips, I became uncomfortable, but not for reasons I expected. In these clips tagged and categorized as ‘sexual assault’ or ‘rape’, I heard very little discussion from the survivors of incidents I could understand as such. Edith Laurri shrugged and waited for the next question. Interviewees spoke of it in small ways while other abuses took prominence (Abraham Traub, Ida Russ). Maria Scheffer blatantly declared that sexual assault “wasn’t the most important...[and she only] mentioned it because it happened” (clip 74). In a flood of desire to learn why these people didn’t want to talk about this (were they systematically silenced through patriarchal hegemony?), keeping in mind all the critical lessons I’ve learned through harm reduction<sup>2</sup>, anti-oppression activism and my personal community of ways to be an ally with*

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<sup>1</sup> According to the VHA website.

<sup>2</sup> Information on the practice of harm reduction at [harmreduction.org](http://harmreduction.org)

*survivors (they are their own experts, not to pathologize or magnanimize their experiences or ways of reacting), while also bringing feminist critical awareness to not prescribe meanings or co-opt experiences into my own understandings-- I sat and stared at the computer. In a moment I began to wonder, much more specifically, not how to learn what and if sexual assault took place and how I could understand and write about it, but much more about the politics of these H/historicizing spaces. If these people were barely mentioning or prioritizing sexual assault, how'd it make it so high in the keywording hierarchy?*

In the recent slew of efforts to reform and egalitarize now-understood-as biased and often racist, sexist, homophobic imperial museums<sup>3</sup>, to create alternative H/histories and archives and document traditionally marginalized and de-recognized groups and experiences of people, it seems many radical and anti-oppression working groups have not questioned the underlying assumption of H/historicizing as a political tool/goal. While there has been much effort to reform tools of H/historicizing such as oral history (OH), memory studies and online crowd-sourcing forums, there is a dearth in debates about the possibilities of H/historical reformation itself. In this thesis and with effort toward transformative anti-oppression practice, I hope<sup>4</sup> to work in this gap, making this debate more present by unsettling some practices (alternative H/histories, archives, museums) and asking after some fairly large questions: Why is H/historicizing a structure with which many work so readily? What distributions of power and energy does it continue to uphold? With the help of feminist new material quantum physics and posthuman

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<sup>3</sup> See Levin (2010).

<sup>4</sup> When I use 'hope', it is to express that these are my intentions, though they may have fissures in need of awareness and critique.

cyborg theory, I will enflame some intersections of understood-as differing practices and ideologies (anti-oppression and women of color organizing practices/theory, queer time, postcolonialism, radical sexual assault survivor activist frameworks and/or ideas of chosen separatism) and read them as speaking *with* each other, as in-coalition in ways which mulch the relatively unquestioned values and practices of H/historicizing. In this I call for a regrouping, and more radically transformative approaches to empowerment, H/historical-social-temporal locating and work toward less violent ways of being.

### *Glossary*

Some of the language in this thesis is not common in academic humanities work. Much of the terminology I will explain here comes from feminist science studies author and activist Karen Barad, who writes, specifically in Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (2007), about quantum physics as useful for feminist anti-oppression based understandings/practices and to dehierarchize human-centric accounts/enactments of the world. For Barad, this is done through reading with an onto-epistemological understanding, the structural recognition that theories and ways of being (physical) and knowing (metaphysical) are inextricably linked, or perhaps, the same. I choose here to identify these specific terms, beginning with terms from Barad's library and moving on to my own, as they are terms with which I want to clarify my own designated usage. I will explain my choice of this language and theory later in this introduction, but now hope to unpack some terms so as to be readily understood.



*Body*- In this thesis, by body I mean any designated entity. Bodies (whether physical, human, social, of thought, of water, etc.), here, are constellations of forces where energy is concentrated closely (though I do not only mean in a spatial or temporal sense, or one which is visibly apparent) in a way which is intelligible to other bodies (I also, like Barad, do not mean intelligibility as only that which is understandable to ‘a human’ perspective, or a hegemonic human perspective, both of which have been normalized through imperial domination and violence<sup>5</sup>). All bodies-- that is, political gatherings<sup>6</sup> in that what is understood as closely related, for lack of a better word, is always political-- are phenomena.

*Phenomena*- I use the term phenomena in a sense utilized by Barad. ‘A’ phenomena<sup>7</sup> (body, force, thing), if we can temporarily and strategically designate such a thing as singular, is a coalescing of the forces which create/are the conditions for which ‘it’ can be designated/intelligible as such; or as Barad defines: “the effects of power-knowledge systems, of boundary drawing projects that make some identities/attributes intelligible, to the exclusion of others.... constituted through and within particular practices.... inseparable from their apparatuses of bodily production” (1998, 106). In simpler terms, what is designated as things (physical bodies/artifacts, teleological structures, emotions) are constantly shifting, breaking and multiple. All parts, or forces (social, bodily, atomically, spatially, temporally), are also always shifting, thus also always intertwining in differing alliances; and that-which-makes-possible particular

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<sup>5</sup> Humanist and Western-centered hegemonic thinking as established through imperialist endeavors will be discussed throughout this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term ‘political gatherings’ to disrupt differentiation between object bodies and more macro social bodies, political bodies, spatial bodies, teleological bodies and on and on and in and in, in all the minute and gigantic ways bodies can be and are understood as bounded beings (for discussions on the porousness and blurriness of boundaries, see Haraway (2008)). Discussion in chapter three.

<sup>7</sup> I do not use ‘phenomenon’ so as to embed multiplicity in even seemingly proper noun usage.

understandings (apparatuses and measuring devices) of what-seems-to-gather-strongly (what has been entitled to be understood as gathered strongly and thus a ‘thing’-- demarcated and thus a body) are also ‘part’ of ‘the’ body (thus bodies have parts which are parts of multiple bodies at once<sup>8</sup> and are always shifting/marking others). This phenomenological body is not understood as having intrinsically true boundaries, but is accountable to intersecting constellations, forces and other designated phenomena-bodies which its make up is part of, connects and diffracts with-- those commonly acknowledged by valued and legitimated human conception and those not. The recognition of a phenomena as such is called an ‘agential cut’. This differs from a Cartesian cut in that it does not attempt to “disentangle” the phenomena, or fetishize it, but “*what the agential cut does provide is a contingent resolution of the ontological inseparability within the phenomenon* hence the conditions for... description: that is, it enables an... account of marks on bodies, but only within the particular phenomenon” (Barad, 2007, 348 original emphasis) so as to be able to discuss difference with less positivism and essentialism, things key in enabling oppression.

*Diffraction-* Diffraction is a term from both classical and quantum physics which caused much of the split between the two bodies of scientific understanding (Barad 2007, 73). Diffraction, in a

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<sup>8</sup> This idea of multiple and the collectivity of bodies has flightlines with Spinozist understandings. According to Gatens and Lloyd, to Spinoza an individual is always in relation with other (human) bodies, a sociality of bodily affective relations (Gatens and Lloyd, 73), quite similar to Barad’s conception of forces leaving “marks on bodies” (Barad 2007, 178). In Spinoza’s understanding, all bodies and imaginaries are of the same substance, and become finite through relations with objects (Gatens and Lloyd, 13), but Spinoza seems to uphold borders of bodies in a way which fares human-centric and absolutist for this thesis. Parts of Spinozist understandings are radically relevant here, in that “bodies are not born into a single community, but into complex crisscrossing structures of reciprocal affinity – constantly formed and reformed under the impact of rival conatus” (Gatens and Lloyd, 77), can be allied with intersectional understandings. But I hope to use the multiplicity of bodies in a more diffractive sense. I understand social relations and all metaphysicality as physical systems, bodies/forces themselves, spatially residing through and within bodies more readily acknowledged as physical. Electrons, particles, forces, weight move through these human imaginaries and between human bodies, but also with other understood objects, and forces not only centered upon human imaginaries.

classical physics sense, is when a moving force, such as light waves, meets an ‘obstacle’ and bends or spreads its traveling path-- the measured result of which is called an interference/diffraction pattern. In quantum understandings, particles (classically understood as stagnant objects) have wave-like properties and can also diffract<sup>9</sup>. This troubles ideas of singularity, causality, the stagnancy of objects/matter and their borders, and being only in one spatiotemporal place. And by disrupting “linear and fixed causalities, [diffraction can] work toward ‘more promising interference patterns’ ([Haraway 1997], 16), both between words and things (allowing for things and bodies to be active)” (Van der Tuin 2011, 26-27) and, I add, between social relations, forces and more. Particles-acting-as-waves helps to recognize bodies as phenomena made up of many atoms/waves/energy/forces which gather/are-made-intelligible/show-interference-patterns differently *with* differing (measuring) apparatuses and/or ‘obstacles’.

For Haraway and Barad, the idea of diffraction can be applied to feminist research practices as, by acknowledging apparatuses as having quantum affect, it “disrupt[s] the geometry that holds object and subject at a distance as the very condition for knowledge’s possibility.... it is not a self-referential glance back at oneself” (Barad 2007, 87-8); that is, it requires accountable positioning as well as less hierarchical assignment (of agency), which so much of feminist and anti-oppression methodology works toward. In some ways, a diffractive reading is a partial decontextualization (that is, shown as connected out of context from how it is hegemonically understood in linear-causal narrative structures). Diffraction acknowledges how a designated part of a body (for instance: a quote) creates interference patterns with, participates in, leaves marks on multiple (phenomenological) bodies (what else it says, how else it connects to differing forces, energies, bodies). It is inherently interdisciplinary.

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<sup>9</sup> For overview of the two-slit experiment measuring this, see chapter two in Barad (2007).

*Intra-action-* Intra-action is a Baradian term used to replace ‘interaction’ which necessitates pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other. Intra-action understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human to be exercised, but as dynamism of forces (Barad 2007, 141) in which all designated ‘things’ are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably. Intra-action also acknowledges the impossibility of an absolute separation or classically understood objectivity in which an apparatus (a technology or medium used to measure a property) or a person using an apparatus are not part of the process which allows for specifically located ‘outcomes’ or measurement. Apparatuses are phenomena and are not only what has been traditionally understood as the mechanical parts of a system of measurement (Barad 1998, 101-2).

*Quantum Leap-* a quantum leap is a term used in physics to name the process when electrons move from one position to another without a recognizable path through space, troubling traditionalized ideas of linearity and causality. I want to embed in the understanding of quantum leaps as also the potential to ally with differing forms of connection, agency and constellation which hegemonicized Humanist understandings have structurally de-recognized, designated as illegitimate, not of value or real.

*-icized-* (for example: hegemonicized) I use this suffix in order to make apparent the shifting, agential forces, energy and power that is part of these practices or things. I hope to use this suffix to not accept something (for instance some sort of all-encompassing hegemony) as given or singular. In this case, to say hegemonicized would be to acknowledge the *becoming* of hegemonic ideologies and discourses, which at this socio-temporal node (a term which Donna

Haraway and Barad use to describe a space acknowledged as located at the coalescence or intersection of time, space, social structures, nature, etc.) are often hypostatized as hegemonic in a move which not only is created *through* oppressive, imperial, Western-Cartesian domination (making hegemony as if only that of imperial dominating forces) but which also *reinstalls* this power through their understanding as encompassing and hegemonic.

*Politics*- In this thesis, politics are spatializations: the amount of space a body takes up in differing locations (not only geographic) and how that marks, shifts, moves, connects to and diffracts with other bodies. Part of this politicality is being accountable to the implications (power stratifications, systems of value, where energy is concentrated, the allowed possibilities) of making these bodies as intelligible, their positionings and alliances, and what is intelligible with/in/from/through these positionings.

*Unethical*- In this thesis, to be unethical means to occupy the position of oppressors.

*Oppressors*- For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term “oppressor” to mean oppressive structures and those who help to uphold them in all their personal, structural, social, material and ideological (onto-epistemological) forms.

*Werk!*- I use this term to identify the kind of work done as and with shiftingly accountable anti-oppression activism that involves being an ally in attempting to dismantle systems of oppression, while building thoughtful community and less violent ways of intra-action. It feels important for me to designate this kind of work/werk! in that I find it quite different from capitalist conceptions

and valuations of productivity as well as work of/for oppressors. I also use this spelling and emphasis to acknowledge linguistic multiplicities, and its prevalence in queer and gay usage predominantly by/from/for a particular intersection of oppression of queer people of color, particularly black/African American ball culture. I hope to do this in respectful citation and homage, more than co-option. This is often shouted in support and celebration of friends, models, drag artists, dancers etc. during performance and in recognition of efforts. Through this usage, I hope to semiotically acknowledge these practices, understandings, celebrations and exhibitions of love and support as directly part of the same constellation, or body, of radical action and werk!; these as much more closely connected than to work.

*Traditionalized Historicizing and/or Hhistor\**- When I discuss traditional/hegemonized H/historical (I will use the prefix Hhistor- to write them as embedded) processes, I currently refer to the practices of museum display, archiving, and linear Hhistorical narratives-- which are generally nostalgic, of deterministic origin and follow a logic of temporal progression. This means these constructs/structural practices even when employed by/about non-hegemonizedly established or traditionalizedly un/der represented groups. In this thesis I hope to show that these practices generally do the work that werk! wants to undo<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> I thank Iris Van der Tuin for this sentence.

## *Accountability as Methodology*

Through my political activism in coalition with differing groups, people and causes in order to operate in less oppressive modalities, and in academia studying socially conscious media production/literacy and now gender studies, I have come to practices of taking call-outs and critique as caring, collective work! and of evaluating my own privileges, marginalizations and possibilities in collective struggles toward anti-oppression. Accountability in locating myself (as a phenomenological body connected and diffracting within and through many kinds of bodies, for instance bodies of the differing identity categories I fall under the scope of) and working to figure out what kinds of positions I can occupy<sup>11</sup>, what kinds of ideas I can and am required to operate with/through, is what I understand as my methodology. Acknowledging the multiple forces placing my position[ings] and possibilities is part of the coalitional politics which Adrienne Rich discusses when claiming that “there is no liberation that only knows how to say “I”; there is no collective movement that speaks for each of us all the way through” (224). Not only does this acknowledge need for collective and recognizedly incomplete political movements, but also the impossibility of ‘I’s in the singularized, totalizing sense. If

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<sup>11</sup> Especially in a thesis which unsettles/deprioritizes conceptions of linear time, these phrasings may seem these to be pre-established. While I do believe linear time is a (human) construct, that understanding alone does not make it obsolete, not real or agential. As Barad explains, “intra-actions are temporal not in the sense that the values of particular properties change in time; rather, which property comes to matter is re(con)figured in the very making/ marking of time” (2007, 180). At best, it helps to deprioritize linear time and acknowledge its matterings and intersections with multiple bodies. To discuss the spaces I ‘can’ occupy, hopes to acknowledge intersections of these bodies/constructs/constellations, including my understood human body and time, and how these coalescing concentrations of energy will and do shift energy/power depending upon which bodies (and what diffracts and connects with their mattering) position in which spaces (geographically, organizationally, temporally, socially). This means acknowledging the apparatus (formations of differing forces/bodies flowing through/in this node) as enabling certain outcomes or measurements possible. While my body, as phenomenological node, is constantly shifting, possibilities are not infinite. With being as accountable as possible to the differing forces/bodies (transformative and/or oppressive) which position me and what that enables, I hopefully can attempt more ethical concentrations of energy, care and connection.

“positionings, wherever projected (on a global or local scale, in the past, present or future), are produced in intra-actions” (Van der Tuin 2009, 25) of differing kinds of forces/phenomena/collectivities, then “feminist embodiment... is not about fixed location in a reified body... but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis” (Haraway 2004, 92). Thus, what constitutes me in/as a node, the intersecting forces which position me spatially, temporally, emotionally, ideologically, socially, are both the prosthesis to my body-- the technologies I operate with/through/in-- and the forces/bodies I must be explicitly accountable to; accountability as, in this thesis, recognizing how/where my particular areas of closeness (including diffractions) are (shiftingly) possible, *werk!*ing toward conditions that enable ethicality. These technologies are exactly what informs how I (can) occupy a position as ally, advocate, activist, writer and what I can say responsibly (read as: with accountability to these things and in dismantling privileges given to me through the violent oppression of others) in these positionings. For instance, in a masters thesis.

I am a white, cis gendered (though I identify as genderqueer/drag queen), queer, visibly able-bodied, middle class, raised Jewish, native-English speaking, university-educated, feminist woman from the United States. In this/these positioning/s, I am allotted many privileges-- for instance, these things and more have coalesced in this current operational platform, writing a thesis to obtain a master’s degree in women’s and gender studies. By being accountable and locating myself, I in no way think that naming all the privileged or less privileged identity categories I am understood under satisfies my responsibility or enables some sort of banal transparency in the name of (scientific) objectivity. Rather, “location is about vulnerability” in



order to “resist the politics of closure or finality” and to be “accountabl[e] and responsibl[e] for translations and solidarities linking cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledge of the subjugated” (Haraway 2004, 93). As Barad explains, “turning the mirror back on oneself is not the issue, and reflexivity cannot serve as a corrective here. Rather, the point is that these *entangled practices* are productive, and who and what are excluded through these entangled practices matters: different intra-actions produce different phenomena” (2007, 58). In this sense, “accountability is an ongoing, difficult process; like all theoretical processes, it requires relentless auto-critique” (Burton, 22) in which what is to be accountable to and the ways in which to do it are constantly shifting. This locating is a fundamental step in my methodology as it is important for my politics to *carefully* position through and with these things in ways that are, hopefully, less violent.

Understanding how I occupy this current privileged/privileging platform is a complicated process, as, in the collective struggles I attempt *werk!* to be a part of/support, it seems quite obviously systematic that I am such a person allotted this legitimated platform. In this unethical positioning, a very large part of my methodology is to be shiftingly accountable to what I think and say-- the kinds of connections I readily recognize-- and attempting to understand and check my biased assumptions, thoughts, choices, ways in order to figure out what I -- as a gathering of experiences, parts, thought structures, locations, genealogies-- can perform responsibly as relevant to transformative ally *werk!* in struggles I am directly part of and those I am not, and toward dismantling the very -isms that allow for systematic violence and oppressions, including the very privileges allowing me hegemonicalizedly legitimated platforms in normalized power structures. As Rich explains, “all privilege is ignorant at the core” (226), and in acknowledging

the locations of my assumptions and formations, I attempt to dismantle much of my own ignorance and bias and hopefully unsettle some of these privileges. This is the werk! I feel possible in my current positioning.

