# one

chapter summary

This dissertation looks at new ways of reading *queer bodies* and *queer experience* within technological contexts. How do digital tools and platforms change the way we interact with affect (associated with queer experience and embodiment) within texts? What about the digital allows us to activate *sensational* reading experiences? In other words, how does digital media interface with queerness?

This chapter proposes /a reading methodology/ that leverages the critic's relationship to the text to open possibilities for interpretation and connections to the textual material. It explores the ways that reading practices across two different fields (digital humanities and queer theory) intertwine, and how this creates a new method for reading queer narratives in digital contexts.

First, queerness is established as something that can only be touched "at a distance." It is defined as a *desire for touch* (digital touch), a desire *that cannot be satisfied, redeemed, or recovered*. This impulse to satisfy, redeem, or recover queerness is observed in “paranoid” or “suspicious” reading practices, which seek to answer or discover the “hidden” meaning within text. These practices attempt to answer questions, but do so in a way that constrains inquiry, because paranoia only delivers the results that are *imaginable* within current the knowledge structures. To avoid reproducing these knowledge structures, we must look to strategies that do not assume full connections, like *feeling backward* and *queer form*. We value abstraction, which is necessary for bringing things into relation, and opacity, which keeps the unknowable nature of queer experience and identity somewhat in tact. We look at *Confessions of the Fox*, *These Waves of Girls*, *Borderlands*.

Second, we examine a similar impulse in DH—and a parallel across the status of queerness and data, which cannot be captured in their raw forms. The history of computing and media shows how tools were built in ways that are not neutral, and we find DH practitioners doing work that is critical of digital methods. Looking at the example of DH from the position of queerness we see more clearly the necessity of opacity, formalization, and abstraction as reading methods, and the real danger of reproducibility and totalization, byproducts of paranoia. We find parallels between queer critics and feminist DHers, who are doing something similar; we interweave Saidiya Hartman and Lauren Klein.

Third, we propose three values for queer DH, which is: novelty (the performative), vantages (the visual), and provisionality (the ontological). We see these examples in *voyant-tools*, *these waves of girls*, and /the orlando project/(?).

## intro touch via Rosenberg, Fischer, Munoz, Anzaldua

### touch intersects queer and digital, abstracting sense

If digital humanists and queer theorists are going to find some common ground, they might start with *touch*. Touch is a means of interfacing with the world, a mode of encounter between subject and object that applies to both digital media and queer subjects. The root of the word digital, "digitus," comes from the Latin word for finger or toe, and within the context of electronic media, it refers to a counting system based on ten digits[[1]](#footnote-1). Associations between the digital and touch expand from numerical computation to include the haptic connections made through the intermediaries of mice, keyboards, and touch screens. To touch something, the digits extend, the furtherest appendage still part of the coherent body, and establish contact. Touch relates to queerness through the desire for touching that which is untouchable. It indexes a lack of access to the source of its desire.

As a method of knowing based on feeling, touch can amplify sensation beyond the readily sensible. A complicated thesis about touch which this chapter will unpack: At the intersection of queerness and the digital, touch operates by abstracting its object through the intermediary of the sensible. This process of abstraction compensates for the core condition of queerness, which is untouchable, unknowable, and inexpressible. By transforming the inaccessible source into new forms, *queer forms*, queerness is exponentially sensualized and engaging. Within digital queer literary materials, touch is a *reading method* that works by abstracting the senses to provide alternative possibilities for connection.

### *Waves*: queerness (story) is frustrating closure, eluding touch

Queerness is concerned with touch and desire, and more precisely with *the desire for touching*. One example text figures touching as desire quite literally, with touch being a means of pursuing desire. This "hypertext," which is an electronic text format that links "nodes" or pages within an associative structure, enacts desire by tempting the reader through the various episodes of the story in order to achieve narrative closure. *These Waves of Girls*, by Caitlin Fisher, is an autobiographical account of the author's sexual coming-of-age. The narrative unfolds in a series of vignettes connected to each other by associative hyperlinks, which recount Fischer's adolescent experiences with men and women when she was growing up in England. Despite winning the 2001 Electronic Literature Organization Award, this "hypertext novella" draws much criticism for a formal structure precludes a straightforward reading experience. Through the profusion of hyperlinks, which connect one node to the next in ways that disrupt temporal and causal relations, this hypertext frustrates the reader’s desire for narrative coherence. The relatively comfortable and conventional reading practice of turning the pages in a traditional codex dissolves in the distracting and technical complexity of a narrative that requires what Espen Aarseth calls “untrivial effort” to traverse (1). An empirical study on reader responses to the fragmentation of narrative structure finds that the “heavy cognitive demands of the interfaces used by hyper-writers" lead to reader frustration, dissapointment, and low engagement (Pope “Where do we Go from Here?” 75). Speaking on *Waves* in particular, James Pope argues that the use of hyperlinks “present[s] a baffling range of choices for movement which actually led to a stifling of movement altogether” (“Significance”). Joining Pope, Anja Rau criticizes the overabundance of options for movement within the hypertext, as well as its poor design and lack of significant markers. She comes to the similar conclusion that these elements diminish the reader’s absorption in the narrative.

[![Watch the video](./videos/erotic.mp4)]

"DARE" > [arrow] > [arrow] > "I liked girls…" > "the lover" > "Only one of us is 15…" > "Jerk off…"

I want to draw attention to this disorienting feeling of reading this text. Episodes do not have a discernible chronology or progression. They are non-linear, and clicking on the links is disruptive to any sense of coherence. The expectation for narrative coherence and closure is continually frustrated by the work’s form. Yet, in another sense, the fragmentary structure of the narrative is exactly what constitutes its appeal, as it compels the reader to chase an elusive understanding of sexuality. In particular, the text continually defies the reader’s expectations about the narrator. In the final linked node, from the areads “and it was the most erotic year of my life” march across the screen in ticker tape (“And it was…”). This node is reached through two different sources, both of which feature sexual episodes between the narrator and men. In a novella that largely consists of stories about the narrator’s sexual histories and fantasies with other women, this node is unexpected. It checks the reader’s expectations about the narrator’s homosexuality against the possibility that she is more satisfied with men. There are other moments in the text that also create a similar dissonance from the associations between links. One of these associations occurs in the last node of the “beam routine” episode, when the narrator is about to perform her beam routine to sexually placate the man that she brought home. The link reads “I don’t want to have sex,” and it leads the reader to an episode about her experience with a woman:

I’m in bed with Jennie Winchester and I realize she want me to undo her pants. She needs to be home by 11:00 and needs to leave my place by 10:45. I’m kissing her but opening my eyes at intervals to catch the clock. At exactly 10:43 I unbutton her Levis and shove my hand inside, barely undoing the zipper. “I’m in bed…”

Now the reader experiences a previous node from a new link that casts its former meaning into doubt. Is the narrator watching the clock because she wants to make the most of her time with Jennie, or is she waiting to be free of Jennie’s presence? What before seemed straightforward now appears to support alternate readings. The reader’s confusion in navigating through *Waves* relates to the work’s central theme of narration as seduction, which reinforces an approach toward queerness as something elusive, a process that will never be complete. Narration as seduction works by piquing the reader's interest in the story, propelling her through hyperlinks across the various nodes, and repeatedly frustrating her desire for closure or resolution. The reader’s continually thwarted desire for narrative coherence enacts the themes of sexual discovery and seduction that the narrator experiences within the space of the story.

### Munoz's queerness as lack – not just a displacement though, but a displacement from which something else can grow.

I follow queer theorists who have isolated a core experience of queerness as displacement, a feeling of a lack. José Esteban Muñoz articulates queerness as something "not yet here” (*Cruising Utopia* 1). Rather than signify a forward-looking, or future-oriented desire, "not yet here" suggests a futurity established within the present. Munoz explains:

Queerness is *a structuring and educated mode of desiring* that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present… Queerness is *a longing* that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed *something is missing*. Emphasis mine, *Cruising Utopia* 1

First and foremost, queerness is defined as being about desire, it is a "longing that propels us onward." The ontological nature of queerness is founded in a lack, in a vacuum. This vacuum comes from the political and social environment that attempts to erase the existence of minorty subjects, particularly queer people of color. Even as LGBT groups appear to gain more visibily and acceptance within the intitution of marriage, and the military and workplaces, Munoz points out that such gains are trapped within the limiting, normative time of the present. [Queerness is being wrenched within heteronormative agendas—-IE the 2020 surpreme court decision that protects queer desire bc it protects straight desire].

