

**Gathering Kinds:  
Radical Faerie Practices of Sexuality and Kinship**

By

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## Abstract

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Though they began as a gay male counterpart to the lesbian separatisms of the 1970s, the radical faeries are now a growing movement with thousands of participants in the United States and Europe. This dissertation argues that they are also a kinship phenomenon, a form of extended family. Faeries' polymorphous sexual ethics and economic collaboration entail consequences and constitutive exclusions divergent in some ways (but not others) from those of the United States' dominant homonormativity. While some faerie practices are also reminiscent of a new religious movement, others are not, and a careful consideration of the phenomenon in fact destabilizes the distinctions between sexuality, religion and kinship. The case of the radical faeries suggests that religiosity be seen as an erotic orientation and the coming out experience as a religious conversion. Although faeries articulate in many ways the anarchist and ecological themes of modern Euroamerican homosexuality, their own normative philosophies can be rooted in deistic and ultimately authoritarian totalizing ethics, and might be productively re-thought via greater attention to issues of difference and mindfulness. Moreover, while some faeries have achieved remarkable success in establishing rural collective property and new patterns of migration, their consensus-based governance processes can be rife with conflicts that might bely claims of filiality. In the conclusion, I argue that same-sex marriage does not go far enough and that advocates for progressive family law reform would be wise to take the example of the faeries into account.

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## Acknowledgements

Faeries surround me on all sides. It has not been possible for me to depart their company long enough to consider them from a distance, with the leisure of reflection. I am writing in part about my friends, lovers and roommates, about one of my chosen families. Dozens have had to live with my research and writing process, following the joys and travails of this project through the simple reality of living with me. Moreover many are relentlessly self-archival, savoring bits of their collective history, constantly trading in stories. In addition to the usual audiences for a dissertation — my colleagues and advisers in the academy, particularly future graduate students — it has been impossible to write the present work without considering it as part of an evolving archive the radical faeries keep for themselves. I imagine some of my readers, if indeed I am to have readers, may identify as faeries, others as their friends. Reader, I acknowledge you, be you scholar or faerie or both. Whatever path brought you to this page, be welcome.

Quite a few scholars made insightful suggestions about the present work and asked questions that could at times be uncomfortable. Stanley Brandes, Philip Brettschneider, Donna Haraway, Cori Hayden, Seth Holmes, James Holston, Jake Kosek, George Lakoff, Michael Lecker, Laura Nader, Aihwa Ong, Elizabeth Povinelli, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Michael Warner have each been inspirations in their separate ways. I am especially grateful to my adviser, Lawrence Cohen, whose unflagging support kept me going during a few years in which I wondered if I could ever produce. All made suggestions that shaped my future reading and intellectual trajectory. Over a series of conversations, Will Roscoe offered insights both queer theoretical and specific to the field; I am consequently both indebted and somewhat embarrassed that our conclusions do not always match.

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My biological family has also been an enormous source of respite and encouragement. I thank them for their patience as years passed by with no dissertation emerging, but most of all for the value they place on learning and scholarship. If the remarks that follow have qualified as a dissertation in anthropology, it is at least in part due to academic privilege I did not earn, but inherited through the lucky circumstance of having been born into a family that included professors of archaeology and philosophy as well as two librarians.

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love, in a certain sense, then all those who have contributed to them have indirectly put a little of their love into this dissertation. For specific conversations and insights, I thank Andrew Adams, Zac Benfield, Joey Cain, KD Calfee, Carol Carmick, Davi Cohen, Dennis Collinson, Everic Dupuy, Murray Edelman, Free to Be, PJ Geise, Stephan Georgiou, Wallace Gorrell, Gavi Kessler, Alexander Monsanto, Noam Parness, Ari Rosenbaum, William Stewart, Frank Susa and Paul Wirhun. There have been many others as well.

What follows marks a beginning, not an end. Factual and interpretive errors no doubt remain for which I take full responsibility. The work makes an argument about kinship, tells some tales from radical faerie worlds and reflects for awhile on some rather queer ethical issues. Parts may amount to philosophy or criticism. Yet the kind of ethnography I would rather write, and which I believe represents the best of the anthropological tradition, is one in which the voices and stories of the interlocutors are front and center, in which the richness and pathos of the informants' lives shines more brightly than the bourgeois syntax and academic pretension of the author. Alas, the exigencies of completion and political economic reality kept me from doing the more in-depth storytelling the topic rightly demands. Perhaps more than is usual, what follows therefore consist in a series of opinions. I have attempted to inform them. May you find them helpful.

I THINK it may perhaps be agreed, once for all, that the human mind is incapable of really defining even the smallest fact of nature. The simplest thing, or event, baffles us at the last. It is like trying to look at the front and back of a mirror at the same time. The utmost squinting avails not.

— Edward Carpenter, "Exfoliation: Darwin vs. Lamarck," 1921

# 1 Introduction

“We improvised recipes to bake each other cookies, cakes, breakfasts in bed, weekly free meals in the park, great feasts celebrating our courage and kinship so we might taste their sweetness on our very tongues.” — CrimethInc., *Fighting for our Lives: An Anarchist Primer*

“First the dishes, then the revolution!” — Anonymous

It is a warm night in September, the sky free of clouds but hazy and orange from smog and the streetlights' glare. Only the brightest stars best their collusion. A general automotive rumble and the occasional honk rise toward a rooftop where forty people have joined hands in circle. They are a variety of colors, but mostly pale; a variety of ages, but mostly in their twenties and thirties. Three stand in the center, hands linked behind themselves such that they form an inner circle facing outward, toward the larger group. We om, and one of them starts speaking. “Thank you all for being here with us. Yes, we are here. I am so glad you could join us.” Clearly improvising his words, the speaker explains that this is to be a three-way commitment ritual. Each of the three will make their promises to each other, and then to the collected multitude.

“So, last week I was on the train, the long, long train toward the beach to be with my family for the weekend — and this was causing me a lot of stress and on the way there I was just really overcome with gratitude, realizing — I've been living with you both for three months, you wonderful faggot peacocks you, and I realized I was entering this space of difficulty with, uh, the family I was granted in life, and realizing how grateful I am for the family I've been able to *choose*, and realizing that I can't - live - without - the family I've chosen. I feel sooo blessed to be in your presence and I would just like to be able to show as much of the lovingkindness and caring and support — and absurdity absurdity as you both — as you can — as you have provided for me, uh —”

There is an interruption of laughter from the crowd, and another voice pipes up, “That's a lot!”

“— so, uh, yeah that's that. I just sprinkle?”

He twists open a small vial of glitter and douses two shimmying roommates in a gently sparkling dust. The loud one grins and squeals. “Give it to me!”

There is an extended, audible hiss from the outer circle. It is a sign of approval; no one seems particularly displeased.

“Okay, all of you have been sprinkled. There you go.”

The next roommate holds his vial aloft. “Well, you know, I feel like, my sentiments must —”

“Louder! Louder!”

In an affected British accent, with rounded vowels and a slow, rolling cadence, the voice continues, “This is my first family-based home. My first apartment in general. I left the dorm system finally and I feel, you know — I’ve been away, you know, for six months or so in another country and one of my main concerns was being able to sink my roots back in quickly. But you both have made it so easy to, well, just be entrenched ... and so you made my reimmersion process, and it’s reified that, that family is whatever — it’s about — it doesn’t exist across time or space but — the fact that I was able to come back in and fall in with you to the present situation ... I guess I commit to always remember that.”

More hissing. The speaker glitters his roommates and they hug.

“Yayyyyyy.”

“Don’t hug us *at all* tonight y’all!”

“Don’t even touch the three of them!”

“Unless you want some of it!”

“Can we take a breath?”

“Aaaah. Hmmm.”

It is the third roommate, the loud one. “So — I — have been feeling a lot of things this evening.”

Loud laughter.

“I don’t feel anything all the time ever!”

(comically) “You’re so emotionally unavailable!”

“And one of the things that I’ve been feeling is this incredible sense of *déjà vu* — that I dreamt this all a few months ago — and I’ve been working to generate this kind of thing around myself for a very long time. And I, uh, I’ve been sort of sitting back this evening watching you all in the space and it really, it really makes me very happy because I worked really hard to find it for all of *you*. And I want you to come over and join us. And sit on our couch when it is not in that particular position ... and eat meals with us and drink wine and come up here and sit and giggle and look at the stars. And I’m doing it all in *reverse*, okay, hold on — I’m part of the ADHD generation! ... One of the things I worked really *hard* on was finding the people who could hold center with me. And it was really *magical* the way it developed ... and, uh, I love that we love family as much as we do, and I love that the door is always open.”

“Can we make this circle smaller?”

“Squeeze in!”

“Glitter everywhere!”

“Uh, okay, and as I’ve said many times, life is long and it is good *together*.”

“To this home!”

“Wooo!” There is a general cheer.

At this the loudest voice continues. “As many of you know I pray when I sing. And, well, thanks to Facebook you’ve probably heard this song, too, so you can just join in if you know the words.” He begins rather slowly; for the first verse he is solo but at the chorus other voices join. The collective effort grows with each round, and it seems by the end of the song that most of us have picked up a few of the words.

“We are living 'neath the great Big Dipper / We are washed by the very same rain / We are swimming in the stream together / Some in power and some in pain / We can worship this ground we walk on / Cherishing the beings that we live beside / Loving spirits will live forever / We're all swimming to the other side.”<sup>1</sup>

The song ends in a great cheer. “*Work, faggots, work!*”

“Let’s take a breath!” This time the call is ignored.

“I want people to know our door is always open. I want people to think of our place as a valuable option for doing homework or eating a meal or reading a book or —”

“Or late night drinks!”

“I feel like I’ll be echoing what everyone else has said but ... look, before this I was living in a basement [practically in the suburbs]. I couldn’t host people. It was terrible. No. I mean, I couldn’t share my home with other people. Living in that was just really difficult for me. And it’s amazing to transition to this space where I can have all of you over, yeah, to have a meal, drink, to do nothing, to do whatever we want, umm, and just to provide a space of comfort and safety and beauty and — I’ll say it — absurdity. Everything and anything. Really. So, please, enjoy.”

“How shall we do this?”

“One after the other?”

“Shall we run around in a circle?”

“We can just walk.” They walk in a circle dusting us in glitter to a general acclamation. There is much laughter and various exclamations rife with sexual innuendo. The circle disbands, and people stand around on the roof for a few more minutes, chattering and talking, etching on my iPhone the burbling sounds of a party.

What was happening on this rooftop in Brooklyn? On one level, the scene thus recounted was merely a way of welcoming the guests at a housewarming. On a Friday night in a major urban center, youth culture met a bit of officiousness, and the result was this symbolic performance and dedication of relations between roommates and their extended networks.

One might also describe this space as a *queer* space. Hegemonic relations of heredity and alliance were temporarily bracketed to make room for affiliations based on shared experiences of discordant sexuality. To anoint each other with glitter was to invoke an imagined community, to mark one's compatriots as colorful, magical beings, implicitly distinct from the outside world. Perhaps inevitably, there was the suggestion of ostentatious display: wonderful faggot peacocks who might work it on the dance floor or at a drag ball.

Yet though this was a queer space in that it was a space *for queers*, a space taken over by particular kinds of subjects, by subjects of a particular set of lived discourses, some might argue that in other respects it was not very queer at all. Here were people accorded considerable privileges of affiliation and mobility, making use of a space protected by the prevailing regime of property (if not by guard rails or a use permit). And if this was a queer space, does that mean that those in it identified themselves as queer, or that we should

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<sup>1</sup> “Swimming to the Other Side,” Pat Humphries. Humphries is a lesbian folk singer known for her activity in the anti-war and environmental moments of the 1980s.

identify them as queer? Perhaps “queer” should denote the site of a mutating opposition to identity as such. None of the speakers in this scene used the term. What are we to make of the one they did choose for themselves, “faggots”? Those who consider queer lives with some frequency will recognize a set of familiar issues in these questions.

For me, the more powerful themes are solidarity, togetherness, community, first of all, and a sense of hope, of a promising future, on the other. Any housewarming party might have invoked such themes, which are not easily contained within the frame of queerness and queer theory. On the other hand, for such themes to be inflected by queerness is also for them to be oriented to a different ground (Ahmed 2006).

Each of the speakers invokes an intimate connection with the others. Each invokes a sense of “family,” that standard against which other forms of affiliation have long been judged and most often found wanting. Those who are present in the outer circle literally and figuratively hold the roommates in place. They are constructed as an extended family of friends, guests and lovers. Yet there is an implicit contrast, invoked by the first speaker, between the family of origin and the family of choice. He finds that the tie to his family of choice is stronger because of the strain on his family of origin. The move toward one was concomitant with the move away from the other. Were these the same move, I wondered?