In this re-cognizing constellation, I do not want to conflate differing struggles-- they are obviously nuanced, dispersed and varyingly located. I also understand that while I am an ally in anti-racist struggles, I am in no position to act as if I can speak for or to how the struggle should behave. What I am trying to do is decolonize some of the seemingly abstract matterings of imperial/colonial valuations (as differing Hhistorizing structures will be discussed, predominantly in chapters one and three) through acknowledging how oppressive spatializations operate on multiple planes. I also want to be accountable to the fact that two of the theorist/activists used as overarching source are white, cis-gendered, queer, feminist science studies academes from the United States: Haraway and Barad. While both of these authors write to be increasingly accountable allies in struggles toward anti-oppression werk!, there are many factors which have positioned these two as prominent in their fields, and my affinity for them is surely informed by the weight of my socio-political positioning. My intention is to utilize these privilegings to write differingly accountable practices into and with their conceptions, through, between and checked by werk! of/from differing allies transforming toward less violent ways of being. In the complicated space of a single-authored Humanist platform, I hope to discuss what I have, through all these privileged, less-privileged and collective efforts, been able to understand as in alliance to hold these privileged positionings politically accountable-- that is, as to participate directly in efforts to enable difference in power distribution, which includes destabilizing these privilegings.

## *The Weight of Theory/New Materialist Offerings*

I specifically utilize new feminist materialist discussions of quantum physics (Barad) and cyborgian posthumanism (Haraway) along with seemingly separated discussions of feminist anti-oppression organizing, battling rape culture, practices toward ending co-option and marginalization through canonical practices, conceptions of queering time, feminist of color work!, postcolonialism and chosen separatism, as I feel that the discourses and understandings within feminist new materialisms have a lot to offer to/diffract with causes, struggles and strategies of these subsequent spaces/bodies. Built into these new materialist understandings is recognition of shifting, difference and connectivity intrinsic in many of the anti-oppression practices/causes mentioned (discussed more in depth in chapter three). These can be acknowledged as in-connection, as helpful semantic/teleological tools (prosthesis) and enable alliances. In this thesis I will refer to these allying strategies as a constellatory body called quantum feminisms.

Much of this theory, academized theory in general and this terminology is often conceived as ‘inaccessible’ and thus elitist and upholding hierarchical relations for a small, privileged audience<sup>12</sup>. And I agree vehemently with critiques of inaccessibility and the inappropriate and unethical positionings of academic elitism. I also believe that critique of inaccessibility often gets employed in ways detrimental and explicitly against-its-own-purposes, denying tools created for/by/with/in anti-oppression struggles through elitist demarcation of ‘the masses’ or nonacademics, people of differing abilities or perceived statuses as not being able to access, understand or use

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<sup>12</sup> For critique of new materialisms and its exclusions, see Ahmed (2008) and Sullivan (2012).

tools and strategies specifically made to dismantle this sort of assignment<sup>13</sup>. This is an enactment of what Rich describes as “abstractions severed from the doings of living people, fed back to the people as slogans” (213). This is a dangerous re-location; a domestication (for this thesis domestication read as: strategic de-radicalization through a process of institutional legitimization adhering to standards established and enforced by non-radical, and I would say, oppressive powers) of the possibilities of these tools. And it is in this recognition that I hope to unpack and highlight connectivities, or constellations, in which these quantum feminist and posthuman tools can be more explicitly relevant to feminist/queer/anti-oppression struggles they interdisciplinarily seek to be.

It is in, what I believe, a similar, or even the same move that the idea of theories as ‘abstract’ (and thus understood as not relevant to material realities) is instituted. This demarcation of theory as abstract and thus not usable follows a Cartesian, Western thinking structure of a mind/body duality, in which white men have become considered as the bearers of bodiless reason<sup>[14]</sup>, and those of less-privileged positions have become considered as bodily controlled (Oyěwùmí, 3). N. Katherine Hayles warns that “abstracting the information from a material basis is an imaginary act but also... conceiving of information as a thing separate from the medium instantiating it is a prior imaginary act that constructs a holistic phenomenon as an

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<sup>13</sup> I have seen this justification used at several NGOs attempting to help empower teenagers (a grouping genealogically understood in ‘the mass’), in which academically trained employees decide not to use terms, tools and critiques as they are ‘inaccessible’. Franz Fanon also discusses this: “It is true that if care is taken to only use a language that is understood by graduates in law and economics, you can easily prove that the masses have to be managed from above. But... If you are not obsessed by the perverse desire to spread confusion and rid yourself of the people, then you will realize that the masses are quick to seize every shade of meaning and to learn all the tricks of the trade. ... It has been decided to consider the masses as uninitiated. Such a language is hard put to it to hide the lecturer’s wish to cheat the people and leave them out of things. The business of obscuring language is a mask behind which stands out the much greater business of plunder” (25).

<sup>14</sup> Also see Genevieve Lloyd (1984) on this point.

information/matter duality” (13). This imperative works well in coalition with oppressive structures’ taxonomizing practice of thingification<sup>15</sup>/objectification<sup>16</sup>. Where “difference’ [becomes] essentially ‘division’ in the understanding of many” (Minh-ha, 82) whether it is between bodies of humans, as Trinh T. Minh-ha, activist, theorist, sociologist and documentarian discusses, bodies of thought and humans, or other bodies. And it is “this semantic trap which sets us up against each other as expected by a certain ideology of separatism” (Minh-ha, 82),-- and I qualify-- separatism *out of essentialism*<sup>17</sup>. By operating with this understanding of ‘abstraction’ as not *for* marginalized groups, the denial of tools is expanded.

In turn, these become complicated tricks in contemporary activism. Much of the seemingly abstracted ‘information’, the teleological structures and methodologies or practices, the theory, gets assumed to be separate from material and social enactments. It is a contradictory double-move which naturalizes (invisibilizes and self-perpetuates) the exact structures enabling many violences, and makes differing possibilities largely unintelligible. Part of the technology which removes theoretical tools, “as Trinh T. Minh-ha has written, [is because] theory is threatening, ‘for it can upset rooted ideologies by exposing the mechanisms of their own workings’” (Burton, 22).

Feminist new materialisms specifically obstruct the abstract/material binary and its political implications, through (re)cognizing that which is considered as metaphysical as *also having*

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Thingification’ is used by Barad to describe “the turning of relations into ‘things’” (2003, 812). This is connected with the previously discussed onto-epistemology, or adding ethics: ethico-onto-epistemology.

<sup>16</sup> I will discuss this as a tool of oppressive structures later.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter three discusses agential separatism.

material, agential intra-action<sup>18</sup>. This furthering of agency and mattering<sup>19</sup> is not only expanded to teleological structures, but is to disrupt the assumed unification of the human and/as separate from ‘nonhumans’ (Barad 2003, 806), to acknowledge agential intra-activity of matter[ings] (ibid., 810), and to acknowledge that “‘humans’ do not simply assemble different apparatuses for satisfying particular knowledge projects but are themselves specific local parts of the world’s ongoing configuring”, it is not about putting humans *back in* ‘nature’, as humans and ‘their’ tools have never been something so separate (ibid., 829). Intra-action also challenges segmenting, “linear models of causation that underlie constructivist analyses of the ways power shapes the subjects and objects of knowledge” and how differing phenomena “emerge, persist, and transform” (Frost, 69). The weight, the matter of the (non)abstract rational is posited as mattering, as bodily-- everywhere<sup>20</sup>. In this re-cognition of what I will signify as ~~metaphysicality~~, the understanding of more readily recognized teleological structures as the same sort of matter, the agency and affective material relations of ~~metaphysical~~ bodies *with/as* physical (not only inseparable *but* material ways in which ‘we’ live our ‘lives’, or perhaps better, the way phenomena intra-act), is intelligible (see Barad 1998, 108).

In operating away from false ideas of abstraction (which are anyway always already materializing and politically constituted) and into materialization, the ~~metaphysical~~ is membered as technologies/prosthesis with which we intra-act, tinker, exchange, build-- becoming accessible.

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<sup>18</sup> Barad explains: “according to Bohr [Barad’s chosen physicist], *theoretical concepts*... are not ideational in character, but rather *are specific physical arrangements*” (2003, 814).

<sup>19</sup> ‘Mattering’ is used by Butler in *Bodies That Matter* to denote what is considered important, *and* the process of becoming (understood as) material (see (1993)2011, xviii).

<sup>20</sup> Agential bodily weight of the unseen ‘abstract’/~~metaphysical~~ can differently acknowledge and ally with hegemonicaly de-valued (through Cartesian rationalism) conceptions of connectivity (such as witchcraft, astrological effects, the agencies/animacies of ‘nonliving’ things).

I hope to treat these weighted, spatial(izing) forces as bodies which mark and move with other bodies<sup>21</sup>. It is here that I find Rich's call to "begin with the material. Pick up again the long struggle against lofty privileged abstraction" (213) specifically relevant; this is biopolitical. So, hopefully, "here we are in criminal conversation, forbidden intercourse, queer commerce; and... I/we end up differently accountable-- and differently curious" (Haraway 2006, 145).

### *Demonstrating Through Constellation*

*We are responsible for the world within which we live not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing, but because it is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping* (Barad 1998, 101-2).

In/with/through this cognition of inherent matterings and connectivity, energies and forces creating differently intelligible phenomena, I hope to highlight a nexus (coalitional alliance or closeness) of conceptions generalizedly understood as separate. In locating myself and working to understand my positioning, attempting to shift conditions and energy toward differing spatializations which do less work of the oppressor, I find the differing bodies I discuss as diffracting in/with/around/through each other. That is, they are very dear to and connect in the political coalition understood as me. In this sense, locating and mulching these how/why/wheres is locating as methodology (an exploration in contextualizing my offerings). I attempt to use my background skills in documentary making to position these bodies as readily speaking with each other, placing their discussions closely together, as supporting each other in effort toward a shift

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<sup>21</sup> Arun Saldanha (2006) explains how a both understood as metaphysical structure and biological property like race, has spatiality "of grids of self/other dialectics... of viscosity, bodies gradually becoming stuck and clustering into aggregates" (10); this is an apt onto-epistemological mattering, in which the weight of race, the forces which coalesce with it in, say, a room with people, effect what goes on; it takes up space, has affective relations.

of energy, an enflaming of political closeness to help work! toward creating the conditions possible for (read: shift the apparatus) thinking/mattering differing transformative anti-oppression practices. And in attempt to be part of “unlearning what we have learned not to notice.... to produce critical understanding of how violence, as a relation of force and harm, is directed toward some bodies and not others” (Ahmed 2010, 216). Strategies and checking tools are constellatory apparatuses, mattered connectivity that our spatializing/ion has part in enabling. I hope to articulate and congeal diffracting politics which have not been acknowledged as connected.

“What counts as an object is precisely what world [Hhistory] turns out to be about” (Haraway 2004, 588 in Barad, 42); that is, politics are about hierarchies of the connections which count as objects, or which are made as intelligible. Re/cognizing hegemonicalizedly unrecognized connectivities (constellations, things, objects, bodies) is directly political. These ‘new’ bodies obstruct the stagnated connections/borderings of time, space and linear genetics, merging with new possibilities through/and/with differing foci of energy. This does not mean articulating that-which-has-not-been or not-desired-to-have-been in(to) hegemonicalizedly noticed languages. That would serve as additive, visibility politics of co-option. I hope to support this shift-from as part of the “ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (Barad 2007, 178). This is a matter (ing) of a different kind of care and respect; one which allows for differing structures and legibilities in a way which does not so violently usurp requiring all that is deemed legitimate be intelligible in what has been (Humanistically) hegemonicized.



## *Stopping*

It is through this constellation that I see a formation calling for a shift from classicalized Hhistoricizing practices. Many of the authors/theoretical bodies/pieces I discuss problematize or allude to problems of Hhistory or Hhistoricizing, and many feminist and subaltern studies Hhistorians have discussed the need for *different* ways of Hhistoricizing. Diffracting these politics with, or noticing the quantum leaps between, conceptions in differing feminisms, valuing previously invaluable things, physics' recognition of 'nothingness' never actually being 'nothing' and chosen separatism/the creation of safer spaces in anti-oppression struggles in order to create apparatuses for differing power dynamics and possibilities to emerge, I view as in efforts to enable possibilities from/for/with/of difference. I hope to point to a political strategy with which *this* constellation materializes-- the possibility to make a sort of agential, strategic cut<sup>22</sup>: recognizing particularized Hhistoricizings as spatializations enabling oppression; to stop using these strategies and be okay with it.

This conclusion, or rather, *offering* is complicated and delicate for me, as I *know* that I and many allies and folks in marginalized groupings have learned a lot from 'alternative' Hhistories: they can be helpful, cause recognition, (re)contextualization and can help explain the herenow. And these projects have definitely manifested in and from importantly political, empowering werk!. I also think it is important to regard the violences performed even in radical anti-oppression informed strategies. As The Combahee River Collective says in *A Black Feminist Statement*, "in the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many

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<sup>22</sup> I understand Barad's agential separability as closely tied with Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism, so with cognitions of political gatherings, I write these together.

reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving ‘correct’ political goals” (69). In this thesis, I attempt to show how projects of Hhistoricizing can become blanketing tools, taking over multitudes of other struggles and can assimilate, co-opt, domesticatingly mistranslate and segment possibilities from potentialities and their less-palatable constellatory connectivities. I wonder if there are differing strategies that can werk! toward similar goals without implementing and perpetuating some of these violences.

### *Structure/Case Studies/Chapter Outlines*

In writing a masters thesis on the topic of obstructing Hhistoricizing, representationalist objectification and archival/museum structures, it has been difficult for me to figure a means for this discussion. I have had specific political problems with designating case studies. In one sense (or plane), I have no interest evaluating these ‘alternative’ Hhistorical spaces as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or devaluing the significant and radical efforts of marginalized communities toward empowerment. While I am hoping to unpack some nuances in these strategies, I in no way want to focus energy on denigrating groupings which large oppressive structures constantly denigrate, nor would I agree with that critique-- I do not think any project like this is entirely or even mostly politically malicious. With this, particularized case studies as such, as Gayatri Spivak discusses, or “individual examples... are tragic failures as *models* of interventionist practice, since I question the production of models as such” (1994, 102 original emphasis). To critique in such a way would be totalizing and fetishizing the particular subjectivity of whichever project in a way which this thesis attempts to destabilize. Also, the models would need be either that which

is already recognizable (and thus privileged) in these legitimated understandings, and/or would (mis)translate into these discourses. This structuring, it seems, would itself set up an archival spacing in my sentiments against these kinds of structures. This enfolds my difficulty of ‘citing’ examples or studies, as part of my politics in this thesis is to allow for illegibility, for the unspoken to remain unspoken and to not necessarily canonize into legibilities created by/for/ from/with oppressive power asymmetries-- this *as* a strategy of difference.

With this in mind, I do have something like case studies in this thesis, though I hope to perform them in a more intra-active reading and with less objectification as such. In chapter one, I discuss the becomings of traditionalized Hhistoricizing practices as colonial, imperial Cartesian objectifying machines. I utilize the classicalized museum-implemented display system of the glass case. I view this as an ethically logical study, as I hope to posit it not as particular example, but as imperial formation understood as necessary and having no political implications (naturalized). I hope to denaturalize this through reading it as a ~~meta~~metaphysical structure necessary in upholding the ideological spatializations of imperial Othering, in a nod to the museum structure more generally.

Chapter two discusses the necessities and troubles of attempting to reform these kinds of institutions with radical imperatives/practices, and what these concentrations and enactments of energies direct toward/from/constitute, and I trouble/question the possibility of radically transforming these spaces. I use my experience navigating the Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archives (mentioned in the opening vignette) as a sort of case study in coalescences with the dynamics archival structures enable, coming from my own intervention and understanding of

the radical social work practice of harm reduction and how to be allies with survivors of sexual assault. I attempt to utilize my own intra-active intelligibilizing with the VHA (questioning) as a large part of the study. I do not have ethical qualms utilizing my experience with the VHA in this way as it is a largely mainstream, typically structured institution of top-down practices (which I argue domesticate the transformative possibilities of its own political project as well as those of intersecting strategies) and is politically posited as legacy and Hhistory for Jewish people, which I am. My particular intervention into this space is also heavily conditioned with/by my positioning as an advocate and activist of survivors of sexual assault and how the VHA handles this intersecting political grouping. While museum and archival structures (as bodies) arguably have differing social positionings, as practices of traditionalizedly hegemonic Western Hhistory-making they are also kindred, or allies, in many of the political imperatives, conditions and possibilities from which they take part and enable.

Chapter three discusses how posthuman and quantum feminisms ally with radical anti-oppression organizational practices of non-centralized leadership and non-prioritized longevity or particularized understandings of cohesion. Posthumanist deconstruction of borders and subjectivities helps dismantle thinking that prioritizes certain kinds of political bodies (Cartesian, Western, nomo-centric, lasting, hetero-reproductive-linear) and I hope to explain this prioritization as exactly what these Hhistoricizing process do, what silences, writes out, etc. those who have been traditionalizedly marginalized, hierarchized as less (developed, human, agential). Here is a smaller, less a case study than illustration in which I discuss my first experience being in a separatist safer space and how these sorts of strategic spaces can create the conditions possible for differing kinds of conversations, actions and understandings than when

the energies and forces of the space (physical, ideological, spoken) are taken by situationally oppressive bodies. This continues with discussion of chosen separatism, or the creation of safer spaces, as enacting agential cuts and present-ing intentional absences in order to shift apparatuses, structures and possibilities for new formations from/for/with difference. A particular strategic alignment I propose is a radical call to/through not Hhistoricize/ing in an effort to respect that which is not legible and/or not desiring to be legible in these traditionalized modalities/languages/understandings/structures; stopping as creating separatist safer space; not as stagnation but as political energy foci. This chapter asks for differing ways of “being accountable for marks on bodies” (Barad 2007, 178).

# Spatializing Hhistoricizing: Glass Museum Case as Material-Semiotic Actor

## Chapter One

*History is a story Western culture buffs tell each other; science is a contestable text and power field; the content is the form. Period. The form in science is the... persuasions that take the shape of... objects.... They are momentary traces focused by force fields, or they are information vectors in a barely embodied and highly mutable semiosis ordered by acts of recognition and misrecognition (Haraway 2004, 83).*

### Introduction

Feminist and postcolonial critique has disabled much of the Museum's identity as factual, objective and passive portrayal of absolute knowledge, and has picked apart methodologies and the exploitative power enacted in many scientific and Hhistorical museums' establishment and operation (Levin, 4). There is a growing body of writing about how museums have been used as tools for political aims such as nationalism, warfare, racism, xenophobia and social manipulation<sup>23</sup>, pointing to the Museum's delicate task of creating cultural memory-- something "always socially and politically situated" (Gouda, 23). However, much of the critique has been employed to reform these spaces, add 'new' or 'untold' stories, represent others or display differing things, open feminist museums and queer archives or exhibits. But these material spatializations enfold diffracted bodies of power, definitions, energy and intentions. These institutions hold particular matters. They are not neutral, though they may often be hegemonicalizedly hypostatized as nonpartisan, relevant or even necessary.

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<sup>23</sup> Hilda Hein (2010) discusses the museum institution as particularly prone to imperial/colonial/othering knowledge production/definition, as in its institutional positionings/assumptions it opposes feminist understandings-- she believes reforming forms of representation will remedy this.