### *confessions*: queerness and the denial of touch

This feeling of the world being "not enough" is what activates the full sensorium of queer affects. This works through the denial, deferral, or frustration of touch. For queer subjects, the desire to touch has always been a frought experience. In *The Confessions of the Fox* by Jordy Rosenberg, the main character displays how a troubled relationship to touch constitutes subjectivity. Set in eighteenth century London, this story follows Jack Sheppard, a young transgender male making his way as a wily thief through the London society. In the time before the pathologization of nonnormative sexual and gender identities, Sheppard struggles to articulate his difference, what he calls his "*Something*," from the rest of London society: "This something that set him apart from other coves [men]. Something that had caus'd him to dress his own chest in taut bandages… pinching at his ribs, throttling his every Breath to a forced shallow bird-sipping of the air" (33). The difficulty with self-identification and categorization extends from the main character to the narrative's genre, which unfolds as historical fiction overlaid with contemporary memoir. Sheppard's story is discovered in the present day by Dr. Voth, a rueful academic, also transgender, who immediately realizes the significance of Sheppard's manuscript for the historical record. Voth proceeds to annotate the document with relevant references and increasingly, his own anecdotes tangential to the narrative. In one scene, Sheppard is having a romantic moment with his lover, Bess Khan, a bi-racial prostitute who initiates Jack into the London underground society of "rogues," when Voth relates his own story about his former lover:

She opened her legs a bit, twitched them open, really. I caught my breath, audibly.

"Oh my god," she said, "you're such a lesbian."

She didn't mean it cruelly. And she didn't mean that I wasn't passing as a cis-man, either. Although, since according to her we'd fucked the night before, she knew exactly how un-cis I was.

She meant that she saw something about the quality of my desire: that *I could feel her even before I touched her* [my emphasis]. And that this was part of what it meant to be—or to have been, before my tits became property of the California Municipal Waste Department—a lesbian. That a woman moving in your line of sight could have an effect that was total, atmospheric. That you could be hesitant, incapable, and not particularly interested in establishing a line between touching and seeing. That you would indulge a dead love, dead in the eyes of the world, and valueless. A love that choked and burdened the mind, that might even be the very foundation of melancholy and despair. But, oh Reader, looking at a woman you really get a feel for the way that fire is a phenomenon of touch. And my point is, if you have every been a lesbian, you will not even have to touch a woman to know that. (169)

Here, desire is characterised not by the search for satisfaction, or the success of establishing contact, but by the sensual fullness of a lack. The experience of desire, of craving, wanting, needing to touch the desired object stimulates the imagination and amplifies sensations that would otherwise be replaced with more "direct" modes of contact. Associating this distinction between imaginary and real contact to the realm of identity, Dr. Voth's lover refers to him as a "lesbian," despite his having already transitioned to a male gender identity. The term fits because it signals not a gender identity but a *mode of being* that is more concerned with the visible, which portends the potential of connection, rather than verifiable contact. With regard to desire, the difference hinges on the role of the imagination in activating certain sensors and receptors that cannot be accessed in the "real," actualized world. Here, fancy takes on the connotations of the fanciful; desire grows in the realm of the imagination. But this does not mean the sensations resulting from this desire are any less palpable and sensual; on the contrary, such a desire heightens and indeed maximizes physical experience. This mode of desiring is what characterizes queerness in the text: a desire for something that, because it cannot or will not be fulfilled, amplifies the fullness of that desire. Touch, or the lack of touch, defines a peculiarly queer subjectivity in the novel.

In both texts, queerness is constituted by a troubled relationship to touch. In *Confessions*, maintaining the gap between sight and touch stimulates the senses beyond what's possible within normative expectations of sexual desire. In *Waves*, frustrating touch eludes satisfaction and complicates sexuality. The condition of being continually thwarted gestures at an affect of suspension or displacement that is central to the experience of queerness, an affect that we will now explore in depth, which we call the "untouchable."

## the problem: queerness as untouchable

this section begins to deconstruct the state of queerness as being untouchable. We cannot capture, grasp, or access queerness, because minoritarian subjects cannot be interpolated by dominant culture without being co-opted or transformed into the terms of that culture (Munoz, Anzaldua, Schutte).

* Minority subjects struggle to be read into majoritarian systems of identification, and rather experience disidentification, which manifests as a choque, a collision of feelings. Within this choque there is the incommensurable element, which cannot be resolved or verified.

We look into methods of reading that try to ascertain truth or verify facts, and we find parallels in methods from disciplines of science and history that are positivist (paranoia: sedgwick, haraway, hartman). We conclude here that the proper position is hesitation, restraint.

### Disidentification is a clash of affects

Queerness is untouchable. By this I mean that queer subjects cannot be accessed or known in the same way that majority subjects are within dominant culture. As readers, identifying with literary subjects is both dangerous and seducticve. Identities within texts are not stable across time and place, and acts of identification might collapse or overlook the complexity of experience. For queer readers in particular, identification often emerges from a desire to recognize within the past something that affirms queer experience in the present. Heather Love describes queer critics, "Like demanding lovers [who] promise to rescue the past when in fact they dream of being rescued themselves" (33). Reading in this sense is a search for reflection, community, or similitude, a link between past and present. This chapter borrows a theory of identity developed by Queer Theorists from mostly Latinx backgrounds and traditions, particularly Muñoz, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Ofelia Schutte. The work of these theorists, as well as that of Chela Sandoval, Norma Alarcón and Audre Lorde, all radical feminists of color, coalesce around a paradigm of identity formation that Muñoz describes as "identities-in-difference" (*Disidentifications* 6). Muñoz's identities-in-difference marshalls theories of difference that center moments of failed interpellation, misfitting, and unbelonging as the core materials of identity formation.

Due to the effects of what Muñoz calls the "cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny," queer people of color have been placed outside majority ideas about race, sexuality, gender, and class, that constitute dominant society (*Disidentifications* 5). As a result, minority experience is defined by a gap in identification, where the minority subject emerges in the failure to adhere to social expectations. Within this gap, dominant signfications of identity do not remain totally inaccessible to minority subjects. Rather, they are accessed according to a process of "disidentification," where subjects find alternative pathways of connection to that which remains beyond their grasp. These moments can be fleeting sensations of finding oneself attracted to something that is inappropriate, "to read onesself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (*Disidentifications* 12). Muñoz offers his own formative experience of disidentification from a childhood memory of watching Truman Capote on TV:

I remember, for instance, seeing an amazingly queeny Truman Capote describe the work of fellow writer Jack Kerouac as not writing but, instead, typing. I am certain that my pre-out consciousness was completely terrified by the swishy spectacle of Capote's performance. But I also remember feeling a deep pleasure in hearing Capote make language, in "getting" the fantastic bitchiness of his quip… I can locate that experience of suburban spectatorship as having a disidentificatory impact on me. Capote's performance was as exhilarating as it was terrifying. *Disidentifications* 4

This memory is distinguished by a powerful disjunction between opposite feelings, which consitutes identity from ambivalent affects. The exhilaration that Muñoz feels when he understands Capote's dig, the surprise of grasping its "fanstastic bitchiness," is attended by an alternative affect, one of fear of recognition. In this process, identification emerges in the space between these opposing sensations.

Acts of disidentification can be shattering. In "The Torment of Queer Literature," Kelly Caldwell explains the quandry of reading James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* as a transgender woman: "what if the only available act of identification is one of stigma and shame? Embracing queerness is often embracing abjection. Sometimes identification is loss and despair" (par. 4). Identification tends to center around these "bad feelings" which offer less fodder for political resistence. However, identification with more positive aspects of queer experience is hardly an alternative. For many readers, the more redemptive or celebratory narratives offer no consolation. The reader is stuck between recognizing their own pain or feeling guilty for not recognizing pleasure: "Either read a book like *Giovanni’s Room* at the risk of recognizing David’s denial and repression as my own, or read a book that celebrates queer lives and sex boldly and end up despising my own cowardice" (par. 17)

### Anzaldua's choque is a manifestation of incommensurability

The sensation of doubleness has been well explored by queer Chicana Theorists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. Anzaldúa's figure of *la mestiza*, or mixed woman, drawn from Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos's promotion of "una raza mestiza" [the mixed race], emphasizes hybridity as a structuring component of identity. Mestizaje is the experience of being mixed, at the intersection of two opposing forces, "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures," being able to contain dualities, such as male/female, English/Spanish, American/Mexican (78 in old). Mestiza consciousness, for Anzaldúa, is a tolerance for ambiguity, for existing in the middle space. This consciousness is characterized by what Anzaldúa calls the experience of *el choque*: "The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of referencee causes *un choque*, a cultural collision" (78 in old book). The affective experience of *el choque* or the *shock* consists of a bodily phenomenon where the subject receives multiple opposing messages that incite a physical upheaval. Anzaldúa explains that "the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity… The mestiza's dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness" (78 in old book). This physical upheaval is the ground from which the mestiza builds identity: "The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cu]tures" (79 in old book).