Listening to my friend speak, I also wondered whether he had read Weston's important *Families We Choose* (1997). As an urban college student with a few seminars in gender studies under his belt, it was reasonably likely. It was probable, moreover, that even if he hadn't read the book, some of his colleagues and faculty had, and that the felicitous idea of its title had consequently been amplified. Did that amplification make it less accurate, or more? How might that particular work — and the broader discourses in which it is embedded — be themselves shaping the queer cultures they sought to describe? One *leit-motif* of the present work is reflection on the ways theories can themselves become the basis of practice. It seems to me that some contemporary LGBTQ lives have changed much since the classic descriptions of the 19th and 20th centuries, and that they have changed in part to reflect the conversation occasioned by those descriptions. The 1974 gathering “Faggots and Class Struggle” was an important early catalyst for my field site; beyond that single example, the critical questions of queer theory, around race, gender, class, love, sex and other axes of power, often come to occupy a central position in the collective discourses and imaginaries of travelers in the worlds I describe. Without suggesting that the responses to such questions have been adequate — indeed, it is likely that they could never be adequate — it is clear that from the perspective of traditional ethnographic research we are dealing with a situation of significant hybridity and self-reflexivity, crossing in and out of “the academy” in consequential ways.

Performed collectively as the climax of a ritual, the celebrants' song expressed themes of solidarity and interdependence: we are all together, under the same stars, and washed by the very same rain. Yet it also expresses hope: for a good life, for love, for care given and received. We *can* cherish the beings we live beside, but will we? The trio were roommates and had no precise commitment to each other beyond the bounds of their shared apartment. Their ritual demarcated a relationship that might last a few months, perhaps a few years. We, the witnesses addressed, were invoked as a community, and yet this group had never assembled before, would never assemble again. Many of us had never even met. We witnessed together a certain set of promises: the promises of the roommates

to each other, and their collective promises to us. Absent the recordings of an anthropologist, who would remember what was said that night? Which of the forty would hold the roommates to account? On some future day, one of their number in trouble, what collective symbolic would reanimate the words of that night, breathing into life compassion, feelings of concern, the desire to help? Those who fall on the mercy of institutional religions might rely on more-or-less worked out codes of behavior, substituting shared norms for personal connection in a time of crisis. Was something similar at work here, in this more informal, non-deified spiritual ritual?

Given a context that presumes most of those present identify in some way or another as homosexual, genderqueer or sexually liberated, such apparently playful, creative work takes on a new aspect. Any of the three roommates might get sick or get into trouble, the others enlisted as support. For what could they hope? What would constitute a productive relationship to time and the future? What mode of togetherness would be adequate to the challenges of real life? The question of aging has proven to be of increasing importance GLBTQ communities, and for gay men particularly since the improvements in HIV prevention and treatment. Considerable evidence suggests that, in the United States at least, otherwise privileged queer men face particular challenges as they age. Youth and beauty fade, and their declining sexual capital makes some feel as though they are slowly turning invisible, their objects of pleasure no longer interested or even cognizant of their presence. Then there are the vexing questions of care in sickness and old age: while there is no single template for aging, the games it plays raise mortal questions, expose our shared vulnerability and ultimate helplessness (Cohen 1998). Absent adult children, descendants acknowledged and confirmed by the state and by society, who cares and who is cared for? Another influential ethnographer of gay families, John Borneman, describes ways that some gay couples have made use of existing family law, adapting it to meet their own needs, finding copacetic ways to transfer responsibility and property accordingly (1997). If queers will work with the institutional apparatus of the family in this way, why should they not work with its affective weight, its dense emotional and symbolic significance? For those who articulate new social forms, the invocation of family need not merely be a form of misappropriation or a plea for legitimization. However contested, family is a more powerful and flexible resource than that.

Some hours later, as I waited for the train home, I found myself wondering why this housewarming ritual had moved me so much with its invocation of kinship and commitment. Why did it stick in my mind? The invocation of kinship, after all, is so widespread as to suggest that the more interesting question is not what counts as family, but why we should continue to invoke family as the grounding and legitimizing resource beyond others. What makes family such a contagious metaphor, one prone to structure the political discourse of entire nations, as George Lakoff has argued (1980, 2002)? Moreover, why were even anthropologists prone to return to what systems theorist Niklas Luhmann characterized as observations of the first order, the immediate observations of daily social life, rather than the distinct material of a sociology, observations about observations (1998)? So many works of recent kinship studies had acted to expand the range of recognizable families in one form or another, arguing over legitimacy of forms and their correspondence with various sorts of definitions, rather than asking what made family the form by which we measured all the others. Yet in the months to follow, writing the present work, I would find my-

self again and again unable to escape the notion even as I rethought it on a rather different basis than my scholarly forebears might have intended.

Embedded somewhere in the context for this rite on a rooftop, perhaps so subtly incorporated that many in attendance had not even heard the term, were radical faeries. Whether or not many of the attendees identified *as* radical faeries, all had been touched. Radical faerie events and themes had collected many of those present, framing and enabling their entanglements with each other. The term “radical fairy” (the spelling would be modified within a year) originates from a group of gay liberationists on the West Coast of the United States, who in 1979 organized a three-day-long “Spiritual Conference of Radical Fairies” in New Mexico. Like a will o’ wisp, however, the precise referent so designated has a tendency to dance away just at the moment we feel it is nearest at hand. What is this thing? What discourse assembles around this term? Whom does it designate and at what times? What might such designation portend? The answers are less obvious than one might suppose. Generally, historians and ethnographers of the radical faeries point to Harry Hay, most prominent organizer of the 1979 event and hence the movement’s nominal founder and, perhaps, charismatic leader. His announcement, however, ran on the back cover of a newsletter called RFD on the same page as calls to four other gatherings presumably for gay men interested in rural life. Most of the features that epitomize radical faerie milieux today had already become fixtures of the counter-public, or perhaps the social scene, called into being by the newsletter long before the so-called “first” gathering, as I discuss in chapter three.

Radical faeries are not just fairies — queers — who happen to be politically or aesthetically radical, nor radicals politically or aesthetically who happen to be gay, but an unruly montage of thousands of people worldwide who have made of the signifier “radical faerie” a key signpost for what it means to be a faggot, a queer, for how to treat one’s friends and lovers, for what constitutes a livable life. What does this term signify? It is not so easy to say: Hay’s editor Will Roscoe recently settled on “phenomenon” (2011), and the most influential ethnographer to have considered them, Elizabeth Povinelli, refers to them as a “social genre” (2006). Others, focusing primarily on the spiritual themes and pagan rituals which haunt faerie spaces, have deemed them a “new religious movement” (Stover 2005); one advocate even described the faeries as “the first spiritual movement to be both gay-centered and gay-engendered” (Thompson 2011). Implicit in the ritual was a notion of a secular, sometimes empiricist, highly individualistic “spirituality of life” (Heelas et al. 2005). Weber noted the rise of such personalized spiritualities almost a century ago: in them an attempt is made to reconcile the articles of faith with the facts of science, and the individual is always left to be their own final arbiter of higher revelation (1958). At first glance the faeries might resemble a new religious movement: there was a clear charismatic leader in the early days, they depend upon recruitment and proselytization, and they can inspire tremendous devotion from their participants. Though they perhaps share a general milieu with the human potential movements, the links are closer to the Rainbow Family, the peripatetic encounter of tens of thousands of people that has occurred at least annually in the United States since 1972. Yet it seemed optimistic to describe the faeries as an “intentional group,” as ethnographer Michael Niman described the Rainbow Family in the definitive work on the phenomenon. From the atmospheric detail with which Niman’s book was pungent, I knew that the Rainbows’ own “intention” was a matter of aspiration as

much as actuality, the vast majority apathetic toward their governing Council (1997, 40). Even to refer to the faeries as a “group” belied the ways they seemed to exist and yet not exist, spring into being for some people at some times, come to be a way of everyday life for others, and yet evaporate under closer scrutiny, fewer and fewer people claiming to be faeries when put on the spot.

Such labels, while not inaccurate, obscure as much as they reveal. Life is more a matter of combination and recombination, a palimpsest, a simultaneity that evades the grasp of any single concept or observation. Its productivity is its excess. In the face of such complexity, the first order observations of those who declare their kinship with each other deserve attention on their own terms. This book, then, is an attempt to take seriously the possibility that the faeries are also a kinship phenomenon, that they demand recognition precisely as a new form of extended family, that they insist their use of the term “family” is not metaphor, not misappropriation, not a pale shadow of something which could only be “real” in the context of obligatory monogamy and compulsory heterosexuality. Yet to make this argument, at base, I do not take some cultural definition of the family — say, the notion of biogenetic descent as the ur-form of relatedness, a prominent feature of “American folk kinship” (Schneider 1984) — and show how the radical faeries match it or meet it point by point. The anthropological trope of “fictive” kinship has already been shown to be lacking even to describe situations with a demonstrably more distant genetic connection (Brandes 2009). Rather, I question whether the normal family has any strong claim to be natural or essential, and propose a basis for kinship neither on “transparent” biology (which has always been more fictive than kinship), nor on a unitary social somehow outside of historical process, but on shared practices, discourses and desires which, when imitated, lead to material clusterings, to political economies of touch, and hence to the formation of kinds.

When I describe the radical faeries as a kinship formation, I might as well describe them as a *kind* in formation. The processes that concern me are those which are basic to social formation, to the emergence of likeness out of difference. For it is clear to even the most casual observers of human social phenomena that there appear to be forms not just of natural or biological speciation but of *social* speciation as well. What circumstances lead to this unexpected outcome, this differentiation among collectives vastly larger than individuals and yet vastly smaller than biological species? One of Luhmann's most insightful systems theoretical precursors, Gregory Bateson, had considered this question in a magisterial ethnography, *Naven*, turning in part on the formation of cultural difference, which he called schismogenesis. The outcome in many respects presaged by half a century the anthropological turn away from the culture concept as itself too discrete, unitary and self-contained to describe the mess of everyday life.

Radical faerie public ritual at times resembles a postapocalyptic, genderqueer remix of the Gardnerian neopagan tune. At the rural sanctuaries and on special occasions in the city, faeries join hands in a circle, ground, invoke the elements and ask for protection from assorted spirits. Each year on May 1, Beltane, half a dozen or more groups of faeries across the United States and Western Europe will erect a Maypole and wrap it in ribbons in a joyous echo of the north European fertility ritual. At a particularly formal public ritual in New York City, the officiant of the opening rites went so far as to draw pentagrams at the four corners, starting from the lower left spike: according to influential Victorian band of occultists known as the Golden Dawn, an earth-oriented banishing pentagram, considered a solid

foundation for a well-protected ritual. On other occasions, ritual idioms reflect the influence and appropriation of Native American spirituality — particularly the reconstructed ritual dance Naraya, led by Shoshone and Paiute elders, which draws many faeries to an annual circuit of a dozen or more spiritual retreats (Morgensen 2001).

For some, the encounter with the radical faeries can take the form of a religious conversion. The most dramatic and notable of such stories come from those whose first contact comes at a rural faerie gathering. Gatherings are immersive experiences predicated on changes in the rules for sexual ethics and intimacy as compared to those of normal public spaces in the United States. They can involve intense feelings of liminality and *communitas*. The connections one forms at a gathering can continue thereafter, leading to a long-lasting change in one's friendship networks and even "moods and motivations." Even those who do not attend gatherings and encounter the radical faeries only in passing can be changed thus, however. On several occasions I've met people who have only come into contact with faeries for a matter of hours, and who maintain no close contacts with faeries whatsoever — and yet who describe that encounter as having shown them a new world or opened their minds. For young gay men in particular, simply meeting a community in which sexual activity and multiple partners are not a cause for shame can amount to a powerful and life-changing experience. They may bear in mind the possibility of an alternate sexual ethics even while continuing their immersion in heteronormative or homonormative spaces. While it would be a stretch to describe such subjects as converts to a new religion, their experience demonstrates the close link between bodies and ethics.