In discussing what Hhistoricizing processes/structures do, it is relevant to discuss how and what they were formed to do/for/from. While this strategy is utilizing Hhistorical relevance, and embeds understandings of origins (which I critique later), I attempt to write this chapter with differing strategy-- one in which the formations of structures and the relevance in differing timespaces can be utilized without employing the same formats. In this chapter I also critique hegemonic versions, for lack of a better word, themselves. It is complicated and difficult to try and think outside of the modality, especially in order to critique it, so, in a materialist deconstruction-based move, I utilize some of their own structuring to destabilize them.

Specifically, I critique Hhistoricizing structures of museums *as* imperial, violent and thus not necessarily reformable or relevant to transformative purposes. In the current rise of museums, archives and narrative Hhistories in new spaces and for/about/from groups of people traditionalizedly unrecognized/derecognized in these structures (whether it be national people/things/bodies which have not used Hhistoricizing tools until recently, or otherwise), this recognition of violence is relevant as these matterings affect, shift and participate in creating conditions for intra-acting-- that is, their political stratifications shift particular intelligibilities, they mark bodies (Barad, 2007, 348). I will go into genealogical background and the conditions and perpetuations which make these apparatuses possible, and move on to the classicalizedly used display system of the glass museum case (including the particularity of glass itself) as a discussion of physical and spatial manifestations of the violent ideological structures necessary to uphold othering, dominance and oppression; this in order to move toward difference in my writing itself.

## *Museums as Imperial Spatializations*

The founding and growth of public and private museums proliferated mostly in Europe and North America<sup>24</sup>, displaying the individual collections of imperially acquired objects and plants, “emerg[ing] with the national, bourgeois state and with industrial and commercial capitalism” (Clifford, 215). Westernized ideas of representationalism and classical Newtonian physics<sup>25</sup> had been in place as hegemonicalizedly legitimated formats of knowledge and understanding since the 17th century Enlightenment (Barad 1998, 94), which was also a time of robust expansion of Western colonialism. In early 19th century England a rise of interest in science, fascination with exotic plants, and the industrializations and accessibility of world travel for the Western economic elite coincided. This meant that those with economic or political power were at meeting points with the sciences<sup>26</sup>. Individuals and institutions were collecting animals, insects and plants from hotter, humid environments. That, coupled with the new industrialization of glass production<sup>27</sup>, led to the rise of greenhouses. Not only did this glass box allow plants to live in a climate replicating that of the imperialized spaces from which they came, it also functioned as a case from which these plants could be observed: understood in a new context,

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<sup>24</sup> Not exclusively so, however as an amassing trend, yes.

<sup>25</sup> Both of these concepts rely on thingifications, objectifying/fetishizing practices which equate legitimated knowledge production and scientific objectivity to classification and understanding of strictly bordered things *then* to be understood and represented by Cartesian humans.

<sup>26</sup> For this chapter, I focus on glass cases and what is displayed in them. However, this is in constellation with human and animal trafficking at the time and how othering (through collection, human sciences, anthropology) and racism *matter*. For further discussion, see Mary Louise Pratt’s seminal 1992 *Imperial Eyes*; Delbourgo (2007); or Qureshi (2004).

<sup>27</sup> See Elkadi (2006) for discussion of glass as boundary and symbolic ideological power.



intelligibilized as acquired knowledge of/from imperialized spaces, 'knowledge' accessible to specific peoples.

In these becoming-museums “personal memory and combinatory arts systems based on divine principles develop into visualized display of sacred scientific knowledge; the artful display of objects in curiosity cabinets gives way to scientific arrangements made according to hierarchies: kingdom, phylum, genus, species” (Van Tijen, <http://www.imaginarymuseum.org/>). These “classifications are constructed on the basis of sequential negation” (Van der Tuin 2009, 17) in that classifying such a thing requires designating it as also not another thing; or processes of othering are directly the same as those of objectification and fetishization of bounded beings into classificatory systems of Cartesian legibility. Lucy Suchman, in her article *Demystifications and Reenchantments of the Humanlike Machine*, explains, “a found object like a stone, placed on a mantelpiece, becomes an art object and an artifact, indexing the agency of its finding and placement, at the same time, the enchanted object’s effects are crucially tied to the indecipherability of prior social action”; this now-artifact is removed from its prior context and placed within a new understanding: a glass case in a museum (244). In this situation, “the fetishized object must have a reference point within the system of the exchange economy” or the classificatory body it becomes understood by (Stewart, 163). These classification systems make possible understandings or measurements of intra-actions as sequences, “sequences that then become hierarchies” (Marcus, 192) which are the legibilities of (H)historical knowledge; and the commonness of these “ordering strateg[ies] may seem natural, even though [they are] derived from a Western narrative of progress” (Levin, 5).

This conception of knowledge acquisition, positioned in specifically imperial practices and institutionally upheld in proliferatingly powerful institutions (school education, state projects), materializations and ideological structures (acquisition), has hegemonically posited Cultural and Historical institutions, namely Westernizedly styled museums and archives, as homes to some of the most revered sites of cultural memory-- or understandings of History. As Andrea Pető describes:

If we define [History] as a site of remembrance, it is crucial to see it also as a reflection on power relations: who is remembering what, who is mastering the past and the remembrance of it, what is becoming visible in such a [Historical] canon?... [History] was defined as the science of the past of the state, which amounts to thematising the past of the nation as a descriptive and cognitive science (2009, 1).

Museums become understood to house and display bodies of knowledge in History and science, art and society, determining “ordering[s of] difference to arrive at [particular] correspondence of relations” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 236) deeply enmeshed in particularity and imperial nationalistic project. James Clifford, in *Museums as Contact Zones* explains:

The growth of public museums in nineteenth-century Europe and America was a part of a general attempt to purvey and organize ‘culture’ from top down. Museums accumulated the ‘symbolic capital’ of traditional and emergent elites (Bourdieu, 1984). They institutionalized a hardening distinction between ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ activities (Levine, 1988). The ‘publics’ whom they addressed and whose ‘patrimonies’ they collected were constituted by bourgeois nationalist projects (Duncan, 1991).... In the twentieth century, [they became more widely understood as] central to the production and consumption of ‘heritage’ (Clifford, 214).

These intentions and their institutions have strong influences on the ways Histories are intelligibilized when ideas, identities and subjects are “cut together/apart” (Barad 2010, 245).

“The notion of the ‘educational hobby’ [has served to legitimate] the collector’s need for control and possession” (Stewart, 161); that is, the pursuit of particularized understandings of education

and knowledge are in close connection with, and parts of, imperial acquisition. The institutional use of glass cases to display objects or ‘artifacts’, is a working through/with the economically elite’s curiosity cabinets based in legitimated knowledge as/through domination, objectification, classification and economic/biopolitical control. These distinct social contexts endow these kinds of Hhistorized bodies of understanding and memory with specifically political coherence and narration (Gouda, 14).

This narration is how the Museum, understood as a site of knowledge preservation, “in its representativeness,... strives for authenticity and for closure of all spaces and temporality within the context at hand” (Stewart, 161). That is, in these practices, the Museum works to close off phenomena into fetishized objects (Cartesian cut), which then can be classified, exchanged and understood within the structures of imperial knowledges. These *displays of narrative* (classificatory representationalist practice) become understood as natural sciences.

In this vein, the discussion must go further. It is not enough to evaluate *what* Hhistories are created and who is allowed to establish them, the intentions or representations, “it is more important to understand the power relations working behind the mechanisms that created [Hhistorical] exclusion practices” (Pető 2009, 3). Displays of imperial wealth, colonial domination and capitalistic commodification form a constellatory body embedded in/shaping with particularized Western understandings of knowledge. Bruce Clarke’s discussion in *Posthuman Viability* can be relevantly applied in this pursuit. If “space can be plotted through a

neocybernetic understanding of the interpenetration of psyche and social systems”(158)<sup>28</sup>, these mentalities can be seen as intrinsic in the (spatialized, metaphysical) structures in which knowledge is acquired and informational bodies are positioned; they participate in the apparatuses which enable certain social operations. By politicizing the understood material structures of knowledge representation, we can scratch at the ways in which onto-epistemological structures work to naturalize themselves<sup>29</sup>.

Bruce Clarke insists that “systems have tales to tell because they have to tell tales” (13). We must perceive these systems, these mediums, measuring devices, phenomenological apparatuses themselves to understand the structure at play, how they matter. Here, I would like to point to an interference pattern in Meyda Yeğenoğlu’s reading of hierarchized othering relations (oppression) in *Sartorial Fabrications*. If an exceptional body (for her: people; for me: artifact) “is a consequence of an oppositional and hierarchical ordering of the universal and the particular” (ibid., 103), herenow, the museum and artifact, “difference is relegated to the status of particularity and, more importantly the particularity of difference is a product or effect of power and discrimination” (ibid., 103); we are at an interesting juncture. The artifact is relegated to the status of difference or “other” through discriminatory assignment as exceptional, that is, not normal. This helps coalesce an alliance of objectifications of museum artifacts in imperially oppressive narratives, in constellatory body with the objectifications and tokenisms of human

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<sup>28</sup> Clark’s discussion also endorses understandings as if pre-established from material replicates. While an important intervention (Clark isn’t alone in this-- Luce Irigaray evaluates parallel structures of language and society in the domination of women; Freud’s psychoanalysis discusses hysterical bodies replicating societal structures), this separates metaphysical structures from mattering through temporally linear prioritization.

<sup>29</sup> Benedikt (2000) discusses architecture, as a political distribution of space, as materialization of ideological structures.

racism; both of which particularize designated differences in hierarchy, are based in partialities through discriminatory practices, and isolate to represent a meaning manipulated and inappropriate, grounded in colonial mindsets<sup>30</sup>. The sciences and museums, the glass cases themselves “have also functioned as legitimizing categories in the civilizing mission of colonial power” (Yeğenoğlu, 95). The structural spatializations are enfolded.

In this way, space and structure can be seen as a medium: a technology of how we understand and create memory, Hhistory and identity, which has its own set of rules, formats and limits. With the help of weighted feminist new materialisms, discussed in this thesis’ introduction, the mechanisms of teleological space are materialized, their perceived invisibility territorialized. Technologies are translators, mediators (Suchman, 270) that shape and weave through, define and structure where-and-what-we-are-understood-as in relation to where-and-what-we-are-understood-in. When politicized this way, there are many ways to discuss the ~~metaphysical~~ museum<sup>31</sup>. For the purpose of this chapter I will look at a tool within the space of many museums: the glass display case-- traditionalizedly a box-shape surrounding artifacts on a shelf or pedestal.

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<sup>30</sup> See again Pratt or Giebelhausen (2003); or for discussion of Orientalist tokenism, Yeğenoğlu (1998) or Zonana (1993).

<sup>31</sup> The Architecture of the Museum (ed. Michaela Giebelhausen) compiles discussion on how Hhistories and theology of museum buildings saturate their matter; important discussions as colonial museums are contemporarily reformatted.

*Knowledge and the Mirror Stage; or Divide and Concur*

I feel the need to take a step sideways into an intersecting part of the apparatus. Masculinist Westernized's hierarchization of sight as a primary sense for acquiring knowledge has been discussed by many authors<sup>32</sup>. Yeğenoğlu argues, "knowledge and vision are part of an interlocking desire for modern, disciplinary, colonial governing, for such a desire is also part of a sadistic desire to physically master the object of gaze by ripping it apart" (11). Particularized sight as designating boundaries enables hierarchical relations; it is a form of warfare. Divide and conquer(concur). Or, in Spivak's terms, "clarity fetishism" (in Braidotti 2011, 204). In this section, I argue this is linked to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the mirror stage, enfolding insistence on complete Cartesian subjects, the naturalizations/abstractions of mediums, and othering practices.

In Lacan's theory it is said that when a human-child looks at itself in the mirror at around six months of age, it becomes fascinated with its own image. This human-child sees itself as a "whole" body, separate from its mother. At this point an intense quest for wholeness, an identity and body complete within itself, begins (Lacan, 287). In order to establish a definition of what one is, to border that identity, it is structurally significant to identify what one is not (similar to the designation of artifact for taxonomy). This process creates a necessary polarization of differing subjects and objects. If a subject or person is to have a concrete and specific identity, there are identities it must be distinctly not. Thus, in order to create one "whole" identity, other

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<sup>32</sup> See Haraway (2001); Braidotti (2011).

identities are needed<sup>33</sup>. This is a violent process, and one with interference patterns in colonial practices and oppression, as it is explicitly always othering (in hierarchies). For in this kind of quest to establish identity it is all too important to rip the object, the other, out of context and place walls, borders and definitions around it by/through the logic of the self. The process of proving completion necessarily ignores interdependencies, connectivities or intra-actions. It must make sure that the other does not, cannot, seep into what one, the subject or the self, is<sup>34</sup>. This object other is extricated in the hierarchizing process, colonized and commodified.

There are catches, of course. The child has always only seen a partial, inverted image, a reflection through/with/from a medium, and seemingly has particular biases to what is understood as closely connected (bodily integrity). There is a misrecognition<sup>35</sup>. If the theory(/fable?) works, they believe to see a true reflection of an unlinked, entirely bordered entity, and in this hypostatized apparatus, the child derecognizes the mirror<sup>36</sup> and its intra-activity, enacting a hierarchy of what counts as objects-- of what is made intelligible as *related*<sup>37</sup> or agential.

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<sup>33</sup> Here objects, whether they be persons or artifacts, are other.

<sup>34</sup> Deconstruction discusses how the process of hierarchical dualities (other/self) inherently defines one as not possible without the constitution of the other (Royle, 6).

<sup>35</sup> Imogen Tyler discusses the categorization of asylum seekers, suggesting “processes of identification are grounded in deliberate strategies of misrecognition, informed and purposeful” (194).

<sup>36</sup> The use of the mirror readily forms constellation with the glass case as both are material-semiotic practices of glass.

<sup>37</sup> I use this term intentionally, as prioritization of certain understood closeness is relevant to, particularly, heteronormative and eugenicist kinship systems, discussed more in chapter three.

With these as in-apparatus, I contend that it is within this establishment, this commodification of that which is not self, that the self falsely identifies its (Cartesian) borders. And it is this attempt to replicate the misconception of the reflection that is part of the apparatus enabling outcomes measured as completed, hierarchized, boundaried entities. The object, the artifact, serves as the inverted and perverse reflection of the ability for the ideal, completed self. Westernized imperial desire for power and control, whether enacted/structured through governments, warfare, ideologies or Hhistorical configurations, is in political coalition with this Westernized understanding of a perpetual yet impossible quest for the completed self. The medium, whether it now be the mirror or process, has become systematically naturalized, misrecognized as not intra-active. Through the idea of the (Cartesian, fetishized) subject as such, accountability to/for the political spatialization of differing bodily relations are hierarchically deprioritized. In this intelligibilizing apparatus, “the [object styled] subject merely aims at self-completion... achieving singularity” (Braidotti 2006, 126). With this, “artifacts are produced, reproduced, and transferred through ongoing labour of divisions” (Suchman, 269). The particularity of an object within a glass case, the glass case serving to identify physical and ideological borders, yet attempting to be de-recognized as medium (what counts as an object to be seen), is a format for establishing this power to conquer an ‘other’ in the name of the ‘self’.



*Display as System, Continued*

*Might what is not easy to learn to see be what is of utmost importance?* (Haraway 2008, 34)

What is really so transparent<sup>38</sup> about a glass case? We can see the structure in physical space, but it is assumed as not *to be* seen, to see through to the ‘real’ object: the artifact. But what we see is always mediated with this glass. In many contexts glass is mediator, a shape shifter, a manipulator: How easy and common to adjust the curve of glass to alter ocular vision profoundly-- to enable intelligibilized sight through glasses; to diffract light through prisms. Glass is mattered; shifting, melting; always already something else, always already the possibility of something different; of sand, liquid, hardened and cut, aged and clouded, changing identities. How, then, is this idea of the invisibility and transparency of glass a manifestation of the same structure? A ‘transparent’ structure that still maintains many active separations? Does the glass surface reflect more than it separates? What is significant in those instances when wandering through museums and peering into cases, you catch a glimpse of yourself in the glass? What is embedded in the attempt to avert that reflection, to gaze beyond the case, into the case and onto the artifact displayed? What does this say of the inappropriateness of glass as border? As passive? Its ability to be controlled? What gets put behind the glass case? Why is structural intention forgotten in this context? What is at stake? Is this trick of transparency hiding something? Bruce Clarke observes that “under transmissions and receptive reconstruction, original messages do not remain the same, but are deformed by noises traversing the media through which they become materialized and reformed by whatever cognitive apparatus is at

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<sup>38</sup> The term “glass” originates from the German “glesum”, transparent.

hand to (mis)understand the communication” (10). What else does this glass case do? How does this ‘seeing through’ the glass to the *artifact* activate and enable certain structural intelligibilities? Can we, also, look at glass case as greenhouse, which lets in light, heat and energy? How does what we put on an object remain within that case? Trapped?

“Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over *how* to see. The terms of vision: the science question in colonialism; the science question in exterminism (Sofoulis, 1988); the science question in feminism” (Haraway 2004, 91). As we assume to see through this structure, to what the object of intention is, we disavow the medium for the fragmented object(ified) thing it encompasses; as if non-agential, non-intra-active, not connected. This again establishes a hierarchy of vision in choosing what is to be seen. As Kerstin Sandell argues in *Stories Without Significance in the Discourse of Breast Reconstruction*, “spaces around the links and nodes in the discourses [the artifacts and facts in science and Hhistory] are not empty but filled with words, material-semiotic actors [e.g. glass cases], and practices... actively kept there” (349). If metaphysical systematic practices are allowed the transparency and neutrality we often allow glass, then we fall into the abstract/material humanistic divide which stalls possibilities. Not only does this assignment of transparency, of border, of un-medium allow this violent, partialized, narcissistic, visually-centered quest for knowledge, it disallows the discussion of these mechanisms *as* socially and politically situated *as material spatializations*. The format, the medium, the glass case must be ‘seen’.

## *Glass as Material-Semiotic Actor*

*The interest is how facts, objects, realities, and social orders are made to be, how they emerge and are sustained, their materialities and how they literally come to matter (Moser, 542).*

According to Tim Ambrose and Chrispin Paine's 1993 Museum Basics, museum showcases are necessary to protect from theft and damage and to provide a "micro-climate in which relative humidity, temperature, and controlled light can be maintained". They are used to protect "artifacts" from pollution, dust, and insects" (82). A proper museum case doing this must have filtered air constantly pumping into the case to push dust and pollution out. The glass used must also be of a particular chemical make-up so as not to oxidize and emit gases, aiding decomposition. This glass and pumping mechanism are, however, expensive and many museums do not have the funding or technology (ibid., 82-3). This, of course, means that many glass cases not only theoretically (which I argue *is* material), but *physically* alter the matter they supposedly partition. It is always doing something (material).