Cherríe Moraga points out that "it is not really difference the oppressor fears so much as similarity" (La Guera, 30). Getting in touch with the *choque* is a great challenge for minority subjects, and an even greater challenge for cross-cultural communication. The minority subject contains incommensurable elements that are not legible by dominant society. These elements are not only neglected, but avoided by society, because confronting the "stranger within" is a psychologically painful process. Schutte goes into detail to explain how the incommensurable operates in conversation:

In cross-cultural communication, each speaker may "say" something that falls on the side of the "unsaid" for a culturally differentiated interlocutor. Such gaps in communication may cause one speaker's discourse to appear incoherent or insufficiently organized. To the culturally dominant speaker, the subaltern speaker's discourse may appear to be a string of fragmented observations rather than a unified whole. The actual problem may not be incoherence but the lack of cultural translatability of the signifiers for coherence from one set of cultural presuppositions to the other. 62

As Muñoz points out, "The fiction of identity is one that is accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects" (*Disidentifications* 5). Subjects from dominant society can avoid entirely engaging in minority discourse. Schutte explains that "The speaker from the dominant culture is basically saying: communicate with me entirely on the terms I expect; beyond this, I am not interested" (62). Confronting the incommensurable is difficult because it requires them to step temporarily into the place of the "other", "that person or experience which makes it possible for the self to recognize its own limited horizons in the light of asymmetrically given relations marked by sexual, social, cultural, or other differences" (Schutte 54).

The feeling of incommensurability—of something missing, misunderstood, or misfitting—is central to queer experience.

### Sedgwick's paranoid/suspicious reading

(If reality is incommensurable, then what is the point of knowing?)

The reality of incommensurability points to ways that knowing will always be flawed, never complete, never self-evident. The illusion that we can gain sufficient knowledge into queer experience, that such experiences are “commensurable,” drives certain reading practices that critics describe as “paranoid” or “suspicious.” This is what is violent about analysis, the assumptions that we make about others being fundamentally different and fundamentally knowable.

* The tyranny of the visual: “At their base, such operations of surveillance and classification rely on the concept of immutable difference, on sharp boundaries, and on the possibility of exhaustively knowing the other” (Amin, Kadji, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez “Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social” ASAP/Journal, Volume 2, Number 2, May 2017, pp. 232).

Paranoid reading practices deliver results that are imaginable within given knowledge structures. To illustrate this effect, Sedgwick relates a conversation between herself and a friend during few years of the AIDS crisis, when speculation about the government's complicity in spreading the virus is rampant. At the time, Sedgwick wonders whether "the lives of African Americans are worthless in the eyes of the United States; that gay men and drug users are held cheap where they aren't actively hated" (123). Her friend counters this suspicion, pointing out that knowledge of conspiracy doesn't achieve anything on its own: "Supposing we were ever sure of all those things—what would we know then that we don't already know?" (123). Merely knowing that something is true, revealing the presence of systematic oppression, injustice, discrimination, does nothing to change the conditions of knowing. As Sedgwick explains, knowledge of a problem is not enough to "enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences" (123). Moreover, a paranoid or suspicious stance blocks out other possibilities for relation to the text. Paranoia often only affirms itself; reflecting and replicating itself in every surface, giving too much power to the act of exposure. The work of paranoia is never done, "for all its vaunted suspicion, [paranoia] acts as though its work would be accomplished if only it could finally, this time, somehow get its story truly known" (141). Like many other theorists, Sedgwick wonders what is the point of continually trying to reveal, unravel, deconstruct the injustices of the past. She searches for "some ways of understanding human desire that might be quite to the side of prohibition and repression, that might hence be structured quite differently from the heroic, 'liberatory,' inescapably dualistic righteousness of hunting down and attacking prohibition/repression in all its chameleonic guises" (10).

### paranoia and replication (the sciences)

In order to understand the ways that the paranoid impulse harm and constrain inquiry, it is useful to view it at work in scientific disciplines and for the purpose of historiography.

Some strains of scientific inquiry, in particular, shows us how paranoia enacts a self-replicating mechanic. Though it appears in much of literary studies, the impulse that drives paranoid reading is borrowed from a critical viewpoint in scientific inquiry that assumes a detached observer. Critiques of this position, particularly in Donna Haraway's work on primatology, attempt to articulate a new mode of feminist science that de-naturalizes the "natural." Haraway's research on primates reveals the ways in which assumptions and preconceptions from the (white, male) subject inflect the object of study. She examines how scientists bring their own investments to bear even in the seemingly benign questions they might ask, or qualities they isolate, as areas of interest. For example, primatologists working with the goal of studying social structures in the field often impose their own social structures by turning their assumptions of male dominance into "observations." Feminist scientists attempt to revise such narratives by emphasizing organization and cooperation among primate communities: "revisionists have stressed matrifocal groups, long-term social cooperation rather than short-term spectacular aggression, flexible process rather than strict structure” (19). Pointing out that, “Women know very well that knowledge from the natural sciences has been used in the interests of our domination and not our liberation," Harwaway asserts that such revision is about empowering the subjugated, reconceiving “female receptivity” as "female choice" (8). The creation of a subject/object split *reproduces* and legitimizes hierarchies of domination.

Oftentimes, new tools can obscure the ways that we replicate our own assumptions. The advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century allowed subjects to codify their prejudices as science, for example, in the pictures of American slaves taken by Louis Agassiz in 1850. These daguerrotypes, a pioneering practice in photography that uses light-sensitive chemicals on silver plates, show how the impulse for scientific classification impacts the quality and kind of knowledge that results. Agassiz, a Swiss anthropologist, came to the United States to study the physical differences between European whites and African blacks, by examining the shape and character of their heads and torsos, similar to contemporary studies in physionomy and phrenology that analyzed the exterior form of the human body. Agassiz's goal was to amass evidence to support his theory, that mankind had been separately created and whites and blacks were in fact different species (Wallis 40). Using photography for anthropoligical purposes, and organizing photographs to support a classification system, Agassiz's work demonstrates how the apparent "objectivity" of the photograph can mask the highly subjective motives for classification. Writing about the photographs, which were exhibited by the Amon Carter Museum in 1992, Brian Wallis explains that such images were organized to suggest divisions between "self and other, healthy and diseased, normal and pathological," with the insidious effect of "mask[ing] its subjective distortions in the guise of logic and organization" (Wallis 47, 54-55). The problem, Wallis points out, is the realism of the photographic tool obscures the ways that subjects harness it to solidify their preconceptions—"Strengthened by the seeming transparency of photographic realism, these categories and the divisions between them soon took on the authority of natural 'facts.' Supplying either too much or too little information, photographs soon muddied the easy distinctions between subjective knowledge and what was called "objective." (47-48). The more seeminly transparent the tool, the easier it is to wrangle it toward proving "self-evident" truths.

In this case, the apparent fidelity of the photographic tool to record "nature" in fact obscures the ways that using the tool only reinforces a preconceived notion of "nature." Wallis explains that, "Supplying either too much or too little information, photographs soon muddied the easy distinctions between subjective knowledge and what was called 'objective' (48). The photographs reinforce the ways that scientific tools, which appear to capture "reality," can be harnessed and manipulated toward the observer's purpose.

### paranoia and recovery (historiography)

Not only does paranoid inquiry tend to replicate the assumptions of the observer, but it blocks out other forms of knowledge. This is especially evident in the work of historical recovery, in the impulse to find "hidden" or "forgotten" meaning in textual and archival material. Recovery works by a self-legitimizing and perpetuating logic that attempts to render what has been left out, disregarded, or misunderstood within the logic of dominance. It is Jacques Derrida's *archive fever*, or the desire for legibility, under the auspices of the ruler, which animates the endless search for origins.

The stakes of recovery work are uniquely stark in the history of the Black Atlantic, where researchers must work to square the growth of an inhuman practice within a historical narrative of progress and liberalization. A tradition that rationalizes slavery with the right to property, that justifies war through the social contract. Black Atlantic scholars Lisa Lowe and Saidiya Hartman point out that the central paradox of studying the archive of slavery is the structuring condition of recovery. In her essay "History Hesitant," Lowe explains that because recovery work necessarily occurs within the limits of the authorizing power, it always subjects itself to that power. Rather that work under these conditions, historians of enslaved experience ought to examine this confining structure, "the archeology of knowledge through which the archive subjects and governs precisely by means of instruments that absent the humanity of the enslaved” (87). Researchers might examine, for example, how "the slave trader’s desire to record, measure, list, and account" weigh up against "rationalist claims to produce truth or meaning about the terrors of captivity, enslavement, or torture" (88). Saidiya Hartman similarly turns to the question of epistemology as the crux of the recovery work: “If it is no longer sufficient to expose the scandal, then how might it be possible to generate a different set of descriptions from this archive?" (7).