It would be a mistake to assume that participants in radical faerie events are "believers" in any straightforward way. Radical faeries are far more likely to express interest in astrology than to profess a belief in the actual existence or conscious presence of the ancestors and deities they invoke in ritual. Indeed, many of my interlocutors claimed to be atheists, and others spoke in a more general sense of reverence for nature and the earth. A fierce penchant for anarchism and considerable personal variation in belief, moreover, undermine attempts to codify or formalize radical faerie religious ideology. There is neither a guru nor a formally-recognized class of teachers. Many faeries maintain ties to other religious and spiritual communities and continue to practice in other styles indefinitely despite their involvement. Harry Hay and his immediate circle, for their part, tend to see the radical faeries as a political project as much as a spiritual one, an attempt to further the work of gay liberation grounded in empiricist Marxism; often they express distrust of religion — as that which oppresses homosexuality — and some are reluctant to participate in overtly neopagan or Native American rituals. This belief in the facticity of Harry Hay and Will Roscoe's history of patriarchy and research on indigenous Two Spirit traditions can itself take the form of an irate, defensive fundamentalism, however, when it comes to admitting constructionist theories of sexuality, or whenever someone mentions Michel Foucault.

While radical faerie religious belief is centered neither on Harry Hay, neopaganism or Native American spirituality, and despite the absence of an identifiable guru, faeries tend over time to adopt a remarkably consistent ideology which can be described as naturist, millennial and communalist. Partially this adapts Harry Hay's view: gay men stand outside ordinary kinship relations and, as caregivers, healers and shamans, have an important role to play in mitigating the excesses of a warlike heterosexual patriarchy. This comes about in part through a close connection with essence, or "nature" — their nature as gay men and

also the earth's nature, the environment, the species around them. Faerie organizing is important and urgent due to an impending civilizational and environmental collapse. The groups that fair best in this collapse will be faerie collectives and communes with tight interpersonal bonds and permaculture work such as water storage and gardening. This combination of ideas forms something like an ideological core; as this dissertation will show, participants tend to gravitate toward these ideas over time even if they are not formally codified or indeed ever presented as a coherent unit.

The term "new religious movement" arose as a politically neutral alternative to "cult." The positivist social science of the 1950s and 1960s arguably made the latter term untenable, populated as it was by hysteria about the possibilities of coercive persuasion (brainwashing) and post-cult trauma. To many in the field, it seemed strange to hold that new religious movements be subject to scrutiny for such tactics when the same level of scrutiny could not be applied to established religions. The reasons people joined cults were found to be largely similar to the reasons people joined any other kind of group. Coercive persuasion was found to be both far more insidious and far more ordinary than anti-cult activists had suggested, encompassing matters of everyday sociality such as framing and social sanction as easily as anything else. Today the study of new religious movements appears both to be flourishing — in that conferences continue to be held and volumes published — and yet on shakier epistemological grounds than ever. Like kinship studies, the field encountered persistent difficulties defining religion precisely.

This dissertation argues that the radical faeries are a kinship phenomenon — that is, a new kind of extended family. In and of itself, this is not a particularly difficult claim. Anthropologists are notoriously pluralistic. The corollary, therefore, will be that the categories which underscore the anthropological conversation on kinship — the reproduction (and adaptation) of a social form, the exchange of persons, gifts and substance, the tracking of descent, and the formation and reformation of alliance — describe the mutual entanglement of radical faerie ways of life *better* than the categories that follow from the other major buckets into which the faeries can be placed.

The reproduction of a social form requires the patterned production and enrollment of the bodies, discourses, practices specific to that form. Though there are more and more exceptions, relatively few people grow up in a context that proclaims and affirms that they are faeries from birth. Many more will later claim to have *been* faeries from birth, probably as an analogue of the notion that they were born gay, but most faeries are raised by non-faeries. Even those who raise small children in faerie contexts often ask the children to decide for themselves whether or not they truly belong, echoing a broader theme of liberal self-making prevalent in Euroamerican countercultures (Povinelli 2006, 56). Thus radical faeries do not reproduce through childrearing, but through the affiliation of new participants. While I will identify several causes of such affiliation, the most important are intimate events, especially the play of sexual desires. As with the nuclear model, the transmission of shared substance matters here, whether it is in the form of semen or merely a side-long glance.

Two forms of exchange often identified as characterizing contemporary kinship regimes, "keeping-while-giving" (Weiner 1992) and "acquiring-while-spending" (Faubion and Hamilton 2007) also play an important role for faeries. Participation in gatherings and obligatory hospitality can be seen as forms of acquiring-while-spending, suggesting models of

kinship as a form of consumption. Yet practices of keeping-while-giving are also important and widespread; those who are skilled at deploying them often accrue greater social merit than those who simply spend a bundle. The circulation of drag is particularly important as a form of keeping-while-giving — the best items often carry long stories of their previous owners — but drag is only one type of object in play, and faeries also practice keeping-while-giving via sacred objects (“wu”) and old archival materials such as issues of RFD.

Exchanges of various kinds can lead alternately to alliance or descent. Alliance consists in an amorphous series of cliques, inner circles that may encompass lovers, roommates or friends. Descent is reckoned through the influence of persons who may or may not be sexual partners, may or may not be living. The latter become especially important in the wake of AIDS, with lovers, caregivers and friends often retaining powerful connections to the deceased long after they are gone. One might track the ways the deceased come to be more or less frequent characters in stories and rituals about the past, with some commanding frequent commemoration, the construction of altars and the performance of various kinds of memorial service, while others slip more quickly and quietly from the memories of the living. Perhaps most importantly, many faeries come to rely on each other to help them through the difficult milestones of life’s passage. Practices of caring in sickness and old age are particularly relevant to faerie social worlds, with many of the key stories stemming from moments when their protagonists lie ill or even dying, and numerous formulations emerging to take care of those in need (and, lest this picture seem too rosy, deemed worthy of caretaking).

Kinship theory has been central to cultural anthropology. Here, it appears, is a human social phenomenon with dramatic variation across cultures. The rules, symbols and practices associated with kinship are often unintelligible to each other, and yet for all their dramatic differences they appear to exhibit considerable systematicity. For Morgan, putative grandfather of this lineage, kinship was the complex object to which anthropology alone offered access. It was so important to systematize kinship relations because it was arguably kinship that made anthropology a distinct science with its own domain.

A few words of context might help underscore why it is important to consider the radical faeries as a kinship phenomenon. Following Edmund Leach, we largely view the structural-functional kinship studies of Radcliffe-Brown and his contemporaries as an exercise in symbolic butterfly collecting: an attempt, that is, to affix non-Western kinship ideas to a firmly biological Western backing. Terms that promised direct access to the mechanics of production, for instance “agnatic” or “uterine,” turned out to be restrictive, impractical and incommensurate with reality as described by our informants. The American kinship studies had always focused more closely on Boas’ culture concept, explaining differences between the kinship forms of Native Americans, Protestant colonists, Spanish Catholics, Africans and others as holistically entwined with the whole range of other cultural practices: food production, crafts and industry, art and language. Schneider’s *American Kinship* (1968) continues this tradition while marking a decisive break with the structural-functionalists, repositioning kinship study as the investigation of systems of symbols rather than “actual” practices or biology. Schneider himself, however, went on to refute his earlier work (1984), broadly reflecting the shift toward studies of power, gender and sexuality as contexts that always already implicated the production of kinship systems as potentially viable responses to a symbolically and materially violent playing field. Kinship studies

would effectively fall into decline, then re-emerge in the 1990s in two new clusters of research: emerging biotechnologies of reproduction and gay and lesbian relationships. In the United Kingdom, the works of Strathern, Carsten and Franklin open a rich conversation on the ways that artificial insemination, surrogacy and genetic engineering reconfigure notions of kinship. Many anthropologists trained in the United States, among them Weston, Lewin, Yanagisako and Borneman, would offer detailed reflection on gay and lesbian relationship arrangements, including various forms of adoption and child care arrangements.

As I discuss in chapter two, the trouble with this intellectual division of labor is that it has preserved a distinctly modern, Euroamerican “nuclear core” to the purview of kinship. To be recognizable as a form of kinship, *something* must resemble the nuclear family — either the couple in a primary relationship or the relationship of parent to child. What of single adults in this rubric? Have they no families? What of roommates? And what, finally, of those who go beyond the nonmonogamous “open relationship” — boys on the side but a strong primary at home — to engage in polyamorous relationships or to balance several loves? In pointing this out, I am echoing and reconfiguring Borneman’s argument against marriage as a form of “universal equivalent,” a fundamentally translatable human form involving a heterosexual coupling and the production of a legitimate child.

Faubion and Hamilton recently proposed that any adequate heuristic for kinship, in addition to an awareness of its own limits and a purview including both symbol and practice, would have to be nonsubstantialist, developmentalist and nonheteronormative. A substantialist theory of kinship might require a biogenetic marker such as DNA to establish relationship. A developmentalist theory would proceed from the notion that the primary kinship categories were determined at birth. A heteronormative account might forget that “human beings do not always marry or form affinal partnerships across the sexual divide and do not always do so for the purposes of generating or fostering children” (2007, 539). Since faeries are largely gay and reproduce through affiliation, not childbearing, their patterns of relationship at first sight appear to pose all of these exceptions. The situation is more complex than this: first, radical faerie relationships actually conform to these traditional kinship expectations more often than one might suppose; second, reproduction through affiliation can take the form of a dramatic conversion, one element the radical faeries share with other new religious movements. For the radical faeries to be “good to think” as an example of a kinship formation, we must agree that they are in fact such a formation at all.

I find the consideration of ritual, conversion and ideology to be important for a full understanding of the radical faerie phenomenon and the characterization of the radical faeries as a new religious movement is apt for some who are involved with them. Yet it seems divorced from the reality of many others. In arguing that the radical faeries are better understood as a kinship phenomenon, I hope to highlight the uneasy borders between sexuality and religion. Both present regimes of sexual ethics, what one might call an erotopolitics of the body. That is, in a context where a particular mode of religion, sexuality or kinship can be presumed, one can also presume a certain set of rules that dictate the comportment of bodies and the ways they are allowed to intertwine. Particular clothing may be obligatory, or even no clothing at all. Sexual intercourse may be permitted — even encouraged — with particular partners and absolutely forbidden with others. It may be expected that one touch or hug others casually, but then again it may be forbidden to touch or share the com-

pany of members of the opposite sex. I argue that such erotopolitics form a more certain epistemological ground than abstract, universalizing characterizations such as religion or sexuality. It follows that kinship phenomena may be the site at which new religions emerge, including new forms of belief and new rituals. It follows likewise that new religious movements should be considered fertile ground for the study of emerging kinship phenomena. This dissertation should therefore be understood as an attempt to pose for each the questions one would ordinarily have asked of the other.

Faeries are decentralized, heterogeneous and variable. Some might engage only to go to a particular party or gathering, to pass through on their way somewhere else. Others might be described as faerie fundamentalists, clinging more-or-less rigidly to certain originary teachings. Probably the single most widely shared opinion, however, an article of faith shared over and over again, is the notion that the faeries represent the “liberationists” of the gay political movement as opposed to the “assimilationists.” The origins of this notion seem fairly clear: Harry Hay taught that gay men needed to isolate themselves from heterosexual society, that they had been so steeped in the patriarchal presumptions, norms and values, that the only way for them to uncover their own unique gifts and talents was to find a someplace outside all of that, where they could gather in peace, exploring their shared experience in a space held safe, for a time, against oppressions of the mainstream social world. One can certainly see the radical faeries as the primary gay counterpart to 1970s lesbian separatist movements, with the important distinction that while lesbian separatism has declined, the faeries continue to multiply, and now often include transpeople, lesbians, bisexuals and even a smattering of straight people.

Whatever else they hold in common, or however else they differ, faeries will almost uniformly argue that gay people are *essentially different* from straight people and that their unique gifts should be encouraged and cultivated. Much of what happens in faerie spaces amounts to an attempt to do just that. As we shall see, faeries engage profound reversals, alternate norms of sexual activity, forms of performance including ritual and drag, the (apparent) rejection of consumerism and embracing of ecology, as well as many other techniques, in order to explore, demonstrate and actualize their own liberation. Clearly, this is a utopian project — and like all utopian projects, there is no guarantee that it can succeed. Very few radical faeries have children, efforts to make the community economically self-sustaining are barely getting underway, and as sexual outsiders, faeries depend a great deal on the ignorance or indifference of the police state.