It also means that the curves and slopes, the labor and intention, the mediator through which we see an object is not routine, passive or obsolete. If different glass, light, dust and air affect the physical 'deterioration' of what are designated as 'artifacts', how, then, do we identify which material energy exchanges are acting? How do we learn to understand *what* matter is agential<sup>39</sup>? Boundaries are enacted, built in similar/same moves to quarantine other identities so as not to disrupt the complete self. The intention in establishing (imagining?) borders on the sites of

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<sup>39</sup> Mel Y. Chen (2012) discusses the assignment of animacy/agency as structural in many forms of oppression. More discussion in chapter three.

intraconnectivity not only relates within structures of othering, but is space in which bodies move and intra-act with/as matter.

As Étienne Balibar suggests, borders vacillate (2002, 216). The activity of the medium is something that not only moves and changes, but moves and changes others, marks bodies. The way that glass intra-acts as matter; the way human bodies, their clothes, their breath, their looks move through/with space, the way that electrons and atoms exchange and bounce off, diffract with other matter-- this is Haraway's queer commerce, the forbidden intercourse-- this is intra-action not only or perhaps even intelligible to Humanistic imaginaries. This is where borders are exactly not so.

Wendy Brown makes an interesting case of borders in her lecture about wall building and the territorializing of nations. I want to bring her discussion to the Museum, specifically the glass case, as part of a constellation (body) of boundaries or borders. Brown claims that the physical walls used to establish nation-state borders "harken back to a power modality that is sovereign, spatially bounded, and territorial, power that is material, centralized, extended through force, fencing and policing" (2008). Walls, really, borders in this case, are a grasping for distinct commodifications of physical location; the establishment of an entity, a completion, something that can be dominated and governed, considered whole. "And as such, not only recuperate a faltering distinction between us and them, inside and outside, law and non-law, but distract from the reality of... interdependence with images of autonomy and self-sufficiency" (ibid.). They exactly are the physical manifestation of desperate attempts to commodify and separate an other from the self (for privilegings). Understanding through Brown's evaluation, the glass case as

border signifies a divide so impossible it must be metaphysically enforced as such, in order to recuperate this false distinction, pointing to its inadequacy (2008).

There is nothing intrinsically inappropriate with a glass case, but “partners don’t precede their relations” (Haraway 2008, 42). A quantum understanding of matter helps us to re-member that “boundaries that are enacted are not abstract delineations but specific material demarcations not *in space* but *of space*” (Barad 2007, 181). The glass case *is* spatial relation; political. The desire for thingification, arguably with interference patterns of the mirror stage<sup>40</sup>, is part of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the “plane of organization” which “is constantly working away at the plane of consistency”, the plane at which all things are connected and operate together, “always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialization, weigh them down, ratify them, reconstitute forms and subjects” (1987, 270). The glass case is a visibly physical manifestation of the plane of organization, working to quantify objects and ideas and to territorialize identities within artifacts and particular representations<sup>41</sup>. The walls show in themselves their faulty symbolism, they cannot be stagnant.

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<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Guattari discuss Lacanian psychoanalysis and imposition of individualization through familial and symbolic signifiers (1983, 308).

<sup>41</sup> It might be also helpful to enframe in constellation differing glass cases-- in department stores, pharmacies, literature, animal housing. But for this thesis, this will remain untheorized.

bell hooks, in *The Oppositional Gaze*, decrees “not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality” (1992, 116). But how do we know look is not always already altering “reality”, shifting matter? Touch is understood to affect an object, deteriorate or oxidize it by pushing and taking particles, but what of the power of vision? Because we cannot see vision, does it get assigned to abstraction? Understanding “touch” on a molecular level, touch is never really how it is defined. In a world of particles, atoms and electrons, there is never such a thing as true ‘touching’, only exchange. Borders cannot be defined so strongly. What is the exchange in vision? Of ideology? Of thought?

According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the secret, defined as a content that has hidden its form... is a sociological or social notion. Every secret is a collective assemblage. The secret is not at all an immobilized or static notion. Only becomings are secrets; the secret has a becoming” (1987, 287). The secret of the glass case is that we forget to acknowledge it. It is this de-recognition, this subverting factor, the creating of false and partial misrecognitions that is at play. The ideological association of glass with transparency, thing with inactivity, knowledge with sight, collectively allows for hiding its form, denying its becoming. But “a vector of deterritorialization is in no way indeterminate; it is directly plugged in to the molecular levels, and the more deterritorialized it is, the stronger the contact: it is deterritorializing that makes the aggregate molecular composition ‘hold together’” (ibid., 294). As the technology of understanding becomes secret, it is able to work more effectively, without interruptions. The glass becomes

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<sup>42</sup> Quote by Birke, Bryld and Lykke (178).

known not as territory itself, but that which *designates* territory. A physical manifestation of a wall, violently set as an in-between. A fallacy of border. And “the more the secret is made into a structuring, organizing form, the thinner and more ubiquitous it becomes, the more its content becomes molecular” diffracting in more and larger bodies; even as its form dissolves, even as the glass case turns from being ‘territory’ to being ‘border’, it is always active (ibid., 289). In its deterritorialized form, the glass museum case is always territorializing phenomena into objects. If we now look at the glass case as actor, kept with Humanistic intention as transparent, hidden intentionally as and within the forgotten space between ‘links’ and ‘nodes’ (e.g. self/other, person/artifact), we must obstruct this idea that the glass case is an inactive, practical transparency. The glass case is an apt materialization to discuss this naturalizing of strategically formatted technologies of understanding.

The glass case, now, is more an ideological structure of the Museum itself. How can the materiality of the Museum be seen as another glass box? Misrecognized through its assumed value? And what greenhouse effects are at play? How has the ~~metaphysical~~ matter bouncing in and around those bricks, created specific deteriorations, and, in turn, how have these new grooves, these new angles affected the intermingling within the museum space? Around it? How has the foundational structure on which the building was created affected the soil? How has that soil then affected the atmosphere? How have the trees and bodies of water and rainfall changed? And then, in turn, how has that again affected the deteriorations, the growing, the aging of the museum, the air, the space, the people? The chemicals chosen by the preservationists? The affect on Ozone layer? By whom and for what purpose was the building created and how is that within the materiality of all involved? How does *that* exchange? How and why has this been forgotten?

Rendered invisible? Can the bricks ever lose their meaning? Even in its shifting concepts, ideas and definitions tied to ‘cabinets of curiosities’ have somewhere(somehow) been left behind to now become a ‘museum’<sup>43</sup>: The house of knowledge; Home to artifact. As Wendy Brown says, “walls do not merely bound, but invent the societies they limn” (2008). We must attempt to re-cognize what this body *does*, highlight the constellation of allied closeness, if we are to understand political and social relations for careful work!.

### *Constellations*

Understandings of knowledge and identity enfold and are enfolded in the ways Hhistories, inter[/ra?]actions and lives are formatted. It is not about the glass case: it is about de-centering Cartesian Humanist understandings of connectivity and knowledge, of border and identity. The glass case is in political coalition with bordering, representative politics-- the same structural politics which justify domination and oppression. We must ‘look’ at Hhistories, the structures not so easily ‘seen’, the influences hiding in their own justifications, and werk! with multiple perspectives, ability to critique our own misrecognitions. It is in this that I move to the next chapter.

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<sup>43</sup> Ken Arnold (2006) gives an Hhistorical and genealogical discussion of this transition.



# Canonical Installation; or Keywording Oppression: A Critical Perspective on the Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive

## Chapter Two

*As long as... any group defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling-class white men, they have a vested interest in the continued exploitation and oppression of others (hooks 1995, 281)*

*The issue is not simply a matter of inclusion. The main point has to do with power. How is power understood? How are the social and the political theorized? (Barad 2007, 58).*

### *Introduction*

Recently, there have been many efforts to write alternative Hhistories, reform museums and create archives of groups previously unrecognized within Hhistoricizing structures<sup>44</sup>. These Hhistorians of difference, in projects to 'fill in the gaps', attempt to reform Hhistory to unsettle the normative structures (which value Westernizedly hierarchized subjects) by showcasing "dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mention in conventional Hhistories" (Scott, 776); to make possible avenues of research of differing groups of people (Danbolt, 93); "as a way to 'claim the act of [Hhistory]' through 'documentation', 'finding names', and making public cultures 'visible'" (Rohy, 354); to prove wrong the assignment of nothingness or lack of culture and Hhistory that is a prevalent tactic of imperial and colonial domination (Spivak 1994, 76); "to go on speaking of [the violence of subjection], refusing to let the discussion go on as before, speaking where silence has been advised and enforced, not just about our subjection, but about our active presence and practice...[in order to] open out the

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<sup>44</sup> Mohanty (2003) and Burton (1994) discuss how many projects began in the last few decades.

structures of resistance, unbind the imagination, connect what's been dangerously disconnected" (Rich, 214).

Considering that oppressive structural violence (subordination) depends upon segmented definitions (or lack of definition and thus invaluable or worthy of agency or care) vehemently imposed through imperial taxonomies of identity<sup>45</sup> (racialized, sexualized, animacy-based understandings of productivity or worthiness of citizenship<sup>46</sup> which maintain certain parties' dominance), identity politics (read as: creating and/or utilizing differing subjectivities in efforts toward political change) become strategic methodology necessary in slowing this violence. In a similar move, efforts toward inclusion in systems hegemonically relegating legitimacy are logically dire in order to ebb oppressors, and projects of becoming Hhistorical are ways of enabling self-definition for the possibility of coalition building (see Rohy, Mohanty (2003), Scott, Molyneaux, Burton, Saldanha, Hemmings (2002; 2011)). As feminist Hhistorian Joan W. Scott explains, this method has been both successful "because it remains so comfortable within the disciplinary framework of [Hhistory]" and limiting, I paraphrase in Baradian terms, because of the intra-acting apparatuses enabling specific possibilities (776).

Minh-ha (1989) discusses how this need to become Hhistorical is produced exactly through a Western imperializing that establishes who-has-Hhistory and what-does-not. The violently

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<sup>45</sup> This is not to say all identity is objectifying, stagnant or violent. Saldanha explains "dominance is achieved through the fearful discursive exclusion of the 'Other'. But since identity is never given, the future of the system is inherently political. Politics is then about the formation of heterogenous coalitions amongst the disenfranchised to wrestle signifiers from the dominant" (11). This particular employment for oppressive violence, however, is also utilized in intelligibilizing artifacts, discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Not only nationally, but intra-actively.

imposed legitimacy of particularized documentation enfolded not being documented *as* threat of being erased. This pigeonholes logical resistance *as Hhistorical documentation* and this *being* the marginalized speaking for themselves. Onsets the feverish paradox of documenting what these processes were made to exclude in exactly its oppressive formats, incorporating and consuming their previous illegibility into the hegemonicalizedly legitimized economy of Hhistoricizing (or the understanding of valued citizens). Through this demarcation and effort of inclusion, this dynamic remains and keeps the oppressed “occupied with the savior’s concern” of standards (Minh-ha, 89). It becomes a chase after a holistic, authentic origin-- which creates the conditions possible for these taxonomical understandings-- based in Westernized hierarchies<sup>47</sup>. This emergent desire “to reclaim a [Hhistory] that was strategically denied” (Towle and Morgan, 483) enfolded Hhistoricizing as something which all should value, have and work toward. I argue that this is one of the “diversion[s] of energies and a tragic repetition[s] of racist, patriarchal thought” which Audre Lorde discusses, filling in gaps and educating oppressors rather than werk!ing on projects from/for/about/doing difference (in Minh-ha, 85).

This becomes an additive<sup>48</sup>, visibility imperative/approach in which groups work toward becoming legitimate (to ebb the violence of oppression in its economical, biopolitical and social forms) *through* their simultaneous co-option into oppressive materializations/enactments. In this way, the “process of representing/representation and the process of colonizing can be one in the same... ‘coming to voice’, ‘speaking for’, ‘representing’, ‘recovering’, ‘restoring to [Hhistory]’

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<sup>47</sup> See the previous chapter on Lacan’s mirror stage and the subsequent chapter on the posthuman obstruction of origin stories.

<sup>48</sup> Berlant and Freeman discuss how “it is not enough to ‘include’ women, lesbians, racial minorities and so on in an ongoing machine of mass counter-nationality” in work toward a ‘queer symbolic’ (151).

are both deeply politicized and inscribed equally in contemporary patriarchal and world-imperial relationships” (Burton, 212)<sup>49</sup>. Even in efforts to institute alternative practices and voice differing positionings, the Hhistoricizing Archival structure’s *translation into* hegemonized Hhistoricizing practices is a domestication. This kind of translation is acknowledged “in subaltern studies, because of the violence of imperialist epistemic, social and disciplinary inscription....their text articulates the difficult task of rewriting its own condition of impossibility as the condition of its possibility” (Spivak 1994, 80)<sup>50</sup>. And/or “‘History’ is precisely the site where the struggle goes on to appropriate... these other collocations of memory” (Chakrabarty, 10-11). At stake in the attempt to become legible to oppressive bodies (as human) in order to logically necessitate less oppression, “is the archival issue of ‘untranslatability’” (Shetty and Bellamy, 39)<sup>51</sup>.

While alternative archives, Hhistorical narratives and museum displays are created by/for/with less represented groups groups (though not exclusively) and this does entail a “disidentification”, or “inhabiting with difference” (Muñoz, 91), the archival structure itself is not neutral. As Spivak cautions:

Welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, [Hhistory] and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long

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<sup>49</sup> Oyěwùmí exemplifies this sentiment: “foundations of African thought cannot rest on Western intellectual traditions that have as one of their enduring features the projection of Africans as Other and our consequent domination” (23).

<sup>50</sup> Shetty and Bellamy discuss the impossible position of a postcolonial archive (in/of/for/about India), since it is necessarily founded with/through Orientalism and Imperialism, thus possesses a nostalgic desire for antiquity (44).

<sup>51</sup> Many authors discuss how these mistranslations are themselves violences with radiating effects. See Minh-ha’s discussions of ‘griotte’ to ‘oral traditionalist’ and women’s storytelling to masculinist, ‘objective’ Hhistory (1989); Spivak’s 1988 discussion of Sanskrit Studies; or Shetty and Bellamy’s general recognition that “the codifying of ‘that which is remembered’, yields only hermeneutic *misremembrances*” (43).

run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-construction, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever (Spivak 1994, 90).

I follow this up with an analysis by Dipesh Chakrabarty, one of Spivak's colleagues in the Subaltern Studies Collective:

Insofar as the academic discourse of [Hhistory]-- that is, '[Hhistory]' as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university-- is concerned, 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all [Hhistories], including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other [Hhistories] tend to become variations on a master narrative.... one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this [Hhistory] (Chakrabarty, 1).

This form of globalization, in which all that are to be global subjects (valued Humans) are to have Westernizedly-understood Hhistories as such, "makes use of differences in order to contain and incorporate them. What looks like a postmodern flux of diversity, then, can also be seen as a complex management" (Kaplan, 157). With visibility politics as assumed practice, the apparatus becomes secret, naturalizes its self-perpetuating formats and, in this, naturalizes its hierarchies of value/difference as if not intra-active.

In these recognitions, Hhistorians of difference try diversified methodologies to Hhistoricize, utilizing oral historicizing as practices of differing kinds of representation (Petó 2009, 4), telling different kinds of stories (see Hemmings (2011)), moving toward cartographies and genealogies (see Van der Tuin (2009)), to occupy these spaces from difference and recognize how they shift and change meaning when employed by differing people and in differing contexts (example: Spivak 1988, 2). However, the maintenance of the constellation of Hhistoricizing as legitimizing is not removed strictly by intention to benefit 'others'. Unasked questions are: What happens

when these differing practices get recognized as legitimate, incorporated into the ‘diversification’ of hegemonizing narrative structures? Why should the ‘unspeakable/ unspoken’ be spoken as such?

This is not to act as if writing, storytelling or forms of community or identity are only Western created or should be not utilized by anyone (else). To pretend that would be essentialist, a quarantining of tools, and inaccurate. What I am hoping toward with this discussion is a sort of checking tool-- to synthesize feminist theoretics and organizing practices with these discussions, enflaming constellation in order to help re-cognize that maybe some calls to ebb oppressors actually focus energy toward the same power structures which constantly work to suck energy through systematic oppressions, rather than toward the groups oppressed<sup>52</sup>. Perhaps with the acknowledgement of the radical, quantum closeness of these generally-understood-as separate (misrecognitions, sense-hierarchy) conversations, the gatherings of energy can shift to create differing possibilities. To unpack this further, in this chapter I bring the discussion begun in this thesis’ introduction, of a particular archive which utilizes oral histories in political project to change hegemonic understandings of an oppressed people: The Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archives (VHA), the largest archive of oral history (OH) videos of survivors of The Shoah/WWII Holocaust.

As a political project dealing with marginalized groups, as something which is timely, as a project which in many ways is radical and important, and surely for other reasons, the VHA has

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<sup>52</sup> This sentiment is in Audre Lordes’ and many activists’. For a contemporary examples, see interview with activist scholar Virgie Tovar (2013).

received little close reading or critique<sup>53</sup>. While I, and the VHA itself, would not call it a feminist endeavor/project, being that it is entirely made of oral histories it has been informed by and has legacy in (diffraction) feminist political struggle and practice, and, in turn, redefines and informs the practice itself (intra-activity). In this chapter, I argue that beginning with such a specifically feminist topic as sexual assault reveals the explicitly unfeminist structure of the VHA<sup>54</sup>, and, I venture to say, the Archival structure itself, even when what is archived is as informed by feminist practice as OH methodology<sup>55</sup>. Through this entry, studying my own affective experience, and with background in both documentary making/teaching and anti-oppression based activism, I look closely at the politics of the VHA to *question* how politically empowering or transformative projects like these are. Here unsettling the particular methodologies of this archive to irritate the underlying assumption that radical practices, such as OH or the werk! of any sort of marginalized group toward anti-oppressive social change, should enter traditionalized knowledge houses and historicizing processes. I argue it is this hegemonized institutional legitimation that domesticates these practices, employing them in close constellation with/as oppressors. In this case, I follow my own experience navigating sexual assault in the VHA to argue that it is the structural Archival practice dominating how these things become intelligibilized and spatialized which allows a project with anti-oppressive goals and practices (VHA) to participate in enabling rape culture. This exploration is in the larger goal of more ethical accountability and strategy.

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<sup>53</sup> Feinstein (2010) discusses feminism in the VHA; Baer discusses emotion in the VHA; Klingeböck writes about turning eye witness testimony of Shoah survivors into audiovisual media; Farmer writes about general visual representation of this Holocaust.

<sup>54</sup> Feinstein takes feminist radicality of OH for granted, discussing how the VHA has ‘finally’ brought it to Holocaust studies.

<sup>55</sup> OH has a diverse inception not only stemming from/with feminism. Its development is discussed later.

*A Bit About Oral History; or Why the VHA Doesn't Jive*

This project, led by Steven Spielberg in recent decades, is composed of over 116,000 hours in 52,000 (Olsson, 1) videotaped, one-time interviews conducted by teams across the world (guided by U.S. made instructions<sup>56</sup>) with volunteer survivors and placed in physical and digital archives. In order to catalogue the videos and make them, what I guess would be described as, relevantly searchable, over 55,000 keywords (around 90% of which are geographic<sup>57</sup>) were pre-established by a panel of “experts”: academics, Hhistorians and archivists. The videos were then watched and indexed accordingly.