Hartman's central problem is what to do with an absent archive. She leaves us the paradox of recovery work: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (4). Hartman writes caustically about the impossibility of telling stories that have been left out of the record. Not only that we can never recover these stories (they are lost to time) but we can not approximate them with our current tools, with language. In "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman tells the story of Black Venus, the unnamed slave woman who appears variously throughout the "offical" record:

we could have as easily encountered her in a ship’s ledger in the tally of debits; or in an overseer’s journal—–“last night I laid with Dido on the ground”; or as an amorous bed-fellow with a purse so elastic “that it will contain the largest thing any gentleman can present her with” in Harris’s List of Covent- Garden Ladies; or as the paramour in the narrative of a mercenary soldier in Surinam; or as a brothel owner in a traveler’s account of the prostitutes of Barbados; or as a minor character in a nineteenth-century pornographic novel. 1

What draws all these iterations of Venus together is their silence, "no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said, or observed that she refused to say anything at all" (2). The fact of silence cuts deeper than the failure of history but is part of the condition known as the "violence of the archive," which denotes not only absence as a form of evidence, in that the physical records are missing, but also in the tools of expression, in language that cannot approximate the reality of experience, and in the audible discourse that dictates silence.

### affective strategies, hestitation, restraint

Within the dominant culture, recovery means authorizing the structures of knowledge that give rise to injustice in the first place. So what do we do now? There are affects associated with this kind of impasse. We hold ourselves back, restraint, avoidance. Lowe explains that

Hesitation, rather than rushing to recover what has been lost, need not be understood as inaction or postponement, or as a thwarting of the wish to provide for a future world. Rather, it halts the desire for recognition by the present social order and staves off the compulsion to make visible within current epistemological orthodoxy. 98

Feelings of hesitation, doubt, dissapointment are ways of protecting the archive of slavery from further exploitation.

To sum up: one solution to paranoid impulses involves is critical awareness, the ability to access the affects that come between you and the object of study.

The archivist must work within the discrepancy between reality and the historical record. Hartman's goal is "to expose and exploit the incommensurability between the experience of the enslaved and the fictions of history… the requirements of narrative, the stuff of subjects and plots and ends" (10).

### Heather Love's *Feeling Backward*

Given these difficulties, we allow affect to have its run.

Heather Love offers a reading strategy that acknowledges queer experience, particularly suffering, as unconsoleable. In resisting the temptations to redeem psychic suffering by queer subjects, Heather Love offers a strategy called "feeling-backward." This strategy opens a space for bad feelings without trying to recuscitate, justify, or transform them. She focuses on feelings such as "nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, *ressentiment*, passivity escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness," which, according to Love, are tied to "the historical impossibility of same-sex desire" (4, emphasis original). She examines the burdened protagonists from famous modernist texts like Walter Pater's *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918), and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936). Love argues that the shame and stigma experienced by these characters ought to be recognized rather than resolved. Instead of turning negative histories into sites of resistance or affirmation, these hurting characters might have full reign over their own darkness. And this darkness must be where the critic will meet them.

### queerness is a failed project, which is why it's so tempting.

The more hopeless and resistant queer subjects make for more tempting identifications. Love explains how these subjects remain beyond the reader's grasp: "As queer readers we tend to see ourselves as reaching back toward isolated figures in the queer past in order to rescue or save them. It is hard to know what to do with texts that resist our advances" (8). The reason that these subjects remain so unreachable has to do with the nature of queerness itself, which represents absence, loss, and failure. Love illustrates this quality by evoking a Greek myth, Orpheus and Eurydice, in which the lover botches his beloved's rescue by looking back at her as they exit the underworld. Love quotes from Maurice Blanchot's account of the story in "The Gaze of Orpheus," to describe what Orpheus searches for in the prohibited and doomed glance backward:

Not to look would be infidelity to the measureless, imprudent force of his movement, which does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and in her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, in her distance, with her closed body and sealed face—wants to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants, not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenditude of death. 50

Orpheus's downfall is his desire for a glimpse at what cannot be grapsed, at what remains beyond the light. This desire is not for "daytime truth" but for "noctural obscurity," which is always receding at the moment of pursuit. Like Eurydice, queerness emerges only to slip away, turning its face from the parched gaze. Can we be blamed for looking for that which cannot be grasped? No, because queerness has always been structured by that which is not, by what Love calls "impossible love" (24). Not only is queerness projected to fail, it is a project of failure. Love reminds us that "Queer history has been an education in absence" (50). In learning failure and loss, queer readers can only identify with what they have been taught to recognize as untouchable. Full identification, like Eurydice in the daylight, is prevented by design.

### identifying, but not fully.

Love proposes a method in which the goal is not to redeem queer subjects or resolve queer failure. Rather, the problem of identification is turned to a reading strategy: "I want to suggest a mode of historiography that recognizes the inevitability of a 'play of recogniztions,' but that also sees these recognitions not as consoling but as shattering" (45). Reading, for Love, can enact a "play of recognitions," which is a way of making fleeting connections that do not presume complete understanding. It is a way of identifying, but not fully. Full identification would attempt to wrench the subject from its suffering, and effectively transform it into something else. Rather that attempt to rescusitate it, Love looks to the ways that identity unsettles and dissolves subjectivity. She gives the example of Stephen Gordon from Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. Once considered too depressing as a model of lesbianism, recent critics have cast Stephen Gordon as a transgender figure. Love resists this label, maintaining that Stephen is “beyond the reach of such redemptive narratives” (119). The question, for Love, is not whether Stephen is a pre-op FTM (Female-to-Male), but how Stephen’s existential negativity can be read as an embodied phenonmenon, as “a social experience insistently internalized and corporeal” (108).

### touch severs, divides subj/obj

In short, for queer bodies, there is a dual impulse, a desire to touch and be touched that coexists with the inability for touch to satisfy, provide redemption, or avoid violation. Respecting the right not to be touched, some queer theorists pursue critical methods that prevent overidentification or overanalysis. They resist reading practices, which have been called "suspicious reading" or "paranoid reading"[[2]](#footnote-2), that seek to expose the effects of homophobic prohibition and repression with the goal of affirming queer subjects or recuperating their losses. Paranoid or suspicious reading is oriented around finding and exposing the pain and shame of the closet in order to turn them into sites of political resistance, liberation, or pride.

This leads us to the main problem with touch: it goes both ways. What I touch also touches me; one body impressed by or in collision with another. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that "the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold" (13). Touch engages a range of relations where power is not always reduced to opposition. The sensation of touch often obscures this dual effect. Some bodies appear to desire touching rather than being touched; sometimes, the desire for touch does not seek contact, but the fullness of desiring. it is bidirectional, reveals a subject/object divide.

## solutions: abstraction, formalization, opacity

### Touch reconciles – anzaldua, sedgwick, munoz

Touch reconciles the inherent connection between bodies, something that heteronormativity tries to suppress. For things to not touch, to be severed or "objectified," moves them into a relation of violence. Gloria Anzaldua explains that separation is brutal: "In trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence" (37). Losing touch is a prerequisite for exploitation. The sundering of "objects" from our touch primes us to take advantage of them. Colonial history is a case study in losing touch: "White America has only attended to the body of the earth in order to exploit it, never to succor it or to be nurtured in it" (68). Anzaldua's *mestiza*, birthed in the open wound of the border, "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds," is an attempt to bring together what has been separated (3). Those who live on the border know better than anyone–divisions between bodies puts those bodies into conflict.

Touch offers myriad ways of relation. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers touch as a way of connecting to objects that evades "dualistic thought," that is, in "binary" thought, where things are presumed to be discrete and opposed.

"But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions,. challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal ,combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence… At some poim,. on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes" (Anzaldúa 78-79 in old book).

### reparative reading is active

We might explore, with Sedgwick, "forms of thought that would not be structured by the question of prohibition" (11). Sedgwick points that that critical inquiry might work within a *reparative* methodology, which opens room for interpretive possibilities and attention to positive affects like love, gratitude, and affection. This method welcomes surprise of discovery over affirmation. It prioritizes "local theories and nonce taxonomies" over totalizing perspectives (145). We might approach criticism as having to do with *movement* rather than *knowledge*:

[M]oving from the rather fixated question Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to further questions: What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? How, in short, is knowledge *performative*, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?" (my italics, 124)

This reorienation of knowledge as *active*, as performative, opens up the critical process to one that is mobile and and speculative rather than suspicious. Moreover, it draws attention to the ways that knowledge is embodied, with all the surprises and discoveries that embodiment entails.