Moreover, while the faeries *do* differ in important respects from the so-called “gay mainstream,” they are also remarkably similar. For everything distinguishing factor there is another likeness. Faeries are not the only ones who do crazy drag, but on the other hand they may be especially uninhibited about appropriating found objects, rags and recycled sundries into their outfits. Faeries boast about their wide diversity of ages, about friendships between men separated by more than a decade or two, yet relations between older and younger men have been a foundation of homosocialities far beyond the faeries. I have often heard faeries claim that they offer heart-centered, emotionally-connected sex, and I have heard non-faerie San Franciscans' sigh of relief during Beltane and Burning Man, when the faeries aren't around to fill the Powerhouse with their “liberated” sexual assertiveness. Faeries like to proclaim their celebration of diversity and fascination with difference, yet they are an overwhelmingly white, urban bunch. And so on, and so forth.

More problematically, the radical faeries have in some ways always been a form of circuit culture. Though they were briefly controversial in the 1990s and have been much maligned ever since, circuit parties themselves have been on the decline for over a decade, with many events coming to an end and a smaller handful transforming into larger festivals, like the Black and Blue Party in Montreal or Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco. The term serves as an index, however, for a particular form of gay sociality. For psychologist Alan Downs, one of circuit culture's more prominent contemporary critics, the essential feature of circuit culture is a focus on exceptional experiences, orgiastic multi-day parties or holidays in safely homogenous spaces, in which gay men form intense bonds with an inner circle or clique (2012). The time spent with the clique comes to seem uniquely real and significant even though the members can often have little connection with each other in their every day lives. Such a massive expenditure of energy, and the inherently addictive nature of such peak experiences, Downs worries, might lead participants to live their lives in fantasy, trading intense but short-lived connection for the stability and everyday struggle of a "real" relationship.

Faerie gatherings have been the movement's material base. They are the times at which the largest numbers of faeries are assembled in their own space, and at which the most important stories are told, rituals enacted, and bonds formed. While they incorporate elements of the spiritual retreat and the academic conference, they are also times of abandon and celebration. In this respect they do resemble circuit parties, and it must not be overlooked that most faerie sanctuaries are financially dependent on the gatherings to sustain themselves through the rest of the year. Yet whereas Downs argues that relationships that emerge out of circuit culture are typically short-lived, and certainly the same can be true of gatherings, there is also a significant discourse about "bringing the gathering home," finding ways to sustain the norms, values, and connections of gathering space throughout the rest of the year. Urban faerie communities have developed in dozens of cities across the United States, not just New York and San Francisco but also Atlanta, Denver and Austin, among others. These networks support their participants in their own daily lives. In the larger communities, it has become possible for scores, perhaps even hundreds, of people to go through their daily lives with little or no regular contact with non-faeries. Being a faerie is no longer just a matter of "back and forth to the land" (Morgensen 2009a), if that was ever an accurate summary. In chapter three, I argue that gatherings are intimate events comparable to group weddings, which do not just offer a time of exception, the everyday world turned upside-down, but can also initiate first-time participants into a new way of being and a potentially lifelong network of extended kin.

Some might respond, of course, by characterizing the "family" of queer communities like the faeries as inevitably a fakery, a poor imitation of the real families that emerge from marriage and children. To do so, it seems to me, is to participate in the reinscription of certain symbolic norms to which the variations of queer lives can only ever be necessary as an ancillary exception, the perverse "entombed" — to draw on Judith Butler's commentary on *Antigone* (2000), which I will discuss at some length later — as that which guarantees and underscores the real precisely through its negation. One of the primary arguments of this book is that, to avoid such a dilemma, we need to rethink kinship as embedded in processes of affect, imitation and schismogenesis, rather than arising out of the social in an unquestionable, unexamined way, or, worse, as simply a transparent reflection of a fundamental biology. Chapter four, on what I call the political economy of touch, investigates the vio-

lence intrinsic to this expanded notion of family, which has limits after all, and which inevitably consigns some to loneliness and death even as it proffers intimacy and care for others.

The qualitative social sciences and queer theory have largely supported broader notions of kinship and family akin to the ones I advocate here. The 2000s have seen an expansion in work on polyamories in addition to continued work on queer families and caregiving. Yet the faeries have largely been left out of this conversation. To many critical scholars, the radical faeries have seemed fatally flawed: overtly supportive of some of the same normative ideas, goals and aesthetics of elite queer theory, but also reactionary in their apparent whiteness and transphobia. Their hedonism might even be taken for nihilism.

Ethnography is largely a qualitative practice, more akin to literary analysis or history than to psychological testing, for instance. Such work can be thought as falling into two broad categories of approach. The hermeneutic tradition attempts to answer the question of meaning, thus specifying with care and precision what *is*; the critical tradition answers the question what could be otherwise, thus specifying, in a sense, what *is not*. Radical faeries have proven rather more appealing to scholars inclined to a critical disposition; as of this writing, it would probably be fair to say that no work on the faeries from the hermeneutic tradition has been taken seriously, at least if the latter is indicated when a scholar gets a job or a promotion following a work.<sup>2</sup> They are too close at hand to be good objects for anthropology, one of the favorite majors for faeries in college. Faerie theorists appropriate and probably distort anthropological wisdom to create a basis for something which most scholars would probably find self-evidently non-anthropological. To make matters worse, to claim that they are “radical” must strike critical scholars as an insult. How could faeries presume to make such a claim, and with barely any reference to elite queer theory or cultural studies at that? “I keep thinking,” remarked a colleague recently, “that if I were going to write about them, I’d be inclined to do so ironically. Surely you can’t take the faeries *seriously*.”

“Well,” I replied, “I certainly don’t take faeries’ ideological claims at *face value*.”

“But it’s more than that! The return to the rural, the refusal of specialization — isn’t it a form of nostalgia, ultimately a refusal of *knowledge*? It takes thousands of years to know the land, to understand it the way indigenous peoples did. For the faeries such knowledge is unattainable.”

“Yes, that’s true. Faeries are constantly dealing with urbanites (or more likely, suburbanites) who move to the sanctuaries without any idea what they are doing. When successful, they find ways to draw in locals and learn from them.”

“White Americans have always done that! Really, shouldn’t you understand this project as a kind of elegy to a settler mentality that is already gone? Aren’t the faeries, in some sense, just re-enacting the colonization of North America?”

I have heard this objection more times than is possible to count. Is all settlement a question of a space conceived as empty, pretending that a land is without history when in fact it has been erased? To put the question another way, is there a way in which the radical faeries continue a certain trajectory of deterritorialization? That is, while colonial Europeans are deterritorialized — by religious difference, criminal status or the pursuit of capital

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<sup>2</sup> Obviously, I think of Povinelli’s *Empires of Love* as critical, not hermeneutic.

— in their invasion and appropriation of the indigenous lands, are gay men who settle in rural communities continuing along the same lines when they respond to an ambivalent settler society precisely through settling elsewhere? One has to answer affirmatively. Yet it is rare to hear the same accusation leveled against postcolonial ethnic communities in diaspora; one does not dismiss or invalidate Indian or Chinese people, settling in North America, because Protestant Europeans have done so as well. Instead, the movement of money determines the course of such anxieties: “Los Angelesños worry about the Japanese buying up their city, and people in Bombay worry about the rich Arabs from the Gulf states” (Appadurai 1991, 49). Surely, many faeries benefit from complex forms of white privilege though they may be marked by class, citizenship and especially gender and sexuality. In this regard the ethical and spiritual ties to First Nations struggles seem profoundly important. What worries me, however, is that accusations of appropriation and recapitulation of settler dynamics appear to exonerate “legitimate” peoples, religions and ethnicities, recognized through the use they make of discourses of genealogical society, while doing little to expose those very discourses as part of the operation of liberalism (and, ironically, obstacles to new forms of social relations). “The loosening of the holds between people, wealth, and territories fundamentally alters the basis of cultural reproduction” (49).

It is apparently difficult for even the most well-intentioned scholars to take the faeries *seriously*. Surely, there is a mishmash of New Age ideas, superstition and misinformation extant in the movement, such that its foundational myths can appear laughable and wildly inaccurate. Suspicion often greets my project in the guise of helpful advice: I should be more critical, I should be wary of Nazi sentiments the faeries might be expressing, and most of all, I should be careful to show that the faeries cannot possibly achieve what they claim to be their goals. Under these conditions, what constitutes ethnography, and how might it be done well?

As usual, one of the first steps in formulating a cultural anthropology of the faeries must be to distinguish emic from etic. “Radical,” pronounces Jerry the Faerie in a vaguely ecclesiastical purple gown, “means ‘from the root.’ It asks us to look at the root of who we are. It asks us the questions with which Harry framed the first gathering: ‘Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?’”<sup>3</sup> Some faeries from Harry Hay’s circle have invoked this notion to explain why *radical* faeries have to be cisgendered gay men, or why radical faeries are the inheritors of a tradition of gay shamanism. For other radical faeries, the word speaks to a political tradition more closely rooted in anarchism or communism. Radical faeries, in this notion, should be in the streets. They should be marching or taking direct action to create change. In both cases the word serves to set a certain boundary, implying that some faeries are radical while others are not. The problem does not stop with the faeries, however. In this sense, the term “radical community,” widely used within other contemporary leftist counterpublics, is a contradiction in terms. By definition, a community has knowledge and interests in common. Such knowledge and interests amount to a positive definition; hence negation is immediate and unavoidable, the flip side of the coin. Communities thus require exclusion. Indeed, we can say they exist only by virtue of their exclusion. Part of the problem for critical scholars may be that, in Stuart Hall’s sense, such formations are necessarily liberal as opposed to radical (1996).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95Dz2QQcfSE>

Extending Hall's sense of the liberal-radical dichotomy, I confess my own hope for a truly other otherness, an otherness the character of which is unknown, whose appearance or form cannot be anticipated. Derrida would call the appearance of such radical otherness an event, in all its singularity, for it changes the very terms by which recognition can occur. How can or should a faerie relate to such others? What others do they recognize and under what conditions? Particularly in chapters five and six, I shall argue that others do, indeed, matter, and that the challenge of radical otherness is precisely to allow others' material to be *real* material, to be solid and substantial, fleshy, scaly or feathered though it may be. The question of the other can be answered — and answer it we must — but only with another question. To recognize this is to confront and accept the final contingency of truth.

When a form is recognizable and fits a pattern about which there is existing discourse, we are not dealing with a radical other, though the other may be included or excluded according to a series of practices in which many faeries are well-versed. Indeed, it may not make sense to describe the other *as* other for very long, since the nature of the most predictable outsider cases is that they are often “handled” through integration into faerie circles. They are arguably ideal raw material for the production of new faeries — i.e. conversion. The most innocent such position is that of the gathering virgin. “You can do no wrong as a virgin,” I was told at my first gathering; such new visitors tend to be treated with considerable warmth and interest (in accord, however, with their own persons and personalities). They may be invited to do dishes but are not otherwise expected to do serious work. Some may be dealing with coming out issues, may have recently been abandoned or escaped abusive situations. In these cases a little more intervention can be offered; the proto-faerie is likely to be directed to heart circle or introduced to someone who is known to have had a similar experience. More problematic still are transients, wanderers without a clear home or residence to which they are returning. Transients must be integrated into the community one way or another after the gathering, or in extreme cases, they may be asked to move on. Many of the sanctuaries hold clear boundaries around violence and drug use, particularly methamphetamine, so transients whose journey includes such activities may find they are rather less enthusiastically welcomed and may face a difficult challenge accessing the services they need.

Such cases are not radical others, nor are they particularly distant. Indeed, integrating recognizably gay (and often queer) bodies is a practice necessary for the radical faeries' survival. It remains the case, however, that not all bodies can be integrated so smoothly, and not all visitors receive an equally warm welcome. “Bring us your sick, your poor, your huddled masses” — the faeries might add, as long as they are cute and their penises stick out instead of in. Body fascism wreaks havoc amongst faeries, as it does amongst “mainstream” gays, and it is organized along many similar lines. The young and the beautiful, the muscled, Caucasians — all these qualities help constitute a desirable body, help specify that the person in question is to be revered, honored, given gifts, solicited and perhaps seduced. The fat and the old receive a less welcome reception, though their accounts are mixed, and many report finding companionship and solace notwithstanding. The issue of gendersex, however, is more complicated, and there are certainly many spaces in which woman-gendered or woman-identified faeries do not feel welcome because they are not made welcome. Indeed, the mere fact of a penis that moves inward rather than outward (an “innie”) on an otherwise passable transman, has been more than enough to exclude, alienate and

divide. As I discuss elsewhere, the formation and reformation of circles and cliques amounts to a more general mode of exclusion within those who claim to be — or are recognized as — legitimately faerie.