An important yet unproblematized goal of OH practice “is its potential for use in public [Hhistory]” (Thomson, 592). OH, in its own political becoming, has been utilized to explore experiences and people traditionally un/misrecognized in the majority of (Westernized-style) Hhistory telling; to ‘give voice’<sup>58</sup> (Sangster, 88). Recognizing the marginalizing effects of the assumed yet impossible objectivity of traditionalized Hhistoricizing (Reinharz, 425; Grele, 142; Abrams, 159), OH has become understood as interactive (Abrams, 166; Thomson, 584) and emerged as framing and assisting the political agency of those documented (Abrams, 170; Thomson, 590; Petó 2009, 4). Though it has not always been readily accepted, in increasing

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<sup>56</sup> Todd Presner’s research is significant. He found the testimonies cluster subjects in a linear-temporal progressive style (forthcoming, 2-3). This progress narrative (discussed in chapter three) is likely in correlation with interviews’ standardized guides.

<sup>57</sup> <http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=58585&sid=548017>; In the VHA the keywords are predominantly proper nouns (places, organizations, activities) (Presner, 2), I discuss how prioritization of proper noun subjectivities is intrinsically violent in chapter three.

<sup>58</sup> I use this phrasing as it is commonly familiar, though it is politically controversial by operating a top-down savior mentality and I do not endorse it.



efforts to open up hegemonizing institutions/al understandings-- diversify museums, democratize Hhistory, tell untold stories-- oral testimonies/Hhistories/videos have recently become recognizedly legitimated practice. As a political project creating institutionalized acknowledgement of the atrocities of the Shoah, the people who experienced it and the memories they hold, the VHA undoubtedly utilizes OH practice for public Hhistory. It can be argued that the perpetual thereness, the definite document, that the archive creates directly defies the aims of the Shoah to eliminate people forever, making it a politically relevant project<sup>59</sup>. But little theoretical discussion unpacks the shift in what OH is, means and becomes once accepted and employed in institutionalized structures linked to modes of Hhistoricizing and preservation quite different from politicized OH<sup>60</sup>; and, in turn, what happens in the use of digital platform. As Maria Tamboukou in her 2013 quantum feminist reading of archival research explains, “the archive is a dynamic spatial and discursive milieu forcefully acting upon the research process, the analytics of the research, the ‘research findings’ and the researcher herself” (7). That is, its politicized diffractive spatializations, narrativizations and intelligibilities matter. What does the VHA, as archive, continue to hold? Reading these different projects together, I argue that the VHA can be seen as a prototypical de-radicalization of OH as a tool and its own potentials.

An important aspect making OH methodology different from others is its intention of being a dialogically intersubjective process (Denzin, 3), probing new topics by engaging in “active, human relationships in the course of [the] research” (Thomson, 584). “The interview” in OH has

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<sup>59</sup> Pető explains how as the goal of the Csengery 64 massacre was to have no witnesses, the survivors claiming memory is a direct resistance (2011, 162).

<sup>60</sup> See chapter one on how traditionalized hegemonic (power) structures like museums (and archives) partake in imperialist knowledge production.

long been understood as “a relationship embedded within particular cultural practices and informed by culturally specific systems and relations of communication”, cultural contexts change needs and compatibility (Thomson, 582). The idea of dynamism and mutual production has helped in shifting understanding of OH as empowering and productive politically (Thomson, 590). Using this definition, the VHA works dangerously without these understandings. While Spielberg and his team had prestigious goals of being multi-national, inclusive and with ‘equality of opportunity’ to share stories, by keeping a Western/U.S.-guided interview format and organization of stories, they ignore how differing contexts and cultural factors affect the subjects, interviewers, possible tales, relations and collection. While it is made clear where interviews take place, how interviewees got there and interviewees speak in their language of choice, aside from the questions and time being somewhat flexible, the practice does not allow for localized intelligibility in document production-- the document is of standardized form. This ‘document’ becomes a particularly prioritized artifact, and U.S.-based systems-of-relation dominate the largest, international resource for Shoah survivor testimony.

### *Keywording*

When using the archive, one navigates and accesses materials through a system of tagging/keywording. These keywords, then, would seemingly categorize topics in the archive which are of importance. Considering that much literature on OH purports it to break paternalizing and hierarchically-prescribed thought structures, allowing empowered narratives ‘from below’, it is easy to imagine that if a part of an OH video is tagged with one of these keywords (for instance

my experience described in the opening vignette with ‘rape/sexual assault’) that an experience of that tag (sexual assault) is talked about as an important event in the interviewee’s narrated life story. Upon realizing the radical difference between the interviewee’s (lack of) specializing and that of the ‘experts’ structuring the archive (the interviewees did not speak of it as so), we can look at the space, the aim and the production of the archive in importantly political ways.

“Communication is facilitated by carefully crafted structures”, the structure of narrativizing, or the structure of an archive, and built within these are “associations [which] become relationships; relationships [which] become theory” (Stake, 146). Just like any other cultural institution, any other structure of communication (though arguably with more social capital), the VHA is creating relationships, following and forming theories of association, normalizations and hegemonic understandings. Since the relations in the archive are structured through tagging, keywords set up the hierarchy of the archive by deciding what gathers and can be navigated readily by users; they guide the shaping of cultural memory through their spatializing. And “the ‘research findings’ ... [emerge] through the multifarious entanglements – both material and discursive – between ‘the researcher’, ‘the research object’ and ‘the research context’” (Tamboukou, 6). They are entirely political. While I am sure the panel of experts was full of people who have an interest, in and background knowledge of, the Shoah, its scholarship and no doubt think methodologically and critically, this pre-emptive expert keyword selection falls short of moving toward OH as dialogical process empowering those represented. It has severe implications for the practices and possibilities of the VHA. What is deemed important is not by the survivors: the ‘voices from below’ supposedly allowed agency and framing. If interviewees do not explicitly explain sexual assault as a significant aspect of their experience,

why is the keyword prominent in *this* archive? Since keywords were chosen without watching the videos themselves and not in words or topics of the survivors, I can only surmise that they were chosen based on contemporary interests for and by future academic ‘experts’. What is of this *kind* of entitlement?

If we continue asking after keywording, we can cognize further distractions: How can we begin to choose present-day keywords in contemporary English (all keywords are) to describe events, topics and meanings told and understood in older forms or non English? What of the entire video segments with no keywords? Why have these stories not been deemed for inclusion? I just keep asking: why aren’t the survivors considered their own experts<sup>61</sup>? Could the keywords have been based more on what the survivor’s actually *say* is significant? Would this be enough? In a project attempting to transform hegemonic memory for, with and of survivors, frankly, this could be done more responsibly<sup>62</sup>.

Another foundational aspect of OH is its radical recognition of non-verbal communication (Portelli, 65): inflection, embodiment, movement, silence, tone, rhythm, emotion. Even while video as a medium has potential to make nonverbal aspects of OH viewable and audible (Thomson, 593), and while the VHA is a pioneer of video-taped OH interviews in navigational internet source, the VHA and its keywording system explicitly do not recognize these traits. The

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<sup>61</sup> A foundational aspect of the radical social work practice of harm reduction; assisting the person (say, a survivor of assault) according to their own understandings, needs, goals and boundaries. See [harmreduction.org](http://harmreduction.org)

<sup>62</sup> Baer discusses the VHA’s aim is to embed emotion in the archive, an intentional blur of ‘objective’/scientific processes of Hhistoricizing (498), which in many ways is quite radical, feminist even. However, it does not question structural/spatial power relations of the process. If sexual assault is a prominent tag, *whose* emotion arranges this archive?

VHA creates textual transcripts of the interviews in its categorizing, recently employing transcription software<sup>63</sup>. In prioritizing these kinds of transcripts and using them as the basis for keywording, all the non-verbal affects important to OH methodology are de-prioritized; structurally they are ignored as in-relation<sup>64</sup>. While I do not necessarily believe it would be a transformative or radical project to taxonomize these non-verbal communicators, I do think it may help movement toward transformative possibilities to ask after such a task: What if, perhaps, the interviewees's speech was mapped in audio-waves, categorized according to changes in pitch, tone and silence<sup>65</sup>? Would survivor Maria Scheffer's seemingly flippant dismissal of sexual assault be built into a different relation with the interviews? Different topics? Events? How would our theory then differ? How and why did OH, which hopes to de-center word-based language, get caught up in this old hierarchizing structure?

### *Into the Digital Archive; or Stagnating Intra-activity*

The goal of accessibility is noble and in many ways radical, and while internet is not a medium everyone has access to<sup>66</sup>, it is a significantly more disseminated methodology than material,

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<sup>63</sup> Automated speech recognition software development for transcription in the VHA is being done by Franz et al. through a research center at IBM, a company known for aiding the industrialized effectiveness of WWII concentration camps.

<sup>64</sup> Elinor A. Mazé (2006) asks after the politics of transcribing and what this does.

<sup>65</sup> Presner asks after similar questions involving emotion (19) or linguistic patterns (27).

<sup>66</sup> Thomson questions how this may widen social marginalizations (594); Manoff discusses what privatization of internet/publishing means for access and what is archived (12-13).

geographic archive locations<sup>67</sup>. But this widening of access and medium does not come without its own set of ethical questions. Thomson asks, “if sound clips from the interviews are put on the internet, then whose agenda shapes their selection?” (594). I ask: What is at stake in this shift in medium? How do the technologies used by the VHA manage and reflect choices and presentation<sup>68</sup>? In the way that the oral histories, the people, the politics, the audience and the, now, objects intra-act? And what(why) governing people, ideas, forces, structures determine the possibilities? If the VHA is viewed as a political constituency’s project, is it allowed authority of selection in the name of the declared goal of the archive? What happens when the OH research process, even in the name of politics, is turned into a video, set in an archive, placed as an internet link-- that is, made stagnant?

This structural placement diminishes the agency of the interviewees *to frame their answers in direct relation* with whom is listening. It is no longer about shifting relations of mutual dialogue and understanding in the telling of stories, things intrinsic in the ethics of interview in OH. When OH becomes archivized source it increases the “danger of appropriating experience for theory” (Thomson, 587)<sup>69</sup>. Widening access to new spaces like the internet *through and with* these particular organizings brings a wider control over possible localized understandings by

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<sup>67</sup> Though there are a select number of segments available to general public, and access points for more are at select universities.

<sup>68</sup> Few critical discussions of technology use and/or digitizing archives is available, and rarely focuses on needs beyond restoration. See again Klingeböck; Franz et al; Olsson; Kirchoff, Schweibenz and Sieglerschmidt; Manoff has a critical approach, utilizing the Derridian understanding of archivization as more politically agential.

<sup>69</sup> “Abstractions severed from the doings of living people, fed back to the people as slogans” (Rich, 213).

some of the same assumed values of traditionalized Hhistory<sup>70</sup>. The communicative structure requires interviewees like Abraham Traub, Maria Scheffer, Ida Russ, and Edith Laurri become examples and clips associated with certain keywords on the problematically created web structuring the VHA. Those telling their stories become the ‘artifacts’ for traditionalized Hhistoricizing practices; stagnated pieces fetishized as ‘complete’, videos as virtual objects on hyper-spatial shelves to be moved around in the economy of archival relations. This mainstreaming process of accepting OH methodology has merely fit it to the structural needs of traditionalized Hhistory. The VHA, in a nod to the larger ideology of archival structure, erases the intentional, largely feminist aspects of OH by flattening the process and enacting a top-down organizing system based in possessive nostalgia<sup>71</sup>. It denies principals intrinsic in the ideological purpose of the genre, utilizing individuals in a new mediascape, yet old-fashioned economy; amassing a quantitatively-based system *in the employment* of qualitative-based methodology. The very methodology of OH becomes product, domesticated for the same processes that it, as a genre, has been trying to destabilize.

Roland Grele discusses some of these problems:

The sad condition of our theoretical knowledge about [OH] and the lack of serious efforts to think through exactly what an oral interview is or should be, how it is analyzed, or for what purposes, has resulted in a situation of endless activity without goal or meaning. As a result, [OH] has not become a tool for a serious analysis of the culture (42).

The industrial methodology employed by the VHA follows “the condition of possibility for genocide: the impulse to quantify, modularize, distantiate, technify, and bureaucratize the

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<sup>70</sup> Most often discussions on digitizing glorify possibilities and/or mourn ‘physical’ spaces (see Niegaard (2001)) or only discuss technical use (see again Franz et al.); But Hart, Bains and Jones (1996) compare the unseen architecture of internet to imperial structures of libraries.

<sup>71</sup> Discussed in chapter three.

subjective individuality of human experience” (Bauman, in Presner, 3). Though with some political aims worthy of valor, it is sloppy and typical. This taxonomic objectification removes the power of definition from those interviewed. It is a co-option and commodification with dangerous potentials. It *is* subordination. As Franz Fanon asks of transitional governments in postcolonial spaces, perhaps this reuse of the archive “limits [political] claims to the taking over” of structures “formerly occupied” and created by those who have done such violence; perhaps “its mission has nothing to do with transforming” (Fanon, 3). The process of archiving itself cannot, does not and is not built to be reflexive about this, not in its metaphysical structure. To do OH justice to its own politics, we must attend to what happens in the intersubjective, intra-active, shifting relations when OH *itself* mingles. How do we contextualize, understand and strategically work! with/around these dangers as we move toward new methodology?

*Performing (Domestication): The VHA Through Ally Practice*

There has been much gender-based discussion about the Shoah in recent years. Much of this scholarship focuses on women-specific experiences of what is termed ‘sexual assault’ and how it has been left out of hegemonized narratives of the Shoah, theorized for reasons of shame for moral decency, male-centered history creation, etc. (among many: Petó 2003, 145; MacKinnon; Fuchs; Sinnreich; Saidel). And these reasons may ring true in multiple ways, but this is specifically complicated in Shoah scholarship, as Petó describes, because contemporary language of rape was developed in the 1970s and retroactively applied (2003, 145). This not only troubles translation in language, but in prescription and value, in connections with what may



(now, then and/or in the future) fall into differing categories. There are many possibilities why these interviewees shrug off, do not elaborate on or hierarchize instances of sexual assault during the Shoah. I cannot begin to understand exactly why this is as a phenomena nor individual experience (as if those remain stagnant). But, politically, an important practice advocated by survivors and social (justice) workers is that the survivor is their own expert; that as an ally it is inappropriate to tell them how to heal, what to do, how to act or how to qualify their experience<sup>72</sup>. Can not it be understood that maybe, just as the interviewees say, (for) this (it) isn't their priority?

If it is still too difficult to let *them* decide this, let's do an exercise: Perhaps part of it not being spoken of, or in depth or with great care, is that maybe other things were just more impressionable. Perhaps it has to do with sexual assault having differing social meanings in the myriad of contexts overlapping in the collection and peoples' lives, or how we have no way of understanding or knowing other sexual assaults experienced outside of occupation/camp life, how comfortable they felt during the interview, or even how hegemonized narratives have shaped what they deem important; all of them or none of them. However, even if hegemonized narratives which trivialize sexual assault have shaped and influenced, this *is* the way they live their lives. And even if other scholarship or survivors speak differently, this is how *they* answered the questions in *this* archive. To prescribe the 'reason' as a dupe of hegemonizing narrative (although it is critical to remain aware of institutional prejudices), is paternalistic<sup>73</sup> and entitled, devaluing the discussion offered by the survivors themselves. It disallows them intention or

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<sup>72</sup> For more information and tactics, visit <http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/articles/what-do-you-say-to-a-rape-victim/>

<sup>73</sup> For in depth discussion on 'reason' as misogynistic in Western philosophy, see Lloyd (1984).

agency. Cannot we question our more current understandings of sexual assault? What it does, how it weighs and *how we* utilize it? This is not, in any way, to devalue the gravities, complications and violences of what would fall under the scape of sexual assault at any time and in any context. What I hope to do is validate them, all of them, and all that they inter(ra)sect with, tie to, fall under and escape. To not prescribe appropriate understanding, value and behavior or reactions to any idea or occurrence.

It can help to think through Alejandro Baer's lens that "the present is inevitably the site for all past representation and knowing" (498). That 'we', as contemporaries, cannot have Hhistory except through its division from 'the present'. This particular divide of Hhistoricizing stalls connection and understanding of ourselves and our worlds in many ways. This linear thought process often makes only specific and nostalgic connections possible. By this, I mean 'today's' understandings connecting and coding past occurrences<sup>74</sup>. What would happen if we localized these processes more, even in our Hhistoricizing? If the 'experts' did not decide the meaning and critical value of the experience of the 'subjects' and how it relates to, inter(ra)acts, overlaps and connects with the present; if the 'experts' did not decide what was real or a product of hegemonicized narratives influencing the 'subject', but listened to what the interviewees said things meant and ordered them from there<sup>75</sup>?

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<sup>74</sup> David Halperin (1993) critiques this in Hhistoricizing sexuality/sexual identity. I elaborate on this point in chapter three.

<sup>75</sup> Presner explains "it would take a viewer 24 years to watch every testimony, assuming one watched 12 hours a day, 365 days of the year (and could understand 34 different languages)" (5) making this a seemingly impossible task. However, the videos were all watched and indexed by hand (ibid., 17). Presner suggests a crowdsourcing interface in which segments can be tagged and untagged by users in efforts toward shifting relationalities (27).

Feminist OH practice and theory has struggled with this, developing increasing efforts to contextualize and embed reflexivity in processes and publications so as to value both the ‘subject’s’ understanding as well as the contemporary researcher/academic’s, so both or neither are considered experts. I cannot say if these kinds of moves would ever be possible in the traditionalized structure of an archive, nor does reflexivity and contextualization always justify ideological violences intrinsic in many of these practices. But it does seem blatantly paternalistic and elitist to act as if ‘we’ can decide what is significant and authentic in the experiences of ‘others’ (subject:researcher), or to co-opt them into our current political aims and labels. Who are we to say that hegemonized narratives are not as much part of understanding and experience as ‘alternative’ ways of thinking? To try and divide here seems to be in nostalgic aim of discovering some sort of ‘genuine’ experience, ignoring the value-laden decisions of what is assumed genuine. And it seems obviously targeted for current researchers wanting to pull out ‘true’ understandings, to create ‘new’ ‘untold’ Hhistory. One of the explicit goals of OH is for stories to be told *by* the people in *their* understanding, and to recognize the intersecting, intra-acting, blurry spaces in their experience, their oppression, their lives. What is the point if we are just going to fetishize, stratify, label, and hierarchize their ‘oral histories’ according to other understandings; or according to anything?