### Scott's evidence of experience:

Scott, Joan. “The Evidence of Experience”:

* Using experience for evidence rather than thinking about how experience is shaped. Scott talks about representation, about looking at experience, at the vision, the optical effects, for what they suggest. The beautiful reading of Samuel Delany’s vision of the “millions of gay men” the fantastical projection (rather than real identity) that suggests a political consciousness. Historiography is about modes of seeing.
* Scott’s proposed project is difficult to carry out. How many times do we need to go back to the archive? To what extent can you constantly start again at origins (genealogy).
* She’s right in the critique that there’s no universal class consciousness.
* Experience is always mediated for literary critics. We never take a text as referential—there is rhetoric and form.

### Munoz's queerness as emergent

The not-yet-here ness of queerness.

"We desire it but we desire it with a difference" (*Disidentifications* 15).

"Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exlusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority: it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by dominant culture" (*Disidentifications* 31).

"The chapters that make up this study attempt to chart the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates. The cultural performers I am considering in this book must negotiate between a fixed identity disposition and the socially encoded roles that are available for such subjects" (*Disidentifications* 6).

### Anzaldua's faculdad

the book as living and structured

In looking at this book that I’m almost finished writing, I see a mosaic pattern (Aztec-like) emerging, a weaving pattern, thin here, thick there. I see a preoccupation with the deep structure, the underlying structure, with the gesso underpainting that is red earth, black earth. I can see the deep structure, the scaffolding. If I can get the bone structure right, then putting flesh on it proceeds without too many hitches. The problem is that the bones often do not exist prior to the flesh, but are shaped after a vague and broad shadow of its form is discerned or uncovered during beginning, middle and final stages of the writing. Numerous overlays of paint, rough surfaces, smooth surfaces make me realize l am preoccupied with texture as well. Too, I see the barely contained color threatening to spill over the boundaries of the object it represents and into other "objects" and over the borders of the frame. I see a hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions, though I believe in an ordered, structured universe where all phenomena are interrelated and imbued with spirit. This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has had a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction hom my will. It is a rebellious, willful entity, a precocious girl-child forced to grow up too quickly, rough, unyielding, with pieces of feather sticking out here and there, fur, twigs, clay. My child, but not for much longer. This female being is angry, sad, joyful, is Coatlicue, dove, horse, serpent, cactus. Though it is a flawed thing—a clumsy, complex, groping blind thing—for me it is alive, infused with spirit. I talk to it; it talks to me. (66-67 & 88-89)

### hartman, lowe, arondekar on recuperating absence

"The critical challenge is to imagine a practice of archival reading that incites relationships between the seductions of recovery and the occlusions such retrieval mandates. By this I mean to say: What if the recuperative gesture return us to a space of absence? How then does one restore absence to itself? Put simply, can an empty archive also be full?" (1).

Hartmen's "critical fabulation"

The archivist must work within the discrepancy between reality and the historical record. Hartman's goal is "to expose and exploit the incommensurability between the experience of the enslaved and the fictions of history… the requirements of narrative, the stuff of subjects and plots and ends" ("Venus" 10).

* "This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" ("Venus" 11).

### QOC critique and aesthetics

Amber Musser's surface aesthetics

### invisbility is a good thing? allows queers to escape???

As disidentified, queer subjects remain outside of the confines of the visible. To gain visibility within the dominant system only reproduces visibility within the terms of that system. This position has been articulated by critiques of feminism since the 70s and 80s, and later on, in critiques of LGBT+ equality movements. bell hooks explains that one of the main issues with the women's movement of the 70s and 80s was a lack of agreement about the goals of feminism. Feminists that advocate for "equality with men," miss the point of radical change altogether: "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" (*Feminist Theory* 15). By prioritizing equal rights, such as access to employment, childcare, and social services, the women's movement asks to be included in the existing system that is already oppressing them. hooks is not saying that these aren't worthy or even necessary causes, but that the changes enacted by such measures will not be enough to raise the quality of life for oppressed and exploited peoples. This in particular is harmful for black women, who, as women of color, have the most to lose within the neoliberal ideology. hooks asserts that "Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society" (*Feminist Theory* 24). One of the major stakes in this chapter is to find ways of subverting, resisting, or opting out of hegemonic understandings of visibility as progress. This chapter will explore how being visible, accessible, *touchable* by the dominant power is being subjected to the terms of that power. At that point, it will be clear that queerness's status as untouchable works to enhance its political potential.

### Toward a Queer Form

Writing the self is connected to form. Always. The form is multiple. The form makes subjectivity opaque, but in the act of abstraction, making it opaque, we can touch it and play around with it.

Opacity as value (Amin, Musser)

“For our purposes, queer form means challenging the primacy of the visual, which has too often been a site for pernicious power relations… At their base, such operations of surveillance and classification rely on the concept of immutable difference, on sharp boundaries, and on the possibility of exhaustively knowing the other…. We see queer form as an aesthetics that moves persistently around the visual, thereby avoiding this flattening. To the extent that form operates behind the scenes as ideological impulse and materiality, queer formal practices can resist the dictates of transparency normally required of non-normative subjects by illuminating the unseen. In this way it not only troubles the epistemic assurances of the visual regime, but it also asks how shifting away from static visuality can circumnavigate questions of objectification. A move toward the diffusely sensual, and away from the linearity of visual gazing, articulates difference in terms that are not about dominance or norms, but that underscore the importance of thinking with other modes of knowing, theorizing, and experiencing. Queer form is about other ways of understanding relationships to power and relationships to being” (Amin, Musser, Perez 232-3)

Form understood as associated with queerness, queer experience, and as a way to disrupt easy understanding. Form can be queer and queer form can be opaque: “Form informs queerness, and queerness is best understood as a series of relations to form, relations not limited to binary and adversarial models of resistance and opposition” (228). “Queer form” emerges… as a name for the range of formal, aesthetic, and sensuous strategies that make difference a little less knowable, visible, and digestible. This special issue makes a case for the value of indirection, opacity, and withholding as queer strategies for minoritarian art producers” (235). “form focuses attention on how violence—homophobia, racism, gentrification, capitalism, and colonialism, for instance—has structured conditions of possibility in material and epistemological ways” (232). touch as an intersection for queerness and DH, both highly sensual in that they abstract from the source