Yet more radical are those others that fail to bear recognizably human form: animals and plants, for instance. One could think larger, more abstract others with infinitely crenelated surfaces, each nook and cranny a matter of faerie life or death — e.g. the state or the law — and certainly some of the smallest others are the strangest and most terrifying. In principle, their form is unknown, perhaps not yet amenable to thought. The space occupied by radical others is a space of darkness every construction of which must be wrong. On the horizon of radical otherness, that is, I find the question of the emergent and the threat of nothingness. In such company, where lie ethics? With what map can we orient ourselves? How even to begin?

There is certainly no dearth of material. Simply visiting a sanctuary or gathering provides a wealth of possible data, plenty to make some initial observations. Moreover, faeries are almost obsessively self-archival, with a journal, numerous books, newsletters, websites, blogs, Facebook groups and plenty of other material from which to work. I have therefore collected an extensive archive of both fairy and “radical faerie” writings and publications from the 1970s to the present day. Far from reticent, many faeries are delighted to be interviewed and are even relentlessly public with their perspective and experiences, several asking to enroll my interview recordings in their own personal and artistic projects.

Unlike some other ethnographers who came to the radical faeries from a professional context, primarily looking for a field site, I have been touched by and implicated in radical faerie social worlds for over a decade. If such a thing is possible in a “family of choice,” an affiliative social genre composed mainly of adults, I am a native anthropologist. By the standards that prevailed in 20th century American anthropology, I should therefore be disqualified from doing “real” work regarding them. Yet the dichotomy of native and non-native, it should be remembered, is in part an artifact of a notion of culture that presumes distance, isolation and a violent reduction of ambiguity. It is a remnant of an ethnographic mode that relied both on the colonial apparatus and on the inability of the informants to respond. Cultures are not discrete, bounded things; nor are they wholly separate from other social differences, from overlapping families, networks, modes of sensibility. We might therefore reconceive the question of the native or non-native anthropologist as a question of “shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” (Narayan 1993, 672). To this end, I mix in this dissertation accounts of events that are at once “faerie” and “professional” or “academic.” This is not a simple opposition; rather, it is an attempt to construct a way of understanding an immanent sociality that renders impossible the invidiously dichotomous “domain.” At times, it may thus be that faerie worlds, through me, are posing questions of academic worlds. At the outset, however, it is vital to note that my participation in radical faerie worlds has not been confined to sometimes putting down pen and paper. I am bodily immersed in such worlds, and I have even helped to create them. Yet this is not to say that I am an unqualified advocate, a mere booster. My disposition as a critic and anthropologist leaves me skeptical of core faerie narratives even as I notice my friends and family adopting them. It does, however, mean that I cannot pretend to a straightforward objectivity that allows the reader to assume I am neutral with regard to the power relations at work in my field. I therefore have attempted to

situate myself in ways that lend nuance and context to the knowledge I am laboring to produce.

Ethnography, I argue, should begin with such situation. Early practitioners of the art began with the colonial situation, the extreme dichotomy between a handful of European powers and the varied people they came to observe, manage and slaughter. Some were quite aware of and reflexive about the power dynamics inherent in such situations; others, for a variety of reasons, were not, or did not choose to emphasize such issues in their works. I begin with the notion that we are all embedded in situations, and that any knowledge we produce is best understood in the context of that situation. In this I am, of course, merely echoing the feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway, who productively contrasted situated knowledges, rich with context and particular histories, with standpoint epistemologies, the earlier notion that one's standpoint — insider or outsider, black or white, straight or gay — was essential to one's scholarly work (1988b). In many ways Haraway represents the emergence of third wave feminism and its profound influence on critical scholarship, and I am enormously indebted to her work here.

From a situation, an ethnographer selects material with which to construct an assemblage, a heterogeneous collection, that begins to tell stories and ask questions. As one examines the material closely, one asks what is reflected in it, and discovers a series of problems. One may discover faults or gaps in one's previous knowledge. One may discover biases of selection and circumstance. In the thinking and writing process, one reveals such problems and has occasion to reflect upon them.

I hope to have done exactly this in preparing the present work. The essays that follow consider a series of problems posed by anthropological discourse, faerie worlds, and their juxtaposition. Inspired by early sociologist Gabriel Tarde, Chapter Two (“Kinship Beyond the Nuclear Core”) asks how anthropologists have constituted kinship, and whether that category might be productively rethought with greater attention to processes of imitation, adaptation, and opposition. Chapter Three (“Intimate Events”) considers faerie gatherings as kin-making exercises, offering some context for the emergence of gatherings as well as a description of the ways faerie gatherings work with norms and their reversals, opening up space in which to engage with new norms. Chapter Four (“The Political Economy of Touch”) considers sexuality, consent and homogeneity more closely, linking faerie affiliation to much more widespread processes of homosociality. Chapter Five considers the faeries' nemesis, the figure of the clone. Chapters Six and Seven (“Harvest Season” and “Time of Monsters”) describe the results of such conflicts as they have shaped and been shaped by the ecology of Wolf Creek Sanctuary in Oregon and the agency of a powerful nonhuman actor, cannabis. Finally, Chapter Eight raises problems for some radical faerie fundamentalists, offering a critique of Harry Hay's ethical philosophy and, hopefully, helping to envision how faeries might update it for contemporary problems while remaining true to its spirit.

We seek that which has not yet been assimilated, not to assimilate and so to expand, but to ask how it might cause us to question every other strand of our own knowledge. If ethnography can be said to be a tradition of radical social science, or if it is sometimes associated with radicalism, I believe that such a quality perhaps inheres in the attempt to recognize and reflect otherness without foreclosing upon it.

## 2 Rethinking Kinship

“Concepts of action—concepts of kinship included—should rather serve to render more clear and explicit analogical connections or topological approximations between or among phenomena that on first sight might appear to be entirely discrete” (Faubion and Hamilton 2007, 539).

“Language thus disperses the desire she seeks to bind to him, cursing her, as it were, with a promiscuity she cannot contain” (Butler 2000, 77)

Kinship is the state of being kin with one or more others, dead or alive. Since it loses much of its analytical purchase when extended too far, it marks certain relations to the exclusion of others. Kinship has often been used to determine matters of citizenship, religion, and social status; often, one’s lineage has defined more than any other factor how one can expect to be treated, what one can hope for, how one will live. Kinship has thus been a central object of anthropological endeavors. Yet despite an enormous amount of effort, studies of kinship have failed to arrive at anything like generally acceptable basic definitions. While the same is true of anthropological studies of economics, politics and religion, it is all the more vexing for kinship. On the one hand, the family acts as a most unusually contagious metaphor, framing comprehension of the latter domains — as well as all sorts of other social metaphors — in a way that is nonreversible. That is, reasoning based on economics, politics or religion is not used with equal frequency to explain kinship. On the other hand, like economics, politics or religion, exceptions to kinship’s practical and ideal norms are rampant and largely indisputable. Artificial insemination, fertility treatments and gene therapy have been advancing rapidly and increasing numbers of families involve intimate same-sex relations in a variety of ways. Yet despite these contributions, important and well-known to anthropologists, and the paucity of basic definitions, I argue that a nuclear core shines brightly within contemporary kinship studies, thoroughly irradiating any possibility of understanding reconfigured kinship relations as legitimate in their own right. Legitimacy for queer families remains foreclosed, and polyamorous sexual ethics impossible to take seriously. I argue that this situation is unfortunate because the pragmatics of such formations open the way for a substantial rethinking of kinship. This chapter begins such an undertaking, first honoring the ancestors via the obligatory performance of anthropological seriousness, that is, the recitation of disciplinary history, and then imagining what might have happened if kinship studies in the first years of the twentieth century had proceeded according to different axioms.

For 19th and early 20th century students of colonized peoples, the problem of the state and social stability were central: in the absence of a governing power, what conduced small-scale groups toward predictable systems of relation with each other? Why was outright war so rare, even given the evidence of enduring conflicts? Part of the answer came from the notion of kinship systems, which consisted in rules for determining the relations of individuals to groups and groups to each other. Kinship did not so much address the di-

vision of labor or gender dynamics within households as it explained how those households — usually through a patriarch — related to each other. Accordingly, in the works of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, two of the more influential ethnographers of kinship in mid-century social anthropology, matters of kinship mediated spheres of domesticity and politics: they lay in the middle, translating the one into the other as well as keeping them apart. Such kinship theories have their roots in the notion that social structures are made of families, that patterns thought to be intrinsic to families — the incest taboo, patriliney and matriliney, the mother-child bond — were necessary prerequisites for the emergence of larger-scale forms. A logic of addition or extension, applied to families, eventually produced societies. Even those works that purported to consider political structures or social systems often found themselves compelled by the family, an absent presence *sine qua non*. For example, in Evans-Pritchard's classic anatomy of Nuer social structure, the family serves as the hub in a larger structure that exceeds but necessarily requires it. Evans-Pritchard maintained he did not set out to study families, for "the family, the household, and the hamlet [are] domestic, rather than political, groups." Yet the "political" system he will outline depends on a series of distinctions that require the family and are meaningless without it.

The contours of this system are well-known. Though the Nuer live side-by-side with the Dinka and marry them routinely, they are not Dinka. Yet the Nuer in and of themselves are but a collection of tribes. A tribe is "the largest group in which legal obligation is acknowledged [and] also the largest group which habitually joins for offense and defense"; their numbers range from the low hundreds "if these are properly regarded as tribes" to almost 50,000 (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 72). Such units are divided into a series of segments and also include a series of clans. "A tribal segment is a political group in relation to other segments of the same kind, and they jointly form a tribe only in relation to other Nuer tribes and to adjacent foreign tribes which form part of their political system, and without these relations very little meaning can be attached to the concepts of 'tribe' and 'tribal segment.'"<sup>4</sup> There is an obvious foreshadowing here of Morton Fried's declaration that the notion of tribe is generally meaningless prior to the encounter with an expanding state. Aside from their appropriation and deployment by subaltern peoples, tribes are primarily artifacts of colonial observation and control (1975).

We are thus left with a conundrum: if membership in these political units is meaningful only when in conflict with other political units of the same order, if the units themselves are genealogical, if the same is true of the very distinction between Nuer and Dinka, thus of the very cultural frame within which Evans-Pritchard's study took place, in what sense did an object "the Nuer" exist prior to Evans-Pritchard's specification? Notwithstanding its own prescriptive force, "Nuer" may have been better understood as a broad kinship term hitched to geography and colonial administration, rather than a discrete cultural entity. We have the spectacle of a series of divisions and conflicts built upon genealogical calculation, and thus the organization of peoples into families. It is as though familial relations become tribal conflicts through distance in time and affect, move outward through generations like ripples in a pond. In fact, the distinction between the political and the "domestic"

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<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between tribal segments and clans, Evans-Pritchard is notably vague, though he defines a clan as composed of various clan segments, or lineages, "the defining characteristic of [which] is that the relationship of any member of it to other members can be stated exactly in genealogical terms" (74). He might as well have said, "it is a clan because I say so."

is consequent to Evans-Pritchard's occlusion of a more relevant power dynamic, that of British colonial occupation.

David Schneider argued in his *Critique of the Study of Kinship* that this focus on relations that arise out of the processes of human reproduction "derive[d] directly and recognizably from the commonsense notions, the everyday premises of the culture" of European scientists (1984, 175). Such anthropologists had ported their own "folk conception" that "blood is thicker than water" directly onto the data they found in other cultures, thus building a theory of kinship on an unstable foundation. Schneider's work did much to move kinship studies from a formalistic concern with developing and imposing a classificatory grid to something more hermeneutic and flexible. Yet decades since the challenge was clearly leveled, it has proven largely impossible to fulfill Schneider's desire for an analytic of kinship that does more than generalize Euroamerican ideals in more abstruse language. Instead, kinship studies have shifted toward hermeneutics and nominalism, documenting emergent variations in the possibilities for relatedness and largely shirking the task of finding an adequate explanatory foundation for kinship as a whole, if the latter domain even retains any credence. Despite this shift, however, most ethnographers still appear to work with a heuristic concept of kinship that relies for its empathic and analytic power on a nuclear core. For a phenomenon to be recognizable as kinship, something must remain within the orbit of that dense complex of norms. In the new kinship studies, either the relationship between parent and child or the (often presumptively monogamous) caregiving couple must be preserved for a social form to qualify as legitimate kinship. This criterion of legitimacy forecloses in advance the recognition of emerging formations of queer families and friends as truly based on relations of kinship.