By taking this consent away from the interviewees and hierarchizing and labeling their experience, the VHA is directly perpetuating rape culture<sup>76</sup>. Not by increasing discussion, but by enacting systems of domination over survivors about their assaults. If we really take to politics embedded in feminist and anti-oppression work! battling rape culture as much as those embedded in OH, are we ready to let this go? To allow these people to *not* discuss it, *not* qualify it, to *not* give it a keyword? Of course silencing often works as violence, and qualifying past occurrences with new understanding can be an empowering political strategy. But *who* is deciding that these people are silenced? *Whose* false consciousness is at play here? And yes, years of hegemony have surely influenced their ways of qualifying it, and this may even be a silencing tactic, but, really: so what? Who are we to say that what these people feel about their own oppressions is invalid? Who are we to say we know better? Who are we to take them up and speak for them with our newest radical qualification of understanding and historicizing? How could this process produce any sort of ethical outcome?

Instead of saying we must uncover these truths so that we may understand the past (through the present) to build coalition to change hegemonized understandings, are we perhaps willing to ask ourselves why we are so bent on having these linear historical groupings even at the expense of belittling the ways in which those who experienced whatever topic qualify,

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<sup>76</sup> Joyce Williams explains that this concept has no specified origin or definition, but Margaret Lazarus' 1975 documentary of this name takes first credit for doing so (*Blackwell*). Dianne F. Herman (1984) discusses, particularly in the U.S., sexuality and violence as linked, and models of "heterosexual intercourse [as] based on a rape model of sexuality" (46), which work together in an institutional structure making rape possible, regular and accepted (for a contemporary breakdown of rape culture by young U.S. activists, see *Our Hidden Culture* at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nv3Kz\\_CluTE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nv3Kz_CluTE)). Sexual assault is used for oppression in myriad ways, a strong theme being the removal of power and control from the victim. While I do not believe feminist/researchers discussing these topics wish to support these values, a large part of dismantling or maintaining rape culture involves the power of definition of survivors over their own experiences.

understand and desire to place it? Is this just another way we are “ignoring the uncomfortable ethical issues involved in using living people”, any people, “as source for our research” (Sangster, 92)? Reforming the structure or changing the keywording system is unlikely to shift violent hegemonized understandings or be transformative-- the spatializings remain. If we bring political imperatives of OH, if we bring political imperatives of feminist action, perhaps we should undo our assumption of Hhistorical requalifying. Can we extend unsettling to the Archive itself, to Hhistoricizing itself-- to projects emerging from Hhistorical research themselves? Because when asked the question, ‘if the archive is not keyworded, how are we to do Hhistorical research?’, the only thing I think is: What makes you so different? Top down processes are still top down processes. There *is no* politically correct ivory tower.

With the idealistic goal of creating alternative, less marginalizing ways of Hhistoricizing, OH theorists have forgotten to ask something critical: Why spend our time trying to egalitarize a Westernizing, linear and violent system like Hhistory?

What if we stopped? What other strategies could we have time, love, energy and space for? What new possibilities could emerge?

### *Difference*

As Haraway calls, “feminists have to insist on a better account of the world; it is not enough to show radical [Hhistorical] contingency and modes of construction for everything” (2000, 84).

Scott believes that Hhistorians should be accountable for shifting identities, uses and manifestations by not acting as if these constellations are pre-established entities to be articulated, or that their locations will not change (792), and feminist ethnography (like politicized becomings of OH practice) has been proposed as practice which “questions the power, authority, and subjectivity of the researcher as it questions the purpose of the research” (Pillow and Mayo, 158); but, I wonder, is this even at all possible in Hhistoricizing? Is this domesticating practice not what Hhistoricizing is all about? “To think that one can inhabit territory and then change the rules is a fallacy because the rules and the territory are not separable; they are mutually constituting” (Oyěwùmí, 25). So why the felt need to occupy this territory, the territoriality of Hhistory, at all? As Dipesh Chakrabaty asks:

Why is [Hhistory] a compulsory part of education of the modern person in all countries today including those that did quite comfortably without it until as late as the eighteenth century?... We know that this compulsion is neither natural nor ancient... the reason for this lies in what European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together: the universalization of the nation state as the most desirable form of political community.... ‘Economics’ and ‘history’ are the knowledge forms that correspond to the two major institutions that the rise (and later universalization) of the bourgeois order has given to the world-- the capitalist mode of production and the nation state (‘[Hhistory]’ speaking to the figure of the citizen) (Chakrabarty, 19).

Are their stories and strategies which werk! with “an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different-- and power differentiated-- communities” (Haraway 2004, 85), toward similar political goals without having to Hhistoricize, archive or institutionalize? To werk! better toward transformative politics? Perhaps it is not that groups should explain their values, tell their truths, “rather, the requirement that they explain themselves should itself be investigated” (Towle and Morgan, 492). In the next

chapter I attempt to use quantum feminist and posthuman understandings to investigate this requirement further and make offerings toward difference.

# A Quantum Feminist, Posthuman Discussion on Hhistoricizing: The Desubjectification of Canonizing, Separatism and Presenting Absence

## Chapter Three

*Recruiting previously excluded subjects into a nationalist regimen [Hhistorical narratives] can be a way of using time to unmake forms of nonnationalist relationality (Ferguson in Dinshaw et al., 185).*

### *Introduction*

Throughout this thesis, I have scratched at mainstreamed structures of what has become an unquestioned, celebrated structural tactic of anti-oppression activism: Hhistoricizing. In this final chapter I continue with offerings of differences in legibility, value and tactic by enflaming the constellatory alliance of metaphysical activist anti-oppression werk!<sup>77</sup> and quantum feminist posthumanism to trace what and where power, time, love and energy are guided.

Canons of feminist understanding and Hhistory have been widely criticized by feminist authors for their whiteness and erasure of voices and actions of people with multiple marginalized markers<sup>78</sup>. Many responses to this critique have been through the creation of alternative canons, museums, archives as well as efforts to reform gaps by representing previously marginalized

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<sup>77</sup> It is in feminist/queer/anti-oppression political/social activism that theory as such can be embraced as spatializing/organizing structure, cognized explicitly in how much of feminist and queer theory comes from/for/with political activism in ways of learning and unlearning (calls to 'unlearn' privileges is frequent in activist workshops and graffiti and writing; this term has been used by Gayatri Spivak who later (2013) rephrased this in a call to utilize privilege) in more ethical ways-- in efforts toward less oppressive models of understanding, being and movement. For example, Nira Yuval-Davis' conceptualization of intersectionality (2006), while an academic theoretical approach, is made specifically to recognize differing kinds of energy gathering, allowing differing coalitional leadership and practice.

<sup>78</sup> See again hooks (1995), Burton, Chen, collective statements by The Combahee River Collective, and Incite!, The Crunk Feminist Collective, among others.



subjects in projects and discourses<sup>79</sup>. I support the critique that these canons are noninclusive, but argue not for additive reform and creating more subjects (“such a waste of energy is perhaps unavoidable at certain stages of the struggle; it need not, however, become the end point in itself” (Minh-ha, 85)). This does not trouble the underlying assumption of a hierarchical Western Cartesian human subjecthood so “the concept of autonomy, which is central to liberal humanism in its masculinist formulations, gets kicked around a bit, only to reappear in revised forms that extend agency to previously oppressed groups-- women, patients, global others-- without any thoroughgoing inquiry into the efficacy of *any* formulation of autonomy as a privileged bioethical concept” (Shildrick, 32). Nor does it trouble “the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white as fixed immutable identities), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, and of its notions of subjects, origin and cause” (Scott, 778).

Donna Haraway critiques many efforts of universalizing and canonizing when explaining that many contemporary feminists “taxonomize the women’s movement to make [their] political tendencies appear to be the telos of the whole ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time” (1991, 156), it is a matter of segmenting, classifying and co-opting to hypostatize entities as legible in this narrativizing, linear structure, domesticating difference into certain understood allowances. “By remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox [Hhistory], these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference” (Scott, 777), they maintain Hhistoriography’s “structural conservatisms” (Danbolt, 101). In this chapter I discuss how Hhistoricalize “taxonomies of

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<sup>79</sup> See previous chapter.

feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation” (Haraway 1991, 156) and what counts as objects, subjects, bodies or relations have specifically Westernizing, liberal hierarchies of priority and recognition. In my imperative, I hope to trace diffraction patterns of deunifying subjectivity in coalitional politics, as assisting and marking each other.

Much has been written about the co-option and assimilation of differing groups through space (for instance, the universalization of ‘woman’ in 2nd wave/and white Western feminisms<sup>80</sup>).

Much less has been done about the co-option, misappropriation and dislocation through *time*. In this vein, I investigate the problematics of Hhistoricizing’s hierarchy of legibilized subjectivities utilizing theoretics of queer time. I move toward the suggested strategy of making an agential cut: demarcating particularized Hhistoricizing structures as violently nontransformative, and refusing to use them in a move allied with Lorde’s (1995) sentiments to shift energy foci from oppressors and create safer space (spatializations which enable difference).

I take serious Minh-ha’s warning that “nothing could be more normative, more logical, and more authoritarian than.... [speaking] revolution...[in] the well-behaved, steeped-in-convention language of ‘clarity’” (Minh-ha, 16). This call to transformative illegibility has traces of the queer, mestiza<sup>81</sup> and cyborgian. This thesis and chapter attempt to mark those practices of excluding difference to help strengthen energy exchange of the deemed illegible (oppressed) without co-optively translating in these shifts. I hope to use these theories as checking tools to

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<sup>80</sup> See Mohanty (1991); or Spivak’s 1985 discussion of Third Worlding.

<sup>81</sup> The concept of the mestiza is used by Chicana@ queer feminist theorist/activist Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) as conflicting identities thinking beyond binaries.

critique strategies used even in the name of anti-oppression, and toward non-hierarchical/oppressive spatializations allowing/enabling difference.

*So What do we do if we are not Subjects?*

One of the main political imperatives of posthuman and quantum feminist theoretical projects is dismantling contemporarily assumed unified subjectivities, citing them as Westernized Cartesian projects reeking of oppressive models<sup>82</sup> like racism, sexism, ableism, cissexism, speciesism, etc. Disintegrating unifying borders has potentials for destabilizing structures which enable hierarchical othering (which justifies socio-political oppression and material-discursive violence). Barad troubles latent frameworks, stating that “holding the category ‘human’ fixed excludes an entire range of possibilities... eliding important dimensions of the workings of power” (Barad 2003, 826). A Cartesian human subject approach is a particularized hierarchizing of connectivity, in which quantum and metaphysical connectivities are denied or denigrated as not mattering<sup>83</sup>. This arbitrary exceptionalism, or fetishization, of a human subject is “constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, [but] which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (Butler 2011, xiii) in the “cut together/apart” (Barad 2010, 245). Or, as Braidotti claims, “subjectivity does not and need not coincide with either the notion of the individual or

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<sup>82</sup> Braidotti (see 2011) participates in this discussion frequently.

<sup>83</sup> See chapter one on Lacan’s mirror stage.

that of a person. It is rather the case that these are [Hhistorical] manifestations of the subject” (2006, 125).

This technology of thought can help shifts toward less oppressive structures. As being hierarchical objectification (subordination), the understanding of bodies as segmented integrities based on Cartesian/Lacanian visuality and the division of ~~meta~~/physical is part of the apparatus enabling oppression. Part of decolonization and transformative politics is decolonizing the idea of bodies-as-such. Disabling this necessitates a transformative shift from politics-as-often-understood (which invite imperialist human exceptionalism); anti-oppression political goals need not be toward subjectification. How does this *matter* in a world of violently forced identity politics? How do we account for the lived-as-real phenomena of people, who seem so convincingly to speak, think, live and are oppressed as something-like-a-subject? If we are, as Lynn Margulis would term it, assemblages that emerge, disperse, intra-act, switch selves, are never stable, “how are we to account for the remarkable stability... with a certainty that endures over the lifetime of that species?” (Fox-Keller, 12). And how does this matter in/to serious attempts to think activist practices differently? These are large questions, which, through this chapter’s discussion, I hope to enable differing ways of addressing.

Cyborgian understandings of intra-active, phenomenologically situated bodies can help render the Cartesian subject-as-such irrelevant, and the tinkering toward differing apparatuses possible. The (posthuman) cyborg’s “defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components” (Hayles, 4). It is not only the material ‘things’ hypostatized to be understood as separate, which can then be mixed and connected to create

cyborgs, but “bodies [themselves-- those of people, of things] are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena” (Barad 2007, 13), intra-active dynamism. ‘Extensions’ of our understood bodies are not only metal, not only animals, or particles, or plants, but are in the social weight of our understandings. It is in *this* re-cognition that I would claim that “all technologies become bio-technologies” (Braidotti 2002, 215)<sup>84</sup>. In this move of including ideological structures as in-coalition with that which makes us cyborgs, we can recognize that “the human organism is neither wholly human, nor just organism. It is an abstract machine, which captures, transforms and produces interconnections” (Braidotti 2002, 226). Participation in teleological mattering space, the use of material-semiotic, ~~metaphysical~~ metaphysical structures and tools, creates us as cyborgs *as* we think. It allows intra-connectivity in which we are either always already cyborgs because ‘we’ are always already in relation, inco(o/r)poration with multiple other ‘things’, dependent with each other: utilizing technologies of thought, medical technologies or cell phones; our electrons exchange, our particles generate/die, ‘we’ ingest and incorporate ‘each other’; from the smallest to largest visual we are planes of palimpsests living upon and falling through each other. Or nothing of us is cyborgs because we are always already never separate-- legibilized separateness being part of the phenomenological apparatus measuring such.

If we recognize our assemblages, the exactly nonhumanness of our humanity, perhaps we can understand ourselves, our subjectivities as political gatherings, as coalitional politic in which atoms, electrons, forces shift together strategically, manifesting a political goal: me, or you. The boundary, however, is phenomenological understanding, as these subjects may seem and be

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<sup>84</sup> These understandings also ally with disability studies. See Chen (2012).

politically allied in certain places more closely than in others (what we see or assume to feel as the body, or, perhaps, an organization or identity group), yet are always much ‘more’, dispersed and diffracted, always already in multiple places and networks; intersecting (for example: people are always operating as/in/with/from intersecting identity groups). So, in this sense, if we can think of “the subject [as] a plane of consistency” (Braidotti 2006, 127), we can operate with recognition of politically organized networks without de-recognizing their elements of continued closeness *and* diffraction. In this move, the “processes that make self-certainty and either humanist or organicist ideology”, that is, subject-creating moves, are “bad guides to ethics and politics” (Haraway 2003, 8).

And as Hayles hopes for, the subjectivity of assumed people turns to “posthuman collectivity... ‘I’ transformed into the ‘we’ of... agents operating together to make a self. [This] gives ‘we’ a performative dimension” (Hayles, 6), in which participating as phenomena (i.e. the “*differential patterns of mattering* (‘diffraction patterns’) produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production, where *apparatuses are not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices-- specific material (re) configurings of the world-- which come to matter*” (Barad 2007, 140 original emphasis)) becomes possible; and coalitional politics become relevant to even a person understood as a unitary subject. That is not to say that difference is not important, as that recognition alone does not stop large oppressive structures which work violently upon gathered bodies and entities, nor to banally conflate how politics and hierarchies are spatialized through them. As Barad's agential realism, in which agency is not a property of individuals but the dynamism of intra-action, suggests, “separateness [is not] an inherent feature of how the world is. But neither...[is it] mere

illusion.... Difference cannot be taken for granted; it matters-- indeed, it is what matters” (Barad 2007, 136). That is, metaphysical bodies are and can be recognized as differing constellations of closeness, alliance and energy formation (agential cuts), and with this they are in mattering, diffractive, intra-active relations with the biopolitics of understood-as human bodies, racializations, affective relations<sup>85</sup>. Through this now impossibility of bordered, unified ‘human’, it can be easier to begin to understand all ‘things’ as technologies, systems and gatherings; gatherings which can and do shift.

### *Origin Stories and Temporal Co-options*

*Some very searching theoretical work on [Hhistory] and [Hhistoricism] has appeared over the last fifteen years or so, but there’s a tendency... to critique ‘[Hhistory]’ (meaning old-style [Hhistoricism]) as if this work has never been done. Maybe this is an index of the difficulty of reworking linear temporality: thinking nonlinearity over against linearity is hard enough, but figuring out the criteria by which different nonlinear temporalities might meaningfully be brought together-- figuring out how to make heterogeneity analytically powerful-- is exponentially harder (Dinshaw et al., 186).*

*What if time’s collapse into [Hhistory] is symptomatic, not [Hhistorical]? What if framing this conversation in terms of a ‘turn toward time’ preemptively reinforces the consensus that bathes the petrified river of [Hhistory] in the illusion of constant fluency? What if the very framing repeats the structuring of social reality that establishes heteronormativity as the guardian of temporal (re)production? (Edelman in Dinshaw et al., 181)*

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<sup>85</sup> Saldanha expands these understandings, explaining, “race must similarly be conceived as a chain of contingency, in which the connections between its constituent components are not given, but are made viscous through local attractions. Whiteness, for example, is about the sticky connections between property, privilege, and a paler skin. There is no essence of whiteness, but there is a relative fixity that inheres all the ‘local pulls’ of its many elements in flux” (18); Chen explains, “for biopolitical governance to remain effective, there must be porous or even co-constituting bonds between human individual bodies and the body of the nation, a state, and even a racial locus like ‘whiteness’” (194).

Perhaps most readily, it is easy to recognize Hhistoricizing as chasing after an origin story, something cyborg posthumanism explicitly dispels as nostalgic and essentialist, in which linear causality, entity to entity, a format of temporal progress in a quest for an original whole is assumed as relevant (Haraway 1985, 192)<sup>86</sup>. This can be understood through Scott's analysis that "[Hhistory] has been largely a foundationalist discourse.... its explanations seem to be unthinkable if they do not take for granted some primary premises, categories, or presumptions.... As such they create a common ground for [Hhistorians] and their objects of study in the past and so authorize and legitimize analysis" (Scott, 780). Hhistoricizing works through a retro-active imposition of "premises, categories, or presumptions" and segmenting, linear heritages and causalities which the contemporary Hhistory writer delineates as in-relation, or always-having-been-in-relation. Through this, the Hhistorian legitimizes their authority to speak for/about/codify that grouping (without the Hhistorical's consent<sup>87</sup> or necessarily even ability to identify as such), as it is cognized as part of their family, thus, I suppose, theirs<sup>88</sup>. Gatens and Lloyd explain: "we want to understand ourselves as different from our philosophical ancestors. But we want also to assure ourselves that there has been rational progress in the course of recorded [Hhistory] – that we differ from our ancestors on grounds which our ancestors could be led to accept" (7), and in this:

A concept such as 'tradition'... is... an important criterion for valuation, and practices that do not find legitimacy in [Hhistorical] traditions have been

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<sup>86</sup> In chapter one I discuss this quest for wholeness as projecting fetishizing, object-oriented world relations, from a Westernized Lacanian mirror stage.

<sup>87</sup> I discuss consent in the epilogue.