1. Waves form: critics on the form opening possibilities for reading

* The reader’s experience of frustration and desire in navigating through the story mirrors the themes of sexual frustration and desire within the story. The electronic format of the story is what allows this theme to surface, for me. As I follow this disorienting narrative, I similarly enter into cycles of desire and frustration. This affective reaction is only possible through a displacement—a formal displacement that uses electronic media to re-organize, re-structure and display the story in the way we encounter it.
* Larry McCaffery, the fiction judge who awarded Fisher the ELO prize, praises the hyperfiction’s use of fragmentation to present anecdotes, bits of story and meditations in a way that liberates the story’s potential: "Fisher creates an interconnected web of branching, narrative possibilities" (“Comments”). Rather than feel paralyzed by the variety of options, McCafferty regards such options as liberating the traditionally pre-determined text into something more malleable, and therefore, more relatable, to the reader. Jessica Laccetti also lauds Waves’ indeterminate reading experience, saying that it cannot have defined beginnings, section divisions, or endings. Each time the reader sits down and opens this hypertext, it is different; depending on the chosen order of node, the reader will derive new meaning from that reading. She argues that, “as the narrative sequencing changes, so does our understanding of reading” (180). By constantly rearranging the order of its nodes, hyperfictions like Waves creates new, unique narratives, “enabl[ing] numerous possibilities for beginnings and, therefore, sequentialities” (Laccetti 180).
* Roland Barthes offers a theory about the reader’s affective response to the text that illuminates how hypertext may use linking as a narrative strategy to engage, rather than dissuade, the reader. In The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes describes two ways that texts provoke reactions by appealing to the reader’s “readerly” or “writerly” faculties. The text may stimulate pleasure or bliss in the reader depending on the degree to which its language disrupts his reading experience. On the one hand, the text of pleasure, or the “readerly” text, is “the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading” (all italics original; 14). The text of bliss, the “writerly” text, on the other hand, is one “that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language” (14). The important difference here is the extent to which the text stimulates affects that actively push the reader away or disrupt his reading. The text of pleasure operates according to the principles of narrative suspense that drive traditional stories, like cause and effect, while the text of bliss negates these principles: “what pleasure wants is the site of loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (Barthes 7). In other words, the text of bliss is an interruption of the comfortable reading experience that emphasizes the reader’s position as a subject. According to Barthes, the text of bliss is a positive experience for the reader insofar as he enjoys this interruption: “the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages working side by side: the text… is a sanctioned babel” (4). Barthes description here applies nicely to the structure of hypertext fiction, in which different texts are embedded quite literally side by side in the form of hyperlinks: insofar as the reader “sanctions” these texts, he will experience them as texts of bliss.
* From its table of contents, the novella foregrounds the reader’s agency in navigating through its fragmentary structure, where the reader encounters a navigation page that lists eight main sections, or chapters, of the narrative. These sections are named “kissing girls,” “school tales,” “I want her,” “city,” “country,” “she was warned,” “dare,” and “her collections.” When the reader pans over each chapter title, a textual blurb appears containing an excerpt from that chapter, which often draw from a sexual episode that stimulate reader's interest in that chapter, enticing her onward. For example, the excerpt for “I want her” presents an erotic moment between the narrator and one of her lovers, Jennie.:
* I’m in bed with Jennie Winchester and I realize she want me to undo her pants. She needs to be home by 11:00 and needs to leave my place by 10:45. I’m kissing her but opening my eyes at intervals to catch the clock. At exactly 10:43 I unbutton her Levis and shove my hand inside, barely undoing the zipper. “I’m in bed…”
* The narrator severs the excerpt at a moment of climax, tempting the reader to click through to the next node. Another section heading, “dare,” displays a similar strategy: “Fay Devlin and I are playing spin the bottle. She spins, but she trembles. By the time we get to Truth or Dare, I have my lips on her nipple and I’ve made her do the asking” (“These Waves of Girls…”). These excerpts establish the reader’s agency and the novel’s fragmentary structure from the outset of the novella. Because the chapters are unnumbered, the reader must determine how to proceed through the sections of the novella by making decisions about which to read first. These previews function to entice the reader to click through to read the rest of that section. And while the table of contents hints at the existence of an underlying structure to the narrative, that structure also reveals itself to be founded on fragments. In this way, the reader’s first encounter with the text portends that she may never get the whole story, yet encourages her onward.
* In fact, as this semblance of narrative organization all but disappears beyond the table of contents, it becomes increasingly clear that the reader fully controls the order of nodes. After progressing from the navigation page, the reader’s options multiply exponentially, and these options compete for the reader’s selection. In order to proceed through the text, the reader is forced to decide from the abundance of choices. On this particular node, reached from the “I want her” chapter title on the table of contents, hyperlinks run up and down the left side of the screen and populate the main text. Clicking through the first link in the main text, “Jennie,” the reader reaches a node with nine links. Again, how does she choose to proceed among these links? According to Barthes, the text of bliss wants to be read: “the text you write must prove to me that it desires me” (6). In deciding between the links that vie for her attention, the reader may follow her own impulsivity (she may simply click on the first link she sees, as she did on the previous page) or her interest in the word being linked. The node tells a story about Jennie and Tracey engaging in adolescent sexual exploits at summer camp. The links on this page include “been to that campground,” “It's grade 10,” “in my head I imagine a desperate love triangle,” “her hand under my shirt,” “the s l o w movements of Jennie's fingers,” “a dyke – I know it – but she won't do anything about it – can't – frozen,” “Close the lights,” “We try not to move too much, too loudly,” and “attended camp” (“Jennie only attended…”). At every node, the text proves again and again that it desires her. The reader may decide to read through this page, or read only a portion of the page, and interrupt her progress to click on a link. Or the reader may forgo reading this page altogether, and follow another link to a wholly new page. Either way, she makes a decision in order to proceed, and her decision determines the order of each node’s appearance. The text of bliss wants to be read, and the reader must decide how. By assembling the node into a specific order, the reader organizes the text of bliss according to the unique path that she chooses.
* Amin, Kadji, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez “Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social” ASAP/Journal, Volume 2, Number 2, May 2017, pp. 227-239: “Form informs queerness, and queerness is best understood as a series of relations to form, relations not limited to binary and adversarial models of resistance and opposition” (228).

## in DH: data is cooked

As a mode of relationality, "Feeling Backward" not presume a full connection between the critic and subject, keeping the subject at arms length. It approaches queerness as something receding, even when the critic is perpetually in pursuit. This relationship between critic and textual subject evokes some of the attitudes that digital humaninists take toward their data. In some queer theory and digital humanities runs a similar hesistation not to overdetermine or overinterpret the content of what we read. Critics such as Johanna Drucker and Ted Underwood are careful to qualify the nature of data as constructed, wrenched from the reality of lived experience, and necessarily reduced to fit whatever environs required by analysis. Even if they are careful about approaching data as constructed, however, they take vastly different routes in handling the results of their analysis.

### Drucker's skewing the graphs

Johanna Drucker argues that quantification techniques (such as visualizations in graphs and charts) actually misrepresent the data they are meant to convey. Drucker explains that, in order to place this data on a graph or chart, it undergoes a transformation. Complexity is reduced to whatever quality the visualization apparently requires. To illustrate this reduction, Drucker presents a chart displaying the amount of books published over several years. The chart appears to convey production during this specific time period[[3]](#footnote-3), but Drucker explains that publication date is an arbitrary metric for capturing production. She brings to the surface all the assumptions made in such a metric, for example, the limitations of "novel" as a genre and the connotations behind "published," which suggests date of appearance, but has no indication of composition, editing, review, distribution. Drucker reminds us that each piece of data carries with it the result of many interpretive decisions, which carry with them varying degrees of opacity. These interpretations ("reductions") are necessary in order to present complex concepts like book production as a bar on a chart. Drucker explains: "the graphical presentation of supposedly self-evident information (again, formulated in this example as “the number of novels published in a year”) conceals these complexities, and the interpretative factors that bring the numerics into being, under a guise of graphical legibility" (Drucker par. 23).

To resist the reductions of "data," a term that connotes that which is "given," Drucker proposes "capta," to suggest the act of being taken and transformed. Drucker's "capta" is deliberately creative, turning graphical expressions into expressive metrics: components used for measurement, like lines or bars on a graph, break or are fuzzy and permeable. Objects are not discrete entities, but interact with the other objects in the visualization. For example, in a bar graph of book publications/year, she warps the bars on the graph, making some of them fuzzy, wider, shorter, in an attempt to show that publication as a metric elides other information such as composition, editing, purchasing, etc.

This activity is a way of figuring elements that have been reduced, resolved, or ignored in traditional quantitative analysis. It evokes what Love says about queer subjectivity and experience being beyond the reaches of the critic. Drucker makes evident what is overlooked or assumed when dealing with complex subjects. She places those elements there, for all to see, in a way that muddles (rather than simplifies[[4]](#footnote-4)) the relationship between them. She does try to figure these elements, but not in a way that attempts to clarify or resolve their complexity. Rather, like Love, she works on the “image of exile, of refusal, even of failure” (Love 71).

### Ted Underwood's models as object of study

Ted Underwood and other literary critics doing Computational Literary Studies (CLS) approach their data with vastly different commitments. Underwood harnesses computational power and sophistication to glimpse the big picture of literary history, what he calls the "distant horizon" of literary trends across centuries. His argument convincingly begins with the observation that human capacities—sight, attention, and memory—preclude them from grasping the larger patterns of literary history over time periods. Distant reading, whereby "distance" implies abstraction, or the simplification of textual data into computable objects such as publication dates and genres, allows critics to make connections in apparent chaos, to draw a steady line of historical development through the swarm of overflowing information. According to Underwood, distant reading opens new scopes to literary analysis, which would otherwise be invisible to readers: "a single pair of eyes at ground level can't grasp the curve of the horizon" (x).

Though to a much lesser degree than Drucker, Underwood similarly turns his computational method into an object of study. His research deploys machine learning, that is, computer programs "trained" by certain data sets to make predictions about other datasets. Underwood studies how "models," or calculations based on multiple variables, created by sample data can then be used to measure further data. One of his models measures the probability that computers can guess the sex of a fictional character based on the words associated with that character. Underwood explains how the test is configured:

We represent each character by the adjectives that modify them, verbs they govern and so on—excluding only words that explicitly name a gendered role like *boyhood* or *wife*. Then, we present characters, labeled with grammatical gender, to a learning algorithm. The algorithm will learn what it means to be 'masculine' or 'feminine' purely by observing what men and women actually do in stories. The model produced by the algorithm can make predictions about other characters, previously unseen. 115

The computer takes in information about some (the more the better) books and studies that information in order to make predictions about other books. The resulting model, therefore, is always guided by its previous experience. Underwood rightly points out that such calculations cannot be taken as fact. Like humans, "machine learning tends to absorb assumptions latent in the evidence it is trained on" (xv). To Underwood, machine learning is no more "objective" than regualar analysis. This is why Underwood calls his work "perspectival modeling," where he studies how datasets reveal, not the truth of literary histroy, but the *approaches* of those who study it: "By training models on evidence selected by different people, we can crystallize different social perspectives and compare them rigorously to each other" (xv).