By the mid-century, kinship theory had shifted from documentation of extended networks and complex descent forms to more abstract considerations. For both Radcliffe-Brown and Claude Levi-Strauss, the effort of reduction was intrinsic to the scientific process, which entailed creating simplifying explanatory theories out of complex data, a project far from the "analogical" connections invoked by Faubion in my epigraph, above. Accordingly they attempt to determine an elementary quantum of kinship out of which all the complex forms had to be produced. For Radcliffe-Brown this was the nuclear family, a marital couple and their child. Levi-Strauss' "atom of kinship" also required the sister's brother; marriage, the incest taboo and the forbidden subject position worked as a complex that originally demarcated the sociocultural domain of kinship from that of nature (1963). The Oedipal possibility could not have fulfilled this role, since that would have required the re-introduction of a synchronic element and produced a complex tale of multiple marriages. In both cases we see a shift from kinship as an intermediary domain between the domestic and political to units more similar to Euroamerican nuclear families.

During the 1990s and 2000s, influential work in the anthropology of kinship emerged on two separate lines. In the United States, where Levi-Strauss had been received with relative enthusiasm by an earlier generation, the new kinship studies took alliance to be more fundamental. A major line of work focused on gay and lesbian families, notably through the ethnographies of Ellen Lewin and Kath Weston. Both worked with gay and lesbian families; both worked in and around San Francisco. Whereas Lewin argued for the legitimacy of the new families, however, that they were adequate to the task of childrearing and not necessarily different in that regard from heterosexual couples joined by marriage,

Weston argued that the new families represented a productive adaptation and rearticulation of family forms to distinctly gay and lesbian needs. This proved more useful to those who were tracking the emergence and history of queer social formations.

The emphasis of these readings, however, is similar: what matters are not shared biogenetic substance or widely-accepted codes of conduct based on subject positions described through kinship terms, but the affective and durational qualities of relationships that constitute kinship as it is lived. This is central idea for John Borneman, who reconceives kinship as a matter of “caring and being cared for” (1997). In the context of the extended debate on gay marriage in the United States, such work can produce a powerful effect of legitimization. We need care most when we are at our most vulnerable, and no one, it seems, is more vulnerable than a child. What I am calling kinship’s nuclear core Borneman diagnoses as a “serial trinity.” “[C]ontemporary anthropologists have shown solidarity with their immediate predecessors in presuming that birth, marriage, and death constitute a serial trinity at the center of the human life course” (1996a, 217). His work on homosexual kinship and European national imaginaries does much to unsettle this serial trinity: for instance, he presents the case of Harald and Dieter, two German gay men who live together and take care of one another. Faced with a terminal illness, Harald moves to adopt Dieter as his son so as to assure his property and body are handled in accord with his wishes. In retelling their story, Borneman shows us that a relationship that does not, in practice, strongly resemble either marriage or fatherhood may nonetheless articulate with kinship positions recognizable in law according to a logic of expediency. Another means to consider kinship outside the serial trinity emerges from his reading of Etoro kinship, infamous for the central role of same-sex unions in the process of opposite-sex reproduction:

The fact that the homosexual union may precede the heterosexual marriage temporally is pointless, for epistemologically neither relationship can be established as originary. Would he have married the woman had she had no brother? Would he have become the sex partner of the boy had that boy had no sister? Such questions are misleading. Neither the hetero-marriage nor the homosexual union is prior; neither relation is supplementary to or completes the other, and neither is marked as presence or absence. Instead, gender, sex, marriage, and social organization are part of a variable chain of signifiers, a chain of differential references that are resignified and prioritized only at the occasions in which they are performed and symbolized. There is no originary theoretical or practical core out of which the other terms or relations are generated, no universal referent prior to all others, no heterosexual imperative grounding the social. Marriage, gender, and the symbolics of blood, then, enter into social relations not as prior to sexuality but as part of a matrix of power relations (229).

Let us consider his observation a starting point for the matter at hand, for here Borneman offers another figure of kinship bent on escaping confinement within the rigid genealogical grid of traditional kinship studies. If kinship is likewise resignified and prioritized through occasions in which it is performed and symbolized, does this mean that these are the occasions on which it becomes actual, the performative citations of which we learn from Butler?

What, after all, is a matrix of power relations? In *Gender Trouble* Butler works in some depth with the matrix as a metaphor for understanding norms and their operation. For her, a “matrix of intelligibility” by which we might understand sex or gender systems amounts to a conceptual grid or a categorical schema. Such a matrix might provide one of the preconditions for recognizing certain genders and their disruption; it might express framing metaphors for the issue at hand (1990, 23-24). If Borneman’s matrix of power relations similarly operates as a necessary part of, even a precondition for cognition, exactly how and when does it do so? If it “grounds” cognition in this way, how is it that it does not similarly “ground the social,” as Borneman puts it in the passage above? Where exactly is the matrix and where are the various positions or occasions made possible by it? Note that Borneman refers to a matrix, not to matrices: syntactically, such a matrix appears to include marriage *and* gender *and* the symbolics of blood. This is a mighty matrix indeed, but where exactly does it reside? Borneman’s model is one of a chain of signifiers performed and symbolized (made into a symbol?) on occasion, or on occasions; it is a temporal model rather than spatial. This suggests that the matrix at work for Borneman is a practical matrix, a matrix of entities and their relations, rather than a cognitive and discursive grid, a matrix of intelligibility. Whatever the case, the matrix is a recurring trope for gender studies and queer theory, a figure that appears and disappears, like the Mad Hatter, in a variety of locations but always, as it appears, at the same position in an argument. Borneman’s matrix of power relations, like Latour’s “tiny conduits” (on which I shall have more to say below) gestures toward an ungraspable complexity while neatly sidestepping questions of ontology. It is thus an ideal explanatory device for matters that one wishes to portray as social in a relentlessly postsocial academic moment. Of what, however, does it precisely consist?

There is much that is to be appreciated in Borneman’s work; in the context of the extended debate on gay marriage in the United States, as well, his ideas may produce a powerful effect of legitimization. Yet Borneman’s cases, like those of Lewin and Weston, may be explicit about their subjects’ nonmonogamy but rarely extend the legitimating mantle of kinship beyond dyadic alliances — that is, couples — and descent realized in childrearing. The possibility of something more diffuse, amorphous and polyamorous appears primarily as gesture and rarely receives careful consideration. If either the parent-child relationship or the adult caregiving couple must be conceived as archetypal of kin relations, then, it appears that such studies continue to reveal the nuclear core. Something must remain familiar — either the couple form, or the relationship between parent and child — in order for relations to be properly regarded as relations between kin.

In the UK, turn of the century anthropology of kinship worked from a somewhat different angle. The study of new genetic technologies and their implications by Strathern, Franklin and Carsten, among others, focused on an apparent destabilization of the biological ground for understanding descent. Sexual activity had come to appear less and less the only road to procreation. Contraception and fertility treatments, especially sperm donation, in vitro fertilization and genetic therapies, all suggested the very real possibility of interrupting and reorganizing human reproduction in accordance with prevailing norms and values. In her study of (in)fertility clinics, Thompson found no “unique template” for biological reproduction” (2005), suggesting the process of conception might have been malleable all along. Kinship, like gender, could not be explained adequately via the assumption of a

firm biological foundation. It became axiomatic that kinship had to be made in a historical and developmental process, rather than something given automatically at birth or static throughout all time. If one accepted that evolution (presumptively “biological”) demonstrated punctuated equilibria, as Gould argued most famously, one might no longer trust the distinction between history and evolution, since we could not know when a speciation event was beginning. The various cases of exception to the so-called maternal instinct supported the same argument. Anthropologists had documented numerous mothers who resented or disliked their offspring *in utero* and post partum, who made decisions to invest in some children to the exclusion, abjection or demise of others, and who forewent care for their children when their own comfort or survival was in question. Cases of assisted childrearing such as the use of nursemaids amongst European nobility and bourgeoisie were equally well-known to historians. Finally, if kinship were straightforwardly biological, we would have found evidence of widespread matrilineality predating later patrilineal forms, since the relationship of mother to child was considered immediately apparent as the relationship of mother to father was not. Yet, as has often been pointed out, evidence for a primitive “age of women” was scarce. The sociality of kinship, the belief that kinship consists of learned communicative practices, that biological discourse on kinship is itself such a practice, consisting in selecting and constructing a narrative from material that exceeds it — all became articles of faith.

Theorists such as Rabinow and Haraway noted that biology itself had come to appear every bit as changing, complex and indeterminate as the social or semiotic (Rabinow 1992) (Haraway 1988a). Nor did it always figure as a foundation; Hayden, for instance, noted that the uses made of biology had also turned out to be unstable, themselves contingent and unpredictable phenomena (Hayden 1995). She described ways that lesbians deployed biological notions in drawing upon and making sense of artificial insemination: rather than the biological as the basis of the primary kin relationships, it became a domain and toolkit with which to articulate significance in context. Similar accounts of biological storytelling, of the social construction of meaningful biologies, began to become quite numerous.

In a contribution from one of the UK’s most eminent anthropologists, Marilyn Strathern’s *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected* (2005), the unit of analysis is the relation, which itself might differ as concept and function in different contexts. Her work concurs with the constructivist notion that the relation is prior to individuals or persons, that the latter are always already formed by relations. Relations do not merely designate certain kinfolk, as in the idiom “all my relations”; nor are they limited to those between people always already subsumed under some system of kinship. In this the work reduces and marginalizes the roles played by “society” and “culture,” yet there is still an assumption that differences of human relation can be located geographically. Strathern still makes recourse here to a distinction between “Euro-Americans” and “Melanesians,” and thus to a grand reduction of the complexities of globalization and postcoloniality. Whether or not the work is thus fully poststructural, however, is less interesting at present than the question of how the work addresses the nuclear family; here Strathern demonstrates the nuclear heuristic of kinship which I argue stands in the way of a more productive rethinking of relationality, imitation, and the making of kind. She recognizes, of course, that the boundaries of nuclear families are unstable and that what counts as the nuclear family depends on how one con-

siders questions of divorce and remarriage, amongst others (2005). Yet the basic relationship of descent, the relationship between parent, especially mother, and child remain central to her cases. *In vitro* fertilization, the visitation rights of grandparents, the efforts of mothers to limit and shape the consumption of their children, and, in Melanesian contexts, the question of the mother's ownership of the daughter, all tend to reinforce descent — one way or another — as an essential requirement for kinship. In this work, then, Strathern abstracts from but does not reformulate the notion of kinship that Schneider found to be an unsound analytic domain.

While less abstract, Carsten in *After Kinship* (2004a) in some ways does a better job of thinking kinship beyond the nuclear core. Throughout the work, she destabilizes the dichotomy between substance and code, the natural and the social, showing how they blend into one another and describing cases in which substance is shown to be mutable, dependent on codes of contact, and to connect differently to local ideas of relatedness than does the diagram of substance we see in Schneider's (Euro)american kinship. She recounts, for instance, one of the arguments that made Strathern's reputation for ethnographic and philosophical reasoning: the argument that Malinowski had actually *understated* a dissociation of physiology, reproduction and the movement of semen, missing that not just were Trobriand fathers not understood to be the creators of their children, neither were Trobriand mothers. Carsten's chapter on houses as homes, in particular, emphasizes kinship as something made rather than given. A house need not be occupied by a nuclear family — several of her examples are not — in order for the interactions between its occupants to count as kin-making. Houses, as Carsten remarks, "offer us a way of grasping the significance of kinship 'from the inside,' that is, through an exploration of the everyday intimacies that occur there. This allows a suspension of some preconceptions about the formal characteristics of kinship in analytical terms so that we can begin from first principles" (2004b). She cites the use of the term 'cousins' by youth in Southhall to describe ties of loyalty and affiliation that combine elements of friends and kin, and she provides extensive discussions of Dravidian kinship and, based on her own fieldwork, Malay families wherein children are normally fostered, for longer or shorter durations, by other families, thus not raised exclusively by those with whom there is a relation approximating blood (*ibid*). Carsten's other cases include Diane Blood's legal battle to be inseminated with her deceased husband's sperm, and the decision of Jewish authorities that Jewish women are to be artificially inseminated only with non-Jewish sperm, supporting an injunction against masturbation. If there is a "nuclear core" in *After Kinship*, it thus works primarily through the balance of the examples' focus on children and marriage, through a relative scarcity of consideration of those examples that do not bear the expected family resemblance.