<sup>88</sup> Andrea Smith (2006) asks to "challenge the 'concept' of the family itself. Perhaps, instead, we can reconstitute alternative ways of living together in which 'families' are not seen as islands on their own" and qualifies the recourse to familial relations as such as a "result of colonialism, not the antidote to it" (73).



marginalized<sup>89</sup>.... the present is held up to the standards of the past, assuming a problematic reproductive logic.... the dominating heteronormative investment in [Hhistory]<sup>90</sup>... actions 'should not need to prove relevant to future generations in order to be valued today, nor should they be obliged to build on conventional models of tradition to be deemed significant (Román 2005, 15 in Danbolt, 102).

“It is precisely through the infinite deferral of authority to an irrecoverable” and thus unpeakable, unable to deny or consent affinity, “past that authority itself is constituted. That deferral is the repeated act by which legitimation occurs. The pointing to a ground which is never recovered becomes authority’s groundless ground” (Butler 2011, 70-1); it self-perpetuates. This process of co-opting, defining and employing for authority is not inherently different from co-options through spatial, gendered or racial stratification.

David Halperin (1993) and Robert Padgug (1979) offer critiques of how the universalization of understandings of sexual identities removes, flattens and misappropriates the contingencies of differing subjects and experiences of the past by codifying them as if in some sort of linear, genetic relation to that which we understand today as homosexuality. Towle and Morgan (2002) discuss how Western transgender theorists use spatial and temporal others (the nonwest, the past) to maintain a subject legitimacy by claiming mythical and primordial pasts, universalisms or primitivisms-- a sort of spatiotemporal contingency which, while helping to feel empowered and

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<sup>89</sup> That is, “specific rules of taxonomy and classification”, implemented in classicalized Hhistoricizing, “allow certain documents of life to be preserved and others to become obscure or marginalized.... archival documents make connections with the researcher’s spatio-temporal rhythms, creating a plane of consistency for specific methodological strategies to be deployed, further selections to be made and certain forms of knowledge, analytical themes and research outputs to emerge” (Tamboukou, 15); Danbolt discusses how queer activist uses of emotion, love, rage and mourning (which is feminized and thus delegitimized in Westernized politics) gets ignored (97-100); Also, much of feminist action has been informal, in ‘private’ space, writing not signed, dated or officially published, lost in activists moving homes (Baxandall, 226).

<sup>90</sup> See Dowson (2009) for the heteronormativity of archeology.

legitimate in some socio-political positionings, serves to degrade, relocate and mistranslate differing enactments into what the contemporary and whitened 'West' understands as transgender. "The institution of the 'proper object'" of Hhistorical study and thus linear genealogical connections to past political gatherings that, for whatever reason or political objective have been established as under the same phylum, "takes place, as usual, through a mundane sort of violence. Indeed, we might read moments of methodological founding as pervasively anti-historical acts, beginnings which fabricate their legitimating [Hhistories] through a retroactive narrative, burying complicity and division in and through the funeral figure of the 'ground'" (Butler 1994, 6). *Through the Hhistoricization of the Hhistorical*, the spatiotemporalsocial of the Hhistorical is stagnated, and the project of self-definition of so many of these political imperatives<sup>91</sup> seems to do exactly *not* this-- instead, it defines itself through the incorporation and definition (co-option) of temporal others, as both them and not them. As Clare Hemmings explains:

Even if one could 'go back' and find consciously or unconsciously elided bisexuals, with all the problems of retrospective [Hhistorical] processes implied, and then simply add them to the contemporary picture, a new set of problems emerges. Such an additive, inclusive politics and theory is linked to a larger politics of cultural redress, which even in terms of its own logic creates a never ending necessity for identifying the next excluded other to be incorporated.... Not only does this... maintain the structure of inclusion/exclusion, itself productive of minoritization, but such a vision is ultimately distopian, since its version can never be accomplished.... It is as if the perceived [Hhistorical] and cultural elision were simply an error to be corrected, a deliberate (but presumably forgivable) absenting-- in short, a failure of [Hhistorical] and cultural memory, rectifiable by 'remembering' bisexuality and setting the [Hhistorical] record straight (2002, 30-31).

The problem with "every story that begins with original innocence....[is that] these plots are ruled by a reproductive politics" (Haraway 1991, 177): an institutionalized assumption of a

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<sup>91</sup> Introduction to previous chapter discusses the creation of alternative Hhistories as in efforts toward self-definition, ebbing oppressors.

predetermined subject (though not only a human body, this subject could be an identity group, political movement, species, etc. which humans create as atomized affinity groups), which in its establishment as an original, authentic whole assigns it particularized linear genealogy. This re-located entity becomes falsely equated with/through contemporalized classification of understanding. This is a co-option and translation through the insidiously assumed lineal integrity of time, and through this reproductive-through-genealogically-defined-inheritance (Edelman in Dinshaw et al., 181), the Hhistorical-spatio-temporal integrity and location of that which has been assigned the status of an unobstructed original is obliterated and masked over; arrested into a a taxonomical classificatory system in which “the order and the links create an *illusion* of continuity.... This, clear origin will give... a connection back through time... to abolish it” (Minh-ha, 94)<sup>92</sup>. If these are what is valued as legible, the structure is inherently heteronormative<sup>93</sup>, among other things. Dialogues about differing intelligibilities and connectivities are shown as difficult if not impossible to write into traditionalized Hhistoricizing practices.

This is not a transformative tool for typically marginalized groups which often feel need to seek refuge in Hhistorical contingency/Westernizedly socialized legitimacy, as “we can’t build a society free from domination by fixing our sights backward on some long-ago tribe or city” (Rich, 227). As Towle and Morgan explain when discussing how “transgender and transsexual activists need not invoke mythical [and Hhistorical] gender warriors....to justify their

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<sup>92</sup> It is this same sort of linear co-option, displacement, ripping from one context into another without care for the qualifications of the bodies in their own understanding, in which, in the previous chapter, I claim that the VHA’s keywording of rape/sexual assault perpetuates rape culture.

<sup>93</sup> See Hemmings (2002) on sexual subjectivity requiring temporal consistency, thus desubjectifying bisexuality.

existence. (*If warriors are sought, they are here*)” (Towle and Morgan, 491, emphasis mine). Are there ways of working toward similar political goals without these historicalizing co-options/authoritative assignments? As Elizabeth Freeman, queer time theorist, wonders, is it “possible to think relationality across time without some concept of [history, does history boil] down to ‘[historicism]’?” (in Dinshaw et al., 184).

### *Political Action as Subject Gatherings/The Multiplicities of Uninclusivity*

I would again like to trace diffraction patterns, unpacking historicization as prioritizing continuous, object-style subjects and how this pigeon-holes transformative possibilities of radical imperatives. I would like to allow the idea of a subject to a particular political gathering, such as a nongovernmental organization (NGO). These subjects, entities or what-have-you, are acknowledged based on their continued legibility as a ‘subject’ (i.e. an NGO of the same name lasting for several years). For instance, in many ‘official’ feminist histories of the United States, black/African American women’s organizing and writing is completely unaccounted before the 1973 creation of the middle class, professional National Black Feminist Organization. Other black women’s organizing had differing goals and strategies than longevity *in the same timespace* as it was denied by large (white) publishing houses (Baxandall, 230-1). As “not all feminist struggles can be understood within the framework of ‘organized’ movements” (Mohanty 2003, 76), part of this absence coalesces with intersectional, mestiza workings frequently getting subsumed under encompassing meta-identities more readily recognized by hegemonized singular groupings. For instance, in many historicalizing canons, the practices of black women

is *either* subsumed under generalized black organizing (in which ‘people’ is often assumed as male in political imperatives) *or* the white-assumed politics of feminist organizing (Berry, x)<sup>94</sup>, and other intersections of people of color are often not represented in even that. This posits these interference patterns as non-agential nor in constellation. But “neither the fact that black women have not organized collectively in huge numbers around the issues of ‘feminism’ ... nor the fact that we have not had access to the machinery of power... negate its presence in our lives or place us in a position of dependency” to more well-known ‘feminists’ (hooks 1995, 278). Canonical Hhistoricalizing works to divide and make ‘sub’ (thus lesser) these connectivities, even within the experiences of a cognized-as-singular human, when rather, they are intra-connective assemblages of gathering and degathering, diffracting, quantum (leaping) political constellations.

And perhaps more importantly, much of feminist organizing, specifically feminist of color organizing (recognizably The Combahee River Collective), has political goals *explicitly* to “challenge to the singular subject of traditional philosophy and liberal feminism” through werk! with/of multiple, intersecting identities, and *because* (even with their named organizational unity) of “standpoint[s] of intersubjectivity” which specifically require organizing and coalition beyond singular dimension (Fowlkes, 106-7). Many of these goals are mattered/enacted/organized with practices which, in their structure, are illegible to prioritized consistency of time. Many feminist/anti-oppression practices intentionally werk! toward not having a “permanent center of organizing. [Because] by constantly shifting the center to communities that face intersecting forms of oppression, we gain a more comprehensive view of the strategies needed to

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<sup>94</sup> Kemp et al. discuss how black women’s struggles have not been “traditionally defined as feminist” (133).

end all forms of violence” (Smith et al., 4). The intentional quantum-style political strategy simultaneously embeds itself as illegible to traditionalized subject-based understandings.

It is *explicitly* relevant that that-which-is un-understandable in hegemonized history, the ignored enactments, are often movements of/by/with/for people of intersecting marginalized identifications. It is not coincidental that this enfolds that which Cartesian Western politics need to denigrate in order to justify and uphold their own self-privileging, this is exactly part of the constellatory politics which work to delegitimize, devalue, assign-as-nothing groupings (i.e. colonialism’s ‘Dark Continent’) for dominance. This de-recognition of non-liberalized strategies/formations/gatherings/constellations, along with the violent assignment of not-being-historicized as being erased or not worthy of value, care or agency in the world of global politics, is part of what Spivak discusses as the colonial strategy “to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary-- not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by institution of the law”, where not only are material bodies (documents, art, social, linguistic) strategically destroyed, but by disqualifying ‘other’ formations as primitive (progress narrative) or inefficient, the law requires *becoming* unsubjected through particular articulation (1994, 75-6).

It is in this sense that we can see the enactment of Derrida’s concept of archive fever, in which “survival depends on preserving, as an archive anticipating a future whose very anticipation effectively prevents it, an order kept in motion by its persistent repetition and, in consequence, by the death drive” (Edelman, 154), that is, the structure of the archive and linear reproductivity themselves build the desire to preserve and create lineage. Survival is considered of value (based

on hierarchies of animacy and life/nonlife<sup>95</sup>) and is constituted as a temporally continuing singularized subjectivity (or ‘the One’) and/or lineage. This establishing of lineage not only stalls possibilities of the quarantined Hhistorical subjected, it installs the same driving structure with a future obligated “to conform to the past, to affirm itself as survival within an economy of reserve” (Edelman, 160).

Spivak states:

Differing knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are themselves dependent on myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject. Yet the continuous and homogenist deliberative consciousness symptomatically requires a continuous and homogeneous cause for this effect and this posits a sovereign and determining subject. This latter is, then, the effect of an effect, and its positing a metalepsis, or the substitution of an effect for a cause (1988, 13).

Naturalizing Hhistoricizing as a political goal, “we see translations of racism and colonialism into languages of development and underdevelopment, rates and constraints of modernization” (Haraway 1985, 204) in which having Western-understood Hhistories equates to gaining a subjectivity and thus being worthy of a differing place in hierarchizing power structures. This pattern is not innocent, and the stratifications inherent in Western models of Hhistoricizing are not erased when new parties are acknowledged as valid within its process. This legibilized articulation is itself an erasure of this subjugated knowledge, and thus the law sets the marginalized/oppressed into an unsolvable paradox in which having a ‘Hhistory’ becomes a necessary goal to ebb oppressors, yet serves to obliterate exactly the H(?)historicalization. This is a boundary drawing project in which what counts as subject must not be multiple, exchange energies or simultaneously participate in multiple movements.

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<sup>95</sup> For discussion of these hierarchies as based in racialized and abelist values, see Chen (2012).

In this application, we can see how subject-making in the process of historicizing and canonizing is an exclusionary process. Historicizing *is* the practice of a specifically Western Cartesian subject-making, a subject of prioritized unified nomological longevity and future-confining heteronormative reproductivity. It is “the unifying aspect of experience [that] excludes whole realms of human activity by simply not counting them as experience, at least not with any consequences for social organization or politics” (Scott, 785), and “polyvocality disappear into political taxonomies that try to establish genealogies” (Haraway 1991, 160). The political assemblages which *werk!* toward a specific goal, i.e. opening affordable daycare, and then disband, not *werk!*ing toward or achieving a sort of genealogical, reproductive longevity, are ‘ignored’. These differing understandings of connectivities, these quantum diffracting possibilities of activist practices, are rejected. This enables intrinsic marginalizations of that which does not fit the Cartesian ideal (white, male, able bodied, heterosexual, human, etc.), or, through the creation of alternative/reform of histories, allows for a only particular politics in which these constellations get fetishized and domesticated into subjects legible for oppressive economies.

This is again a way in which “our current politics are continually reproducing the exceptionalism of human bodies and the aggrieved agential subject” (Puar, 157), in which an assumed and hypostatized subject’s isolation trumps differing, partial, fleeting, multiple, diffractive alliances. “Is this because it’s so hard to think the body’s temporality as anything other than linear and homogenous?” (Freccero in Dinshaw et al., 193). In order to *werk!* toward a transformative politic, queerness, anti-oppression and allies must *werk!* against temporal reproductivity, which would also include the normalized identified-as-subject based understandings of progressive



continuity. And as Gloria Anzaldúa reminds, “the terms *solution*, *resolution*, and *progressing* and *moving forward* are Western dominant cultural concepts” (in Fowlkes, 108).

“Quantum causes trouble the very notion of ‘from the beginning’” (Barad 2010, 245), as the recognition of constant exchange, diffraction and quantum leaps shifts specifically linear understandings of timespace and causality (ibid., 248), and allows for bodies as always already participating in multiple movements, spaces, bodies, times at ‘once’ (a metaphysical intersectionality). Through the application of quantum feminisms and posthumanist thinking, we can evaluate historicizing as with the exact structuring which anti-oppression struggles must dispel, and hopefully move toward differing tactics to build and embellish coalition.

Desubjectification is to value political movements that emerge, gather and disperse. Enflaming these constellatory understandings can help move to werk! “not in some debate over origins and precedents, but in recognition of simultaneous oppressions” (Rich, 227). I wonder, do we have the conditions possible so that if that does happen, if we do give up origin stories and werk! with a more cyborgian understanding of recycled and tainted parts, will we have an apparatus enabling transformative changes?

### *Separatism and Safer Space: A Personal Experience*

*You may ask, but how can we do this? How can we be separate? Let me answer that first: we are separate now, separate and hostile and unequal (Trask, 87).*

I was employed as an educator at an after school program designed to teach socially conscious media production to teenaged girls. I had never been in intentionally separatist space; and though

I had always had girled people as my closest friends, I vehemently denied that I got along with female-identified people and would never have said I wanted to be in a space with only such, which I understand to be part of my assumed heteropatriarchy. Though it was not intended in the course of the program, as all of us fell under the scape of the identity category ‘woman’, we began discussing sexual assault portrayed in media, in our lives, and thought about sexism and misogyny. I watched a young person identify an assault by one of her best friends the morning after it occurred, something (unfortunately) difficult. The women rallied around her, helped her frame it and recognize stratifications of accountability. She was allowed to get angry and to talk about it without feeling shame, with energy and support, and to call and tell off the boyfriend who had blamed her. This made me think of all the people I had known, assaulted without those framings, without being able to name assault, without space enabling that. I realized what safer space can do: while we will never be free of the effects of (othering) oppression, having less spatial energy for situational oppressors can make conditions possible for transformative coalition building, framings and werk!ings (productive absence).

### *Presenting Absence*

*Animate hierarchies have settled into their current life as a palimpsest of a long journey through Aristotlian categorizations, Christian great chains of being. Linnaean typologies, biopolitical governances, capitalism, and [H]istorical imperialisms; these are traces and marks of privileged views upon the world. To the extent these hierarchies have been used to enact zones of deferral, they have produced extraordinary fungibilities of entities in the realms that lie below the white male at the top, the kinds of exchange of matter that allow humans to ‘be’ animals to ‘be’ inanimate objects, while that equally fungible zone of highest privilege has remained largely backgrounded. This is not to say, however, that only the privileged take up these perspectives on the matter around us. For their logics are written into the textures of this world, and our enmeshment within it bespeaks our vexed and often painful complicity. Those of us who can*

*suitably duck them could be said perhaps to access the counterprivileges of biopolitical irrelevance (Chen, 233).*

The assignment of nothingness/absence *as* demarcation of that-which-is not valued to receive care or acknowledged as agential, is a strategy implemented by Western Cartesian oppressors in order to maintain a hierarchy privileging that which receives the assignment of presence<sup>96</sup>.

Quantum physics discusses the assignment of absence/nonmatter to space ‘between atoms’, as exactly not that<sup>97</sup>. For instance, in classical Newtonian physics, ideas of the void and black holes have been understood as nothingness, however, as Sadie Plant argues, “the blind immateriality of the black hole was simply projected by man, who had to believe that there was nothingness and lack behind” illegibility (Plant, 60). With quantum understandings, even the idea of the black hole, which has served as the signifier of ultimate void or lack, is a space of radical potentiality and materiality. Evelynne Hammonds offers an interesting alliance of black holes and black female sexuality through binary deconstruction. According to Hammonds:

It is not empty; it is a dense and full place in space.... I suggest that we can detect the presence of a black hole by its effects on the region of space where it is located. One way that physicists do this is by observing binary star systems. A binary star system is one that contains two bodies which orbit around each other under mutual gravitational attraction. Typically, in these systems one finds a visible apparently ‘normal’ star in close orbit with another body such as a black hole, which is not seen optically. The existence of the black hole is inferred from the fact that the visible star is in orbit and its shape is distorted in some way or it is detected by the energy emanating from the region in space.... In the case of black female sexualities, this implies that we need to develop reading strategies that allow us to make visible the distorting and productive effects these sexualities produce in relation to more visible sexualities.... we must think in terms of a

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<sup>96</sup> Teleological spaces, colonized subjects and marginalized groups are deprioritized in this hierarchical assignment; Bersani describes phallogocentrism as “not primarily the denial of power to women (though it has obviously also led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of the value of powerlessness in both men and women. I don’t mean the value of gentleness, or nonaggressiveness, or even passivity, but rather of a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self” (217).

<sup>97</sup> See chapter one on space as matter.

different geometry. Rather than assuming that black female sexualities are structured along an axis of normal and perverse paralleling that of white women (138-9).

Hammonds asks after differing, more localized intelligibilizing apparatuses and for intra-active accountability to distorting effects, or marks on bodies. That which is deemed hegemonically as nothingness or absence, is rather operating *with* that which 'is', and through making this intra-activity accountable, there are spatializations allowing for differing systems of value (intelligibilities). This kind of apparatus can allow for energy, time, love, concentration to disperse and gather differently. Allowing differing readings can act as relief, or less desire to focus on being intelligible in oppressive standards.