The results of the analysis is baked into the process, something that Underwood understands and accepts as part of the obstacles toward his distant horizon. In looking at the way gender is characterized, or rather how perspectival models characterize gender, in novels from the 18th century to the 21st, he finds that the results reproduce some of the structuring assumptions from the outset. His examination of gender characterization finds that "while gender roles were becoming more flexible, the attention actually devoted to women was declining" (114). The analysis points to a steady overapping of words used to describe men and women over time, shown as a convergence on the graph between words previously associated with women, such as "heart," which begin to intersect with words typically assoicated with men, like "passion," toward the middle of the 20th century. However, while the categories of "masculine" and "feminine" words are progressively blurred over time, the actual number of female *characters* declines. Underwood explains this drop could be due to several reasons, one of which is the simple fact that the practice of writing "gentrified" through the 20th century, when writing became acknowledged and pursued as a male occupation (137). His analysis shows that men tend to write more about men, while women write equally about men and women. With less women writing, the amount of female characters therefore declines. This explains how Underwood's seemingly paradoxical conclusion, that gender roles become more flexible while the actual prevalence of women dissapates from fiction, might be possible. But Underwood also admits that another factor—the assumption of gender as a binary category—might very well be guiding his results: "One possible conclusion would be that the structural positions of masculine and feminine identity, vis-'a-vis each other, have remained very stable—while the actual content of masculinity and femninity has been entirely mutable" (140). Viewing gender as a binary construction perpetuates the structural categories of male/female in a way that is at odds with the actual content of such categorie. In other words, if gender is binary, then it stands to reason that the relation between male and female will be one of opposition. Underwood proposes that one way around this confining structure of binary gender would be to refigure gender "as a spectrum or as a *multiplication* of gender identities that made the binary opposition between masculine and feminine increasingly irrelevant to characters' plural roles" (140).

## Critique of reproducibility

The criterion of reproducibility is deployed as a benchmark for reviewing and assessing the efficacy of digital quantitative methods. Despite their vastly different committments and methods, scholars like Underwood can be compared to Nan Z. Da, Sari Altschuler and David Weimer for the ways they place value on reproducibility.

### nan Z da on reproducibility

In a controversial peice about text analysis, Nan Z. Da critiques Computational Literary Studies (CLS) for its irrelevance to literary criticism. Da explains that results from quantification do one of two things: they either affirm what is already obvious or they present conclusions that are inaccurate. Of her many gripes with quantitative methods, which include "technical problems, logical fallacies, and conceptual flaws," her central concern is the fundamental "mismatch" of scientific methods to humanistic inquiry, both of which have opposing "natures" (601). Meant for reading in abundance, tradign "speed for accuracy, and coverage for nuance," Quantitativ methods are inappropriately applied to literary interpretation (620). According to Da, "we must use them in accordance with their true functions” (620).

One point in Da's essay crystallizes her ultimately conservative investment that aligns her with theorists who have vastly different methods and perspectives. Here she establishes the criterion of reproducibility, which suggests an objective at odds with humanistic endeavor. To verify the results of a Topic Modelling experiment, Da attempts to replicate the model on her own machine. Because the reproduction fails, she denigrates the whole process: "if the method were effective, someone with comparable training should be able to use the same parameters to get basically the same results" (628-629). However, "topic modeling is like a kaleidoscope that turns out something entirely different with the slightest tweaking” (629). Her emphasis on the “reproducible” in CLS extends one of distant reading early champion's originating call for a “falsifiable criticism”: both advocate for a methodology that is as reliable and verifiable as the social sciences[[5]](#footnote-5). The interesting detail in her critique is the insinuation in *reproducible* that somehow analysis is something that can exist outside of human performance/activity/error.

The reproducible indicates a slippery slope. By characterizing literary criticism as something that can be verified, that can be copied and reproduced ad infinitum, it assumes that interpretive conditions can be universalized, that subjects bring with them the same experiences and investments. Moreover, it suggests that there is a *correct* answer to literary critical questions, as if literature is a problem that needs to be solved.

### Altschuler and Weimar

This notion extends to digital humanist practitioners.

they call to overturn the "unproblematic translatability of information between the senses" while maintaining that reproduction is the highest value. They argue to "texture the humanities", pointing out that much of DH prioritizes the visual over other senses – "privilege sight as the sense through which knowledge is accessible" (74). Rightly so, they argue, “The textured DH we call for here acknowledges that we cannot study knowledge only abstractly, apart from the senses, and that we cannot study literature, art, and history without including the history of embodied experiences” (74-75).

* “Touch This Page! uses 3-D printed facsimiles of raised-letter text to inspire reflection on the assumptions most people make about which senses are involved in reading” (82).

But they stray too far when they place reproduction over remediation/deformance. They state their aims: “to expand the sensory accessibility of archives for all users and to do so through the digital reproduction—rather than the translation—of tactile knowledge” (76). Case example of the perfect reproduction:

* A scenario where “users… can download a visual copy with

descriptive data, engage with the text in virtual reality, and create their own textured facsimile. This technology once more makes possible the tactile reading experiences for which this volume was designed and promises library patrons a richer engagement with touch than most archives can currently provide—even in person (85-86).

The use case scenario makes the assumption that a reproduction is the ideal form of textuality, despite their asserted aims for "diversity of embodied experiences":

* “we must avoid tilting after the fiction of some ideal digital surrogate—like a virtual reality system that would flawlessly mimic original objects—lest we become digital Pierre Menards, expending extensive energy to improve our reproductions to discover, at last, that only the original perfects represents itself… Instead, we envision in our tactile futures multiple strategies that could not only open up access to varied experiences—past and present—but also diversity the ways embodied experiences structure our digital worlds” (86).
* in order to open up “multiple strategies” and diversity embodied experiences, we need a theory of text that is capacious enough to accept variation and transmediation.
* This argument overlooks deformance is a

solution: the ways that creating new texts, paratexts, creates new objects of knowledge. It overlooks the performative, ala McGann, Clement.

In this view, digital becomes a means of optimization, efficiency, total knowledge and understanding.

## For alternative readings: queer theory

### Felski's post critical reading: the illusion of emotional detachment

The reality is that we are stuck in these bodies of our thinking. Rita Felski describes how seemingly neutral and detatched critical stance belies an emotional disposition:

Scholars like to think that their claims stand or fall on the merits of their reasoning and the irresistible weight of their evidence, yet they also adopt a low-key affective tone that can bolster or drastically diminish their allure. Critical detachment, in this light, is not an absence of mood but one manifestation of it—a certain orientation toward one's subject, a way of making one's argument matter. 6

The "low-key affective tone" of scholarly discourse suggests that affect, and the feeling subject associated with it, has been left out of the critical process. However, appealing to the apparently unemotional does not succeed in removing emotion from argument—this is impossible—but it does reinforce the illusion that emotions don't belong in rational thought. Actually they do—though the emotions of critical discourse are of a quality and degree that mask their own presence. Felski explains that, “Rather than an ascetic exercise in demystification, suspicious reading turns out to be a style of thought infused with a range of passions and pleasures, intense engagements and eager commitments” (9). One follows the exposition of the framing paradigms, the twists and turns of the driving question, the climax of of discovery followed by the of denouement of the conclusion, one immediately senses the full dramatic repertoire of critical inquiry.

And the illusion of reason as being devoid of emotion is not limited to verbal discourse. It also pervades–perhaps even more insidiously—the apparently objective reprsentations data visualization. Graphs, charts, and maps all contain persuasive elements that succeed through their invisibility, in the trust, for example, that the souces are truthfully represented in the visualization or the implied preference of some metrics over others. Lauren Klein and Catherine D'Ignazio point out that "so-called 'neutral' visualizations that do not appear to have an editorial hand… might even be the most perniciously persuasive visualizations of all!" (*Data Feminism*, chapter 2). Not dots on a graph can be said to be removed from the predelictions of the creator and the generosity of the viewer.

### Felski & Sedgwick affective approaches

Critics like Rita Felski and Eve Sedgwick adopt an alternative approach toward reading that exposes knowledge as derived from embodied experience. Felski talks about reading as an affective orientation, where readers position themselves and their desires around texts. Felski critiques the popular orientation in literary criticism centered on what Paul Riceour has called the “hermeneutics of suspicion”—the desire to unmask and demystify the secrets of literary works. According to Felski, critics generally behave as if language is always withholding some truth, that the critic’s task is to reveal the unsaid or repressed. She identifies the affective modes of suspicion to include disenchantment, vigilance, paranoia.

Sedgwick makes a similar assertion about tendencies of "paranoid reading," though she bases her critique on Michele Foucault's repressive hypothesis from his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, which approaches discussions on sex and sexuality through the lense of repression or prohibition. Rather than excavating the workings of the repressive hypothesis, Foucault is interested in the ways that discourse on sex has proliferated, in its multiplications that avoid censure while satisfying the desire for sexual discourse. Left with no place to go, discussion on sex simply continued to spread by transforming itself into palatable discourses such as Marxism, pyschoanalytic, libertarian, etc. By looking for the specter of sex/power dynamics in these discourses, Foucault seems to work outside the logic of the repressive hypothesis. But this is not the case. Sedgwick explains that, "the almost delirious promise of the book" is "the suggestion that there might be ways of thinking around [the repressive hypothesis]" (9). In fact, Sedgwick explains that Foucault's inquiry has been, from the start, structured by repression and prohibition. She finds that the "critical analysis of repression is itself inseparable from repression" (10).