While the book thus represents another stepping stone to the kind of analysis toward which I am working here, it is nonetheless a comparison and review of a wide range of ethnographic analyses of kinship in recent Euroamerican anthropology. It says much about how kinship may be made but little about where, and why, new kinship forms come to be, or how we would observe such formation in progress. The very notion of a kinship system suggests a backdrop, a wider field of social relations out of which it might be plucked. Yet if that field is itself wracked by fundamental, immediate transformations, an epistemic gap widens when we assume we can stop at thick description and classification. Such hermeneutic approaches to kinship, even when qualified by the subjunctive, even

when understood as a hermeneutics not just of *matryoshki* sociality, of a unitary symbolic, specific and locatable within a set of encompassing totalities, miss the opportunity to understand kinship ontologically. When we examine the form of alliance and descent arrangements, not their substance, that is, subject positions and their meanings rather than immediately effective, iterative practices and the intertwined bodies engaged by them, we require the event, as has become the fashion, to be marked by a shift in relations, a shift in power. Yet this leaves us troubled when we attempt to explain the persistence of norms. To put it another way, meaning implies collectivity, and the focus on such collectivities blinds us to the materiality of their (re)production. It is not enough simply to cease reference to bounded societies and cultures, or to demonstrate the indissociability of “nature” and “culture” as such without fundamentally reimagining social poesis on another basis. Without understanding why the grand domains are fundamentally flawed, one risks recreating their flaws. In this case, it becomes difficult to explain the arising and passing away of particular embodied affects and impressions, not to mention their stability in any particular collective.

Thinking kinship without culture or society turns out to be more challenging than meets the eye. Two matters come directly to the fore. How, first of all, does kinship function as a discourse? Does the continued production and reproduction of kinship studies ironically legitimize what is in actuality a purely artificial resemblance between diverse modes of intimacy prescribed by hegemonic notions of family, i.e. norms? Rather than attempt to look down upon matters from a rarefied and impossible place of clarity, we need to understand our own predicament as investigators, taking our own situations as part of the context within which we assemble research. There might even be something productive in abandoning the hope that an adequate heuristic of kinship is possible. I argue elsewhere that kinship *per se* can be well-understood as a form of folk religion, and certainly it is instructive to contemplate the uneasy assumption that they consider differing domains. Both can offer uniquely early and sticky entanglements. Both can form part of a worldview, an integrative affective approach. It is immediately apparent, as well, how often matters of religion and family practice are closely entangled, as controversies on matters such as the *burka*, abortion, gay marriage and polygamy attest.

Having taken this first step, we move to a more basic and ultimately more helpful set of sociological questions. What are the minimal qualities of a collective or group? What conditions give rise to collectives, and what conditions threaten them? How do we track the outsiders and those left behind, the myriad or the multitude beyond? Ultimately, how might we nurture ourselves and others? It is central to my argument that our answers to these questions are interconnected, and indeed that the questions themselves are not as dissimilar as they first appear.

Reformulating the problem of kinship in terms of the more general problem of collectives suggests an analogy to the problem of the crowd. The 19th century concern with crowds and crowd behavior framed a number of key theoretical dilemmas for the sociology that would follow. Crowds appeared to hold a key to understanding social stability and unrest, the dynamics of revolution — certainly a significant concern in France following the defeat of the Paris Commune! — and criminality in general. For most scholars, drawn from an intelligentsia which required substantial privilege to access, crowds were dangerous, the site of an infectious influence that could overwhelm weak minds. If the connection with

kinship formations at first appears tenuous, consider how often the borders of a crowd have reflected lines of ethnicity or religion. To say that the formation of a crowd is accompanied by a certain subjective “discharge,” as Canetti put it (1984), is to say that it switches one mode of subjectivation for another. The European fear of “the horde,” after all, has ancient roots.

Although Durkheim did not write much about crowds specifically, he was certainly influenced by 19th century French sociology’s general interest in the topic. Indeed, he made the activities of certain kinds of crowds into the lynchpin of his theory of religion as a social fact, a social phenomenon *par excellence*. How was it that societies came to view matters of ritual performance, totem and taboo in such strikingly similar ways? For Durkheim, it had to be that “[C]ertain situations ... generate and recreate religious beliefs and sentiments” (Lukes 1985, 462), situations of a certain “collective effervescence,” peak moments in which the assembled masses underwent dramatic and transformative experiences together. After such an event, he argued, “men believe themselves transported into an entirely different world from the one they have before their eyes” (2001, 314). These were, in other words, events that came to undergird participation in a society conceived as social totality, in which social facts were indisputable, impressing themselves ineluctably on the society’s members. Such events led without delay or distraction to the establishment of a fixed social order. Yet besides referring to the intensity and peculiarity of collective effervescence, its link to ritual disruption or carnival, Durkheim does not give us much of an idea why society should congeal from certain experiences and not others, why religion should settle on certain ideas and not others, or how, precisely, individuals came to be transformed under their influence. Indeed, he at times specifically precludes the agency of the individual upon social facts: what makes the facts social is their coercive power, the weight they exert, the fact that they cannot be changed. Unlike Weber, Durkheim gives little to the notion of charisma, to the actions of particular individuals and the turning-points that might emerge from them. It should be no surprise that his resolution of the problem of collective reality and action into the binary of individual and society formed part of the backdrop for modernist kinship studies as described above.

On what basis might we build a theory of kinship that does not follow Durkheim in assuming the unity and stability of a social system as the end that must be reached at all costs? I want to gesture here in the direction of a view of kinship based not on social structure or Euroamerican folk concepts of biology and family but upon imitative relations, upon repetition, opposition and adaptation — in short, a scheme inspired by Durkheim’s contemporary, Gabriel de Tarde. The latter was in many respects more influential at the turn of the century, but he proved not to have as long-lasting an impact on the emergence of sociology as a discipline and institutional arrangement. His comprehensive, wide-ranging and at times maddeningly general texts, *Social Laws*, *Social Logic* and *Laws of Imitation*, sold well and won him something of a popular following. And yet his central idea, his ontological foundation for the social, turned out to be anathema to Durkheim, who spent a significant part of *Suicide* rejecting it. This was the foundation of the social in “the communication or the modification of a state of consciousness by the action of one human being upon another” (Candea). That this idea did not found 20th century sociology was perhaps due to the inconsistency with which Tarde expressed it. For Durkheim, imitation was too rare a relationship, and too tenuous, to build toward the kinds of all-encompassing social facts he needed. For constructionists, it seems at first equally problematic: what, after all, were

these human beings, and what counted as consciousness? Didn't such moments of imitation count as part of the continued evolution, the continued reproduction of the human as such? Yet read Tarde more extensively, and one finds that the central idea is not necessarily the human, nor consciousness, but the fact of the imitative relationship. Indeed, in his foundational *Monadology and Sociology*, he returns to Leibniz and invents a sociology founded in processes that aspire to a generality beyond the human, or even biological life itself.

Tarde's thought offers a provocative resource with which to ramify the thinking of several more recent scholars, particularly Bruno Latour and Gilles Deleuze. The recent resurgence of interest in "Tardeana" stems partially from the influence of these later thinkers. Tarde's thought, however, also challenges one's credulity on a number of points. For one thing, although he is a fierce defender of Darwin, in some ways he appears to be a skeptic about the possibility of emergence, a central phenomenon for students of evolution. Tarde's whole is lesser, not greater, than the sum of its parts. Rather than increase the complexity of a system through the collaboration of many interwoven elements, the emergence of a new order for Tarde radically *reduces* complexity by introducing much higher-level patterns. This inversion of conventional wisdom follows from Tarde's monadology, which extends subjecthood to the smallest particles. Tarde maintains vigorously an idea that the small is necessarily *more* complex than the large, and thus that "matter is mind, nothing more". The result is what he terms a "spiritualization" of matter, and a substantial difficulty integrating his thought with contemporary empiricism. Though he attempts to counter the charge of anthropomorphism, it is not clear that he does so successfully. Tarde appears to maintain an essence to consciousness divorced from most of the phenomenal experiences with which human, or at any rate mammalian, minds have to cope: movement and decision-making, for instance. He cannot avoid a basically Hegelian account of the idea (and hence of imitation) in which borders are unquestioned and negations intrinsic.

Moreover, Tarde does not consider the family or issues of kinship in any particularity, a striking omission which may lend strength to the argument that he shared certain unspoken assumptions about "the social" and "society" with his rival. Several times he makes imitation appear the social parallel to an apparently biological notion of heredity. Both, however, reveal Tarde's peculiar take on a basically Kantian progressive teleology, and shed light on his particular fashion of unworking the dualism of the social and natural: "[I]n the beginning the family, or the pseudo-family that grew up by the side of it, was the only social group, and ... every subsequent change resulted in lessening its importance in this respect by constituting new and more ample groups which were formed artificially, at the expense of the social side of families, and which reduced them to mere physiological expressions; ... finally, such dismembered families tended to aggregate into a kind of enlarged family that was both natural and social like the original family, except that the physiological characteristics, which were transmitted through heredity, existed mainly to facilitate the transmission through imitation of the elements of civilization, and not vice versa" (Tarde 1907, 287). In this curious narrative, the time before time finds every family with its very own language, and history figures as the emergence of communities. A global community in perpetual peace figures as the natural outcome of this kind of progression. If man is the social animal, then in human times it is the reproduction and beneficial adaptation of the civilization, not the family or the individual, toward which natural selection tends.

The twist to this account is Tarde's assertion that the merely physiological, "dismembered" families aggregate into "a kind of enlarged family ... both natural and social."

We know as well that the family was always already social; thus this re-aggregation is not the long-sought moment of emergence of society. The “original” family thus cannot be treated as straightforwardly or purely natural. What form, then, did it take? Polygamous or polyamorous? Perhaps it involved the cross-marriage of brothers and sisters from separate descent lines? Or was Tarde’s original family an incestuous one, since separated by the barrier of language? Considering such questions, it becomes apparent that the so-called “original” family was itself a society all along; that the constituents of the unit as family are identical to the constituents of society.

Imitation suggests repetition, perhaps an even more basic phenomenon. Its minimum requirements are twofold: some form of extension or duality and a movement between them. The latter is necessary if we are to hold that imitation amounts to more than mere coincidence. Many of Tarde’s examples are naturalistic; two species may share some attribute — tail-fins, say — without common cause. The fact that both whales and fish swim does not demonstrate they owe their swimming to a common prehistoric inventor. Parallel circumstances may produce parallel outcomes; inventions, as Tarde terms the new, need not be unique. Indeed, coincidence is a necessary outcome of phenomenal finitude: it suggests that communication is incomplete, that imitation must not function as the only causal vector.

The genius of Tarde’s approach to imitation is perhaps in its isomorphism with Hegel’s master-slave relationship. Far from an assumption that imitation is only at issue in cases of suggestion or hypnosis, Tarde universalizes the phenomenon, allowing his readers to grasp through it something intrinsic to power relations generally: resistance, which can be seen as negation, nonetheless connotes a hidden shaping, a response to matters at hand. Tarde’s imitation suggests the framing power of discourse, the ways discourse can set prerequisites for the possibility of thought. There is a foreshadow here of Wittgenstein’s language games and Foucault’s understanding of power as intrinsically enabling as well as repressive, a notion expressed in ideas of a “grid” or “matrix” of sensibility. Yet these resonances can be something of a pitfall if they distract us from the attempt to understand the arising and passing away of such relations, the formation of the new. Can one know in advance which suggestions will be repeated and which will not? How to distinguish coincidence from causation? Are the scales not weighted against the former from the start? How could mere coincidence ever be a satisfying explanation for norms of kinship, of gender, for the powerful bodily effects they exercise on us? If each and all suffer the same condition of being an assemblage, a congerie, a society, if Leibniz’s monads are indeed infinitesimal, then how could one ever find one? If the exhortation to “look closer” is the fountain of knowledge, the research method from which all others derive, how is it possible to stop with any set of elements, even — and especially! — a heterogeneous set such as might explain a social situation, in which causality might be tied to any scale at all? The question of “natural” substances, of whether things exist, of whether there are in the universe distinct and self-same substances, returns here, because without it one has no idea which are the productive monads. Is there a certain arbitrariness of the monad? Should we imagine the monad to be entirely in the eye of the observer? If such questions are formally unanswerable, then the end of critical thinking can only be doubt.

With such caveats in mind, we might begin to ask where to locate conceptually or strategically *useful* monads of kinship. It is clear that there can probably be no single set of minima here. Kinship as such is too vaguely defined and various in its manifestations.

Probably, as the earlier discussion should demonstrate, kinship *per se* is nothing more than the offspring of popular ideology by way of scholarly career-building. The nominalist and hermeneutic tendencies in contemporary kinship studies are the necessary consequence of a fictional domain, the colonization of which does violence to our chance of understanding the production of actual human and nonhuman kinds, families, ecosystems, to the extent we allow it to frame our thinking. Attempts to frame kinship as a domain have therefore grown scarce since the 1980s. One of the most influential recent moves in this direction, James Faubion and Jennifer Hamilton's "Sumptuary Kinship," suggests a double *entendre*: in the field, Faubion and Hamilton notice kinship is increasingly reorganized around relations of consumption, while in cultural anthropology, kinship might be said to be afflicted with consumption, it threatens to be consumed by other domains. In this piece they offer two definitions of kinship: the first, which goes largely unquestioned, reiterates the anthropological presumption that kinship is generally "a 'system of subjectivation' whose terminological categories: 1) define subjects—or more carefully, subject positions—through their relationship to other subjects (or subject positions); 2) are finite and particularistic in their scope and extension; 3) are normatively permanent once ascribed and; 4) presume the criterial priority of being over doing" (2007, 534). The authors then characterize such systems as "autopoetic," or self-producing, meaning that they tend to continue through time. At the outset, their formulation appears to locate kinship entirely in the discursive and linguistic, since it is the terminological categories which are the effective aspects of the kinship system. Later, however, they clarify that such systems cannot be purely "symbolological," not merely because practice exceeds the symbolic but also because pragmatic analysis demands moving outside pre-ordained operations of symbols (2007). Yet this approach implies a significant problem with their treatment of same-sex relations and marriage. If terminological categories are the effective core of kinship systems, then same-sex relations can never adequately produce a kinship system in their own right. The reappropriation and redefinition of terms in emerging queer kinship formations is informal, depending upon the normative and affective qualities of particular relationships. Perhaps "partner," "child," "lover" or "friend" might stand as such categories in a system of subjectivation, and even "uncle" and "grandmother" in some contexts, but precisely the move of delimiting the position, providing for a "real" uncle as opposed to a family friend, forces the queer invocation to appear as merely a copy. The problem is not just that contemporary practices of queer relationship are limited by prevailing heteronormativity, conservative legal regimes, and the like, although that problem of practice is also important, and as ethnographers it is fair for Faubion and Hamilton to point it out. The problem is rather that despite making an attempt to avoid heteronormativity, despite their acknowledgement that "human beings do not always marry or form affinal partnerships across the sexual divide and do not always do so for the purposes of generating or fostering children" (2007), their heuristic of kinship forecloses the very possibility of a queer kinship system. To say that kinship's terminological categories are "finite and particularistic in their scope and extension" is to transcendentalize concerns of inheritance, duty and lineage such that the production or procurement of children becomes the realization, the embodiment, the *cri de coeur* of the kinship system. More like religious movements, queer kinship formations rather rely on recruitment and enrollment of potential subjects, typically late adolescents or adults. This relationship toward an outside — which must make the outside the very source of (re)productivity — is constantly ambiguous, amorphous, and permeable, in sharp distinction to many heter-

onormative kinship systems organized around marriage, organized, in fact, precisely so as to limit and contain the dangerous porousness of the social skin.

Nonetheless, it is hard to disagree with Faubion and Hamilton's "desiderata" for an adequate heuristic of kinship. In addition to an awareness of its own limits, a purview including both symbol and practice, and a rejection of heteronormativity, the two argue such an heuristic would have to be non-substantialist and non-natalist. A substantialist theory of kinship might require a biogenetic marker such as DNA to establish relationship. A natalist theory would proceed from the notion that the primary kinship categories were determined at birth. I have no major disagreement with either stipulation, although it has been interesting to note that both the ascription of faerie status from birth — or prior to birth — and the play of substance figure as influential aspects of the ideology of kinship within my field site. In other words, despite a widespread refusal of definitions and a politics of espionage, for some faeries it appears to be important to make claims rooted in birth and substance. That this is the case probably speaks more to the prevalence of those notions in hegemonic Euroamerican kinship, however, where they are deeply and ambivalently entwined with notions of individual worth and status, than it does to analytical necessity.

How is a system like a norm? If kinship consists of systems of subjectivation, how often do such systems subjectivate? Do they do so consistently, producing subjects nearly identical who merely blindly repeat the symbolic with no chance of innovation or change, forever expressing the "transcendental influence of a quasi-demonic psyche (or culture, or society)" (2007)? Faubion rejects imitation as a primary driver of kinship due to an assumed nonconformity of the actual. Yet if a system does not demand to be unitary, unequivocal or all-encompassing, it does suggest that its effect of subjectivation is meaningless without producing a series of subjects. An individual might invent an abstract kinship system, hitherto unknown, just as one might invent a fantasy world filled with strange islands and enchanted seas. Yet apply that system to embodied others, convey its thought and describe its relations, use it to organize birth, childhood, old age and death, and it is no longer merely abstract. Invention, the founding of a religion, for instance, offers a moment in which prior kinship relations may be imaginatively refigured. In time, new formations may come to seem indisputably correct, natural and inevitable. The frequency with which alternative family arrangements have accompanied the emergence of new religious movements — think of the Oneida Community, the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Kerista Commune in 1970s San Francisco, and Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church — should come as no surprise, for the substance of religion and kinship, both "systems of subjectivation," is far more similar than it might first appear.

I take terminological categories as an aspect of practice, even a necessary aspect, but to treat them as coextensive with kinship *per se* seems excessively textualist, more so than Faubion would probably intend. I fear that such a treatment would ignore those changes in subject position that may be embodied but unspoken or unwritten, markings of class, race, gender and class amongst them. Understood as lived experience, a system of subjectivation's terminological categories must be seen as part and parcel of an ethics of kinship. Such an ethics would be substanceless without complexly organizing, reproducing and predisposing bodies. Reflexive practices may entail self-knowledge and an evaluation of circumstances but they also entail belief and desire, hence a wide range of affects that condition and shape engagements with other beings. At the heart of kinship, then, we find neither the nuclear family, nor the conjugal couple, nor biogenetic reproduction and descent,

but bodies that are changing in time. Part of their mutual engagement is, as Tarde predicts, that they repeat each other, oppose each other, and adapt to new situations. Their movements spring from pleasure and pain as well as from capacity and incapacity. Perhaps working without Mauss's forthcoming reflections on the matter, Tarde did not quite describe the isomorphism between coadaptation and reciprocity, but a posthumanist consideration of kinship might well foreground it. Reciprocity between beings creates ways of life, works to make circumstances bearable: not because the alternative is death, as in the Darwinian struggle for survival, but because such accommodation suggests its own repetition through the affirmation of the possible.

To think kinship as a matter of imitation, then, means not just identifying a given, static set of norms but digging more carefully into their origins, into the challenges made through and against them. The argument is that the most ineluctably solid of social symbols began as a matter of imitation, a molecular, vibratory imitation. I differ from Tarde on at least one fundamental question, for I do not find the origins of imitation in invention as the fruits of genius. Similar responses to similar circumstances need not have entered into a relationship of imitation. Things happen in parallel. At times Tarde's imitation appears a structure more arborescent than rhizomatic, though he perhaps lacked the conceptual vocabulary to express this distinction consistently. Yet what is to keep us from veering headlong into the oncoming traffic in biologism? Are we condemned to drive drunkenly down the epistemological freeway, the very rules of the road forever undecidable? (Tarde's imitation might be more accurately understood as cryptoplasm, a movement of reciprocal molding through which we come into being, an active shaping which makes possible both being and time.)

Skeptics will argue of the return to Leibniz that his monads had to be purely immaterial, a construct of the mind, perhaps integral to the process of cognition but little more. A monad, in this reading, was nothing more nor less than an idea; it was the mind and not the body which was so constituted, and the application of the monad to materiality may therefore stand first as metaphor. Certainly, the descriptions from Leibniz and Tarde both draw consistently on metaphor. Leibniz describes the monads as purely internal, infinitely small yet infinitely expressive. Tarde, for his part, gives us monads which grasp at each other, move to possess each other. Perhaps what Tarde offers is, in fact, an idiosyncratic Hegelianism, an account of a concept fully dependent on the operation of its negation; then Tarde, far undermining Durkheim's social fact, would find himself caught so irrevocably within the social that his imitation rays would be mere citations. At first sight, it is a reasonable objection; after all, why should the originator of something so abstract as calculus have much of a handle on the concrete? Such thinkers, so the argument goes, are really thinking of human subjects; stripped of anthropomorphism, their monads are nothing, they have no qualities of their own. What, after all, would be possession without consciousness?

Yet there are significant troubles with this objection. For one thing, it trivializes Tarde's obvious contention that the monads or imitation rays are indeed material, that they have substance. More seriously, however, it reiterates a dualism of mind and matter that was precisely what one wanted to avoid in rejecting a Durkheimian conception of society. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with such dualisms *prima facie*, even if, following Derrida, the distinction turns out to be rather more muddled; nonetheless, it reinscribes more deeply the epistemological break that is arguably the target of a whole slew of contemporary work, from neurological and cognitive sciences to actor-network theory.

Bruno Latour has noted that modernist social theory typically operates around two terms, abstractions, a “hard” term which is operator and a “soft” term which is operand. The scientist claims privileged access to the hard term — genetics, instinct or biology, in the case of the “natural” sciences and society or culture in the case of the “social” sciences and then attributes causality to this term, on which only he is expert. In contrast, Latour argues for a method that “claims that there is nothing specific to social order; that there is no social dimension of any sort, no ‘social context’, no distinct domain of reality to which the label ‘social’ or ‘society’ could be attributed; that no ‘social force’ is available to ‘explain’ the residual features the other domains cannot account for; ... that political relevance obtained through a ‘science of society’ is not necessarily desirable; and that ‘society’, far from being the context ‘in which’ everything is framed, should rather be construed as one of the many connecting elements circulating inside tiny conduits” (2005, 5). Substitute “biological order” for “social order” and one has the beginning of an epistemological method — one that would require a thorough rethinking of kinship theory. Such a rethinking would have to account for as many as possible of the elements which kinship theory has traditionally considered: the questions of maternal instinct, of incest taboo and alliance, of generation and reciprocity.

### *Coda*

The present chapter’s remarks on kinship are inspired, in part, by Butler’s more recent work collected in texts such as *Undoing Gender* and *Antigone’s Claim*. Certainly Butler seems to have framed a certain set of problems with a useful degree of precision. Yet I wonder if the project I am undertaking is necessarily speculative, if it cannot rest solely in a series of close readings of philosophical texts but if it must also involve a form of invention, even a certain leap. If I have taken such a leap, I can make no claim to have landed on solid ground; indeed, part of the problem must be to determine where, exactly, one can land after a movement of this sort — back on the familiar ground of heterosexuality, and perhaps of a certain well-known understanding of concept and of thought that, though might pose as strange, lead us nonetheless back into the vicious circle of the same norms? Or if we are indeed somewhere else, what kind of elsewhere might that be? Let us hope, if there is quicksand, there are also sturdy ropes.

I should also confess, as a way of framing the rather scattered fragments that follow, that I am haunted by psychoanalysis. Anthropology, cultural studies and the related humanities are certainly haunted by psychoanalysis, which appears to be somewhat less compelling for other disciplines, its obvious falsehood and inadequacy probably obscuring its merits. I am personally haunted by psychoanalysis for reasons that will become clear if this work becomes too confessional, and for a whole host of reasons, I suspect that any ethnography of radical faerie social worlds that attempts to take such worlds seriously must necessarily be haunted by psychoanalysis. This seems to be the case for a number of reasons. For one thing, aesthetics, the imagination, affect and desire all belong to what might be described as the realm of the psyche. Although curiously disregarded by the more scholarly theses and publications extant — which may be seeking a sense of perspective or a site from which criticism could begin — many of the most interesting works by or with radical

faeries take such elements very seriously, including radical faeries' works on themselves. I think what appears to be a general instinct toward celebrating, or at least meticulously describing, such elements is, in this case, correct. A second reason for a psychoanalytic haunting is broader: under modern and contemporary conditions sexual diversity has often, perhaps even primarily, been apprehended by the question of pathology, by medicine and an emerging apparatus for specifying various madnnesses, various states of mental order and disorder. In the United States, for instance, the Immigration and Naturalization Service classified homosexuality under the banner of psychopathic behavior as recently as 1993 (Luibheid 1998). The contemporary popularity of Alan Downs' *Velvet Rage*, even amongst faeries, appears to continue this tradition. Finally, many who have been entangled in faerie worlds have drawn on psychoanalysis in various ways. For Harry Hay, a particular adaptation of Oedipus to the situation of rejection by the father was central to understanding the gay male character, as were particular understandings of sex and gender. The heuristic worked for him despite limits all too obvious