Absence itself is not nothing; rather it is demarcated according to particularized standards and allocated as valueless, illegitimate or nonagential. It is a radical valuing of 'absence' that perhaps holds potentialities for difference. Illegibility has been both an assignment for oppressive purposes by being read as absence and qualified as bad, and a taking-up for radical purposes of difference. Occupying illegibility has been a strategy in feminist, queer and anti-oppression work!ings. For instance, Mathias Danbolt (2010) discusses how in traditionalized Hhistorical documenting practices, the queer is left out not only because those with the power of definition do not want to acknowledge it, but also because queers have often destroyed recognized documentation of their queerness in order to avoid discrimination (95) and because documentation of activist practices has been used for policing and imprisonment (ibid. 101)<sup>98</sup>.

Queerness, instead has "existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are

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<sup>98</sup> It is relevant to mention that it is not only oppressed groupings which do not document in these canons. Petó and Schrijvers discuss how governments can make official documents inaccessible and how armies like the nazis were not always required to keep official records (2006, 42).

meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere – while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility” (Muñoz 1996, 6); that is, through that which is considered ‘low brow’, not true, or not valuable to historicizing evidence-based practices. Hammonds also discusses how because of the marks of racism and slavery, at differing nodes it is through “politics of silence” (132) and “self-imposed invisibility, [which] ordinary Black women accrue the psychic space and harness the resources needed to hold their own” in resistance to overcodified stereotypes and violences (Hine in Hammonds, 133). While Hammonds evaluates these political choices as fairly conservative, she also discusses how by “existing within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse and the empty (sic) spaces between, it is a location whose very nature resists telling” (Crenshaw in Hammonds, 133) in these structural narratives. That is, the recognizeably intersectional, the space between, tends to fail at processes of singularized articulation.

It is scary to even think of giving up a tactic like this. But to *fail* at historicizing, as it seems to be radically impossible to not fail at such a thing in projects toward less oppressive intra-actings, can be magnanimous. Besides,

Success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation.... Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world (Halberstam, 23).

In a project of difference, in respect and valuation of the absence assigned and enacted by/with/ onto marginalized and illegibilized groups, perhaps instead of trying to speak the unspoken<sup>99</sup>,

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<sup>99</sup> OH practices, as discussed in chapter two, have been worked with feminist understandings as if to respect nonverbals and differing ways of communicating.

articulate the locations and experiences of these groups, it might better serve transformative disintegrations of oppressive hierarchies to sidestep this sort of co-optive mistranslation and take a political separatist approach through *allowing* the unspoken to remain so; to radically deny that that is *not* being, *not* matter, *not* agential, and to *enact* absence of oppressors. If we are to truly enable this care, respect and difference of value/agency, how can we mandate a ‘speaking’ of the ‘unspoken’? This is *not* allowing for difference, this is requiring assimilation, and mandating the same values of legibility and relationality or *interaction* (rather than intra-action). It is a pathologization of object relationships through legibilized coding which “would also be to pathologize a great many kinds of long-standing, but politically suppressed, cosmologies. These include.... cosmologies dubbed *indigenous* that are less characterized by a categorical, stringent attachment to human exclusivity” (Chen, 214)<sup>100</sup>.

If “phenomena are the effects of power-knowledge systems, of boundary drawing projects that make some identities/attributes intelligible, to the exclusion of others.... constituted through and within particular practices” (Barad 1998, 106), what *matters* is constellations of closeness of energy and situationally drawn boundaries. But “saying something is so does not make it so. Making and using particular instruments in a lab does not produce whatever results are desired” (ibid., 108). These technologies or apparatuses enable certain materializations, or ‘outcomes’ (in the least linear sense of the word possible). These continual actings through these material-semiotic organizational/intelligibility apparatuses affect what matters because and with these structures. Halberstam discusses how “the desire to be taken seriously is precisely what

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<sup>100</sup> Chen discusses here the youtube video “In My Language” by autistic activist artist Amanda Baggs which shows and discusses the artists’ differing relationships to objects and forces than that which is considered normal or appropriate by ableist Western society. Video can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>

compels people to follow tried and true paths of knowledge production... They signal a form of training and learning that confirms what is already known according to approved methods” (6). Thus, in feminist and anti-oppression struggles, it is direly important to dismiss these biased naturalized orders of what is serious, valuable or legitimate and allow for differing matters/ings. There needs to be differing apparatuses, differing structures in order to create the conditions for transformative possibilities.

With a radically differentiated version of bodies as metaphysical, shifting, coalescing, gathering, degathering, diffracting phenomena, this agential stopping (or refusing to enact) these particularized strategies is *not* giving up battling the weight of oppression, nor is it pretending that Hhistories will no longer effect them-- *not* performing these strategies is in no way stagnation. Refusing, stopping, *not* doing, is not non-action or non-agential (not actually absence), but an apparatus of chosen difference; an agential cut of strategic and chosen separatism<sup>101</sup>; a safer space implemented in order to create the conditions possible for a differing kind of relating, cause, goal, strategy, apparatus, dynamism, concentration of energy to emerge.

I don't know what will emerge, nor could I possibly be able to imagine in singularity (of myself and outcome), but it *can* allow for difference to become legible to itself and its allying bodies in ways not so forcefully imposed upon by the oppressive bodies taking up so much space. This is “insisting upon accountability for the particular exclusions that are enacted and taking up the responsibility to perpetually contest and re[werk!] boundaries” (Barad 1998, 103-4). Insisting on a differing focus of energy. Not continuing to value that which has oppressively been deemed

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<sup>101</sup> Marilyn Frye explains the creation of feminist separatist spaces as “a controlling of access, hence an assumption of power” and in this, “there *must* be an aspect of no-saying” (364).

legitimate, not taking it too seriously, not feeling the fever to adhere to its terms (though recognizably it is a privileged position to be able to attempt to do this entirely) can be a strategy for creating the separatist, safer apparatus-space to create the conditions possible for difference. In this strategic spatialization, the possibility for differing apparatuses, differing collectivities of bodies, of political bodies, becomes a bit easier. It is a call to be increasingly accountable to the shifting and marking of bodies and the ways in which timespacematterings travel, embed, speak through/within/between them. And it is a way to enact this more ethically.



## *Conclusion Offerings: A Quantum Feminist Posthuman Approach to Alternative Apparatuses*

In this thesis I have worked to destabilize historicizing in effort towards anti-oppression. Through placing museum display, archiving and linear-temporal narratives in constellatory closeness, I claim that historicizing is uninclusive not only in traditionalizedly ignoring differing groups of people, but in the endless way it only allows for particularized translation into oppressive spatialized economies. I contend that working toward transformative politics is “unlikely to be adequately resolved by a recourse to a bioethical system grounded in modernist notions of the embodied [object styled] subject” (Shildrick, 33). This is part of “an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns.... This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist, patriarchal thought” (Lorde in Minh-ha, 85), and a dangerous trick. In order to work! for/from difference toward anti-oppression, “we need to move beyond anthropocentrism altogether, rather than to extend humanism to the formerly exploited others” (Braidotti 2006, 107), “we must be a bit more adventurous and more modest” (Shildrick, 33). We need to work! “towards a radical redefinition of political action” (Braidotti 2002, 245), adjusting the foci of energy and allotted spaces so as not to perpetuate oppressive modalities we so desperately want to dismantle. This kind of creativity is necessary for destabilizing oppressive power structures and enabling possibilities where “worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently” (Haraway 2003, 7). Since all this theory, all this activism, can be understood to diffract in each other-- if so much questions inclusion, historicizing structures, co-options of understandings and values-- maybe this is a quantum leap.

Through situating the spatializations Hhistoricizings frequently enable, I hope to affirm radical possibilities *of* difference. Perhaps in allying Hhistoricizing structures as taxonomizing and uninclusive, we can enact ways of valuing differently; coalitional politics as not just unifying human identity-gatherings, but connecting particles, ideas, rocks, space, electrons, not (w)holistically, but as allowing for constant shift, care, respect and nonlinearity, accountable to marking/marks on (phenomenological) bodies in “a performance of spacetime (re)configurings that are more akin to how electrons experience the world than any journey narrated through rhetorical forms that presume actors move along trajectories across a stage of spacetime (often called [Hhistory])” (Barad 2010, 240). These quantum intra(re)lations have direct political diffractions in nonhierarchical structures of intersectional anti-oppression werk!. In how they acknowledge multiplicity and connection, they always already have. Perhaps with the additional allies of these thought structures and terminologies, apparatuses can shift toward differing energy gatherings; difference from/for/by difference, not just in goals of ebbing oppression.

This calls for cognition beyond stagnating practices, for practices which incorporate forever shifting marks on bodies and strategies which make marks on bodies (the changing conditions of apparatuses by which we intelligibilize, are ‘part’ of, organize and enact) in order to allow for an opening up of possible methodologies we have not and cannot conceptualize in the current apparatus. Perhaps we need to rattle strategies, rattle the continuous, reproductive forces of kin (a ‘new’ baby Hhistory, a ‘new’ sisterhood). What posthumanist quantum feminisms have to offer is a way of explicitly celebrating and embracing the marginalized spaces of ‘incompletion’ and “starting from there, not from a nostalgic reinvention of an all-inclusive holistic ideal” (Braidotti 2006, 107), without linear co-options or objectifications. For “if feminism [and anti-oppression]

is set forth as a demystifying force, then it will have to question thoroughly the belief in its own identity” (Minh-ha, 96), all too frequently established through valorized medium/matterings of

Historicizing practices. As Jasbir Puar asks:

How would our political landscape transform if it actively decentered the sustained reproduction and proliferation of the grieving subject [bent on ‘survival’], opening instead toward affective politics, attentive to ecologies of sensation and switchpoints of bodily capacities, to habituations and unhabituations, to tendencies, multiple temporalities, and becomings? (157).

Don’t we owe it to ourselves to try and find out?

## Epilogue: Fisting Wormholes

As desubjectified, nonlinear constellations, bodies are gatherings of timespace collapse. Carrying “the practices through which [they are] produced” (Barad 2007, 180), they hold precious multiplicities of definition. In the foamy behaviors of quantum intrarelations<sup>102</sup>, they are matter marked in melancholic, palimpsesting apparatuses enfolding intrasecting bodies, and “every gesture, every word involves our past, present, and future<sup>103</sup>.... Unmeasurable, uncontainable, so immense that it exceeds all attempts at humanizing” (Minh-ha, 122-3). The enabled body: an intelligibilized plane of synthesized timespace. The body’s orifices: wormholes reaching into hyper-full, fleshy, enmeshed timespacemattering, ‘history’ present and diffracting.

Reaching into timespacematterings is no hetero-linear task, and its enactments are not solely dependent upon Humanist desire or intention (cause). In obstructing the conceptual heteroreproductive linearity of time, while acknowledging the weight of prominent intelligibilized subjectivities (through agential cuts), the specifically queer and nonreproductivity of fisting (Rubin 1985, 287) becomes charmingly aloof.

“Fisting involves the insertion of the hand(s)/forearm, into one of the bodily orifices” (Wadiwel, 495). While in its queer connection with the AIDS crisis, fisting is often framed as rough and dangerous (see Rubin (1997)), the “practice is by nature gentle... [and] requires care and skill on

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<sup>102</sup> At a scale smaller than atoms, there is so much fluctuating energy that it curves spacetime, meaning it is pocketed with blackholes and wormholes (bubbles or loops), giving it a or ‘foamy’ quality. This is called Quantum or Spacetime Foam. See Hawking (1978).

<sup>103</sup> “Chain[ed] to the [H]histories and geographies of race and colonialism.... There are the memories of exploitation and slavery, carried around by bodies” (Saldanha, 12).

the part of its practitioners” (Wadiwel, 495). Dinesh Wadiwel introduces a “lubricative ethics” in which he discusses the ‘human’ and nonhuman parts of an erotic scene as intra-active aspects enabling the act of fisting<sup>104</sup> (Wadiwel, 501). Lubricant, to Wadiwel, is the liquid spread on understood organs, but also the “elaborate web of communication strategies” required to make an act like fisting possible (Wadiwel, 495). This web can be read as a desubjectified consent<sup>105</sup>:

Arrangement of the body organs and other objects in the world..... It is the act of making possible..... It invites the other to enter into and share its world. *These openings are not only the result of active resistance to relations of force-- that is the product of contestation-- but are the consequence of actively facilitative practices that emerge from collaboration and reciprocity....* Consent in this context, is the way in which we open and transport ourselves in relation to others-- both human and nonhuman entities-- who are situationally positioned in the world. *Consent is... the positioning and assembly... the arrangement of the scene... which create[s] the ground of potentiality and pleasure....* In this sense, consent cannot be understood as being signified by a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’” (Wadiwel, 501-2 emphasis mine).

Consent is the apparatus enabling a spatialization to be intelligible or possible. The aspect of ‘yes’ saying is *part* of an enabled (consensual) situation (‘yes, I would like to be fisted’, or ‘yes, I

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<sup>104</sup> Wadiwel also discusses how “the lubricative engagement is too slippery to be captured by the vision of the appropriating subject that finds sexuality only through the knowledge provided by what it sees” (Wadiwel, 501), that is, it is not “clarity fetishism” (Spivak in Braidotti 2011, 204).

<sup>105</sup> Consent is a very important tool for movements working to end rape culture, in which consent is a practice during sexual and physical contact between persons verbally acknowledging and mutually agreeing upon what actions will happen. It includes respect for boundaries, feelings, decisions and ideas that people may have about whatever sexual preferences in whatever node they operate. Consent is a tricky issue, frequently based on liberal autonomy. While it is used in dire politics toward working out of the grips of rape culture, it is also employed in frightening neoliberal-colonial ways: Western imperial powers universalizing liberal definitions of ‘consent’ and what-could-be-consented-to so as to justify domination over others (See Abu-Lughos (2002), Appadurai (1996) and Mahmood(2001)). This has nothing to do with the ethics of consent. I briefly referenced consent in Hhistorical research, as an interventional model in OH (interactive interviewing) and to question the ethics of temporal co-option. With these acknowledgements, I hope to use this space to work! consent as a political intervention for more than just sexual relationships between people. Wadiwel’s concept of intra-active contextual consent holds some differing possibilities which I hope to work! with.

would like to be interviewed’),<sup>106</sup> but a fetishized ‘yes’ does not itself enable an encompassing consensual situation. Enabling consent in this intra-active, contextual way requires more care, attentiveness and accountability than treating the tool of reaching into timespacemattering as “merely mechanical” (Wadiwel, 502) or neutral. Consent “involves an intersubjective relay... that is ongoing, always negotiable, each gesture to the other lacking necessity and refusable” (Wadiwel, 501). That is, acts (kissing or keywording) assumed (by some) to be relevant to the same topic, are not inherently consensual. They shift the apparatus, and thus the conditions.

In this shifting acknowledgement, not just any-body can be the fister. Some bodies and acts, at differing nodes, are not attractive nor would spatialize so as to fist without undesired (oppressive) damages. And attempting an apparatus does not mean it yields the intended measurable outcome: fisting (or anti-oppression). To use a particular example between phenomenological human bodies: Just because you want to fuck me, does not mean I want you to fuck me. This could be for myriad reasons: I don’t feel like it, the bodies your body intersects and diffracts with and the space they take up (the ways you enact privileges) are not attractive or are harmful to me. Or, just because we want to fuck each other does not mean it will be possible or that anything goes: we may not like the same practices, we may not have a place to feel comfortable, we might change our minds. Without a lubricative ethic, without trimming nails, without arousal (conditions) proper to making space for the act, without the care and attentiveness and intra-active consent (not a hierarchized value of Humanistic, rational decision-

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<sup>106</sup> This also acknowledges the intra-active domination-tactics of coercion to say ‘yes’. While the idea of coercion has similarities with ideas of ‘false consciousness’, this is not so simple. The latter requires conception that there is a duping of a subordinated (less/nonagential) body, while coercion is forcing the apparatus to *appear* to yield the results a dominating party (spatial political alliance) desires. This is power of definition.

making, which itself enfolds hierarchies of Humans), the act of fisting can cause tears and harm in the delicate orifices; and the continuous focus on fisting as the hierarchized outcome renders differing intra-activity as not mattering.

Something legibilized as orifice, as an eternal black hole (aka wormhole), is spatial-- full of matter. Not every 'orifice' must be fisted (this would be an impossible task), and an orifice need not be defined by its ability to be penetrated. This taxonomical definition (of Hhistorical pasts, orifices) is an exertion of particularized, self-naturalizing authority that conflates *all* entry (which shifts matter and space) *as* the deemed-orifice *doing* what it does *by its nature*; as if enabling the orifice to (finally?) 'be itself' -- removing possibility of nonconsent. Thus, seemingly well-intentioned (that is, well-intentioned in its own logics) acts (for the greater good, for empowerment, for 'truth', to show that the orifice is an orifice-- a subject by this definition) may actually be forceful pummeling (imperialism).

I will again bring my experience with the VHA. For instance, I surmise that part of the reasons for Hhistorical research on sexual assault during the Shoah (and the established keyword in the VHA) is to discuss the insidiousness of rape and assault among humans, most likely in efforts to make this less. However, the interviewees *in* the VHA were not who was saying this was a place of entry (at *least* for them in this situation). The VHA's 'experts', even if with noble intention, authoritatively defined sexual assault among this body of VHA documented survivors *as orifice*, marked as continuously available for penetration. All penetration into this orifice, the contextualized Hhistorical research with this source, lacks a lubricative ethic. But as Wadiwel reminds: "the most fantastical and pleasurable projects begin with the lubricative act" (502). This

power, these politics can surely be spatialized in differing fashions toward less violent ways of destabilizing rape culture. There are so many other bodies *asking* for partners in these acts, bodies with which to build all kinds of alliances, enact in apparatuses in more lubricative ways.

When discussing fisting wormholes in the realm of Hhistorical practices, this is not to set up a hierarchy of the present (it cannot be separated as such). Hhistory and historical contingencies are not null, void or inconsequential because the conversation has been nuanced. It is exactly that these types of hierarchies are what stall transformative possibilities. Desubjectified consent is intra-actively agreeable, spatialized movement. It is not a positivist, linear, pathological search for reasons, but it also does not devalue how context is always shaping enactments and possibilities. It opens up “an ongoing project of training and cultivating ourselves to grapple more delicately with others, to dialogue more intensively” (Wadiwel, 502). Desubjectified consent is a caring, respectful ethic of alliance. Being an ally does not mean you need to own, speak for, be part of, or even understand what you ally with (translate). That is not alliance, that is consumption. Desubjectified consent allows for mutual illegibility in a way which does *not serve to enable domination*. Desubjectified consent is an ongoing project of de-hierarchizing particularly proliferated values and associations. And perhaps an adorning way to act toward transformative possibilities.



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