Felski and Sedgwick see a dead end in militant reading practices.

Felski's nightmare: Sedgwick's wish:

"How do we step outside the repressive hypothesis "to forms of thought that would not be structured by the question of prohibition in the first place?" (*Touching Feeling* 11).

Speaking on Foucault's repressive hypothesis: "I knew what I wanted from it: some ways of understanding human desire that might be quite to the side of prohibition and repression, that might hence be structured quite differently from the heroic, 'liberatory', inescapably dualistic righteousness of hunting down and attacking prohibition/repression in all its chameleonic guises" (*Touching Feeling* 10).

Felski shows how this suspicion toward texts forecloses other possible readings while providing no guarantee of rigorous or radical thought. Rather than adopt a suspicious attitude, Felski suggests that literary scholars try “postcritical reading," which looks to what the text suggests or makes possible. Felski wonders what if we allowed ourselves to be marked or struck by what we read. Then, rather than just be a cognitive activity, reading can become an “embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging” (176).

Reading is about movement

Postcritical Reading — "Reading, in this light, is a matter of attaching, collating, negotiating, assembling—of forging links between things that were previously unconnected”… “Reading, in this sense, is not just a cognitive activity but an embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging” (176).

### Sedgwick on generative shame

What if we read Henry James mobilizing shame as a creative resource? For many queer people, shame is a structuring force in their identity. But this doesn’t mean we need to be negative, we can look to the ways that shame unlocks creativity and productivity—to the ways that metaphors are made possible through shame. James’ “blushing”, “flushing” is linked to a fantasy of the skin being entered, or touched by a hand. GLOVE, GAGE, GAGEURE… We can reclaim a negative affect of shame and approach it as a generative force.

* "Shame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimates the place of identity–the question of identity–at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence. It constitutes the as-to-be-constituted, which is also to say, as already there for the (necessary, productive) misconstrual and misrecognition. Shame–living, as it does, on and in the face–seems to be uniquely contagious from one person to another. And the contagiousness of shame is only facilitated by its anamorphic, protean susceptibility to new expressive grammars" (63).

## Paralleling Queer & DHers looking for alternative readings

### Case in point: klein's figuring the absence

Draw Klein and Hartman together—this is what I want to do for Queer texts.

## Performativity

Digital formats and interfaces facilitate queer encounters methods, an intimate process of engaging with literature on a computer, where users can manipulate and transform text.

### Bode's materiality, critque of Underwood

Katherine Bode's critique of Underwood points out that QLS methods incorporate hidden assumptions about the data, about what is findable. She offers a method that builds off the humanistic approaches in textual scholarship and bibliography, where the model is prior to computation.

### Tanya Clement: discovery

### Against reproduction, for remediation/deformance

### McGann's "prosthetic extension"

These tools work alongside the reader’s intuition, in what Jerome McGann calls a “prosthetic extension of that demand for critical reflection,” by which the reader is able to feel her way through the text (18).

### Critique of Underwood's "sensitivity"

Underwood overlooks the ways that distant reading can be a prosthesis. Claims that Quantitative are not as "sensitive" or "exacting" as close reading, and are mostly useful for long views. How can we approach distant reading as multiplying alternative readings? Rightly points out that human attention guides the scale of analysis. So we have to be very careful at the question we are posing, and the way that we interact with the computer.

* "Critics who want to sensitively describe the merits of a single work usually have no need for statistics… Computational analysis of a text is more flexible than it used to be, but it is still quite crude compared to human reading; it helps mainly with questions where evidence is simple too big to fit in a single reader's memory" (xxi).
* Repeatedly stresses that the point of quantitative methods is to discover new scales of analysis, but he seems to be looking for an overarching theory that will encapsulate literary history. Quantitative methods seek to overcome a problem of attention, of memory, in order to gain a large view. Here, human memory is a hindrance, rather than a drive. The goal is rather to multiply alternative readings.
  + Attention determines analysis, analysis determines knowledge, knowledge determines disciplines, periodization (8).
  + "The challenge is to find a perspective that makes the descriptions preferred by eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century scholars all congruent with each other" (32).

## Vantanges

### Klein, Mandell, Caughie, Gaboury

### Against totalization

### The visible and the invisible, opting out

## Provisionality

### Susan Brown's provisionality

### Julia Flander's work on Orlando

### Against stability

## Digital projects based on text manipulation:

I find that the haptic and exploratory activity of working with these tools enlivens the reading process by allowing the reader to play, experiment, and imagine new connections to the textual object.

### *Voyant-Tools*

Jerome McGann "prosthetic extensions" Potential texts: Woolf's *Orlando*.

* Interweave a narrative about touch. Taking new materialist ideas but

placing them within context of QPOC critiqe. Anzaldua and Bennet on touch and severing. Sarah Ahmed too.

### *These Waves of Girls*

Following narrative desire. The click of the mouse allows readers to move with the text, based on their own paths.

### what are some print texts that enact these principles of movement?

* Alison Bechdel's "Are You My Mother": where every page is vibrating

with reference.

## MISC

### Defining queer, Amin on historicizing through affect

queerness manifests as an affective relation between the subject and desired object. Kadji Amin defines queer as "fundamentally affective… a matter of sensing a resonance between one's object of study and the inchoate cluster of feelings that inhabit and animate the term queer" (173).

### Reading touching: within our bodies

This point bears repeating—we are always stuck within the bodies of our thinking. As such, we might as well turn to ourselves, to explore (rather than how things are in the world) how things are *to us*. Sedgwick points out that the problem is not one of knowledge, but one of movement. We can try to in-*corporate*, as much as possible, alternative reading methods that get at the unique experience of being a thinking/feeling human that is fiddling with these tools. We can, in other words, examine the possibilities of *touching* what we read. And we can do so with digital tools for text analysis and machine learning. However, there still exists a view that distant reading lacks the sensitivity of close reading. "Critics who want to sensitively describe the merits of a single work usually have no need for statistics" (xxi).

### data reduction / queer assimilation

For those that would argue that negative feelings are no longer relevant in today's world, Heather Love responds that the advent of assimilation, of popular acceptance, only creates more problems for a group that has come into being as abject. *(the corrolary for digital studies is the proliferation of data, of information, digitization)* Queer assimilation and apparent rise in acceptance across popular culture and mass media contradicts the reality of shame and stigma that everyday queers experience, a contradiction that breeds ever more shame: "Of course, same-sex desire is not as impossible as it used to be; as a result, the survival of feelings such as shame, isolation, and self-hatred into the post-Stonewall era is often the occasion for further feelings of shame. The embarrassment of owning such feelings, out of place as they are in a movement that takes pride as its watchword, is acute" (4). What do we do with these residual feelings of shame?

How should queer criticism orient itself? Love shows that critics face a contradiction, brought on by the reality of negative feelings and psychic costs of being queer in a homophobic society. The narrative trajectory of queer progress runs counter to the residual pain of being queer. Criticism is stuck in the middle of this ambivalence, between affirming its pride and bemoaning its suffering: "We are not sure if we should explore the link between homosexuality and loss, or set about proving that it does not exist" (Love 3).

### Misc Quotes

"how might activating emotion – leveraging it, rather than resisting emotion in data visualization – help us learn, remember, and communicate with data?" (Klein and D'Ignazio, *Data Feminism*, chapter 2)

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# commands

c-c c-x f => create a new footnote c-u c-c c-x f then select s => renumber footnotes

block quotes: #+BEGINQUOTE & #+ENDQUOTE

# Footnotes

1. Digital computation runs on data in the form of these numerical digits, even though computer language, at the most rudimentary level, is based on a binary counting system, on ones and zeroes. (quote or citation to Code: the hidden language of computer hardware and software OR Sadie Plant's *Zeroes and Ones*) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rita Felski? and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Drucker implicitly refers to the first chapter from Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2007), throughout which Moretti graphs novels by their publication date between 1700 and 2000 and draws conclusions about the relationship between genre and generations of readers. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Moretti: "'Distant reading'… where distance is however not an obstacle but /a specific form of knowledge" (1). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to Franco Moretti: “Testing” literary interpretations be the same process as in scientific disciplines – demanding that interpretations are “coherent, univocal, and complete,” and are tested against “data” that appears to contradict it (*Signs* 21). “The day criticism gives up its battle cry ‘it is possible to interpret this element in the following way,’ to replace it with the much more prosaic, ‘the following interpretation is impossible for such and such a reason,’ it will have taken a huge step forward on the road of methodological solidity” (*Signs* 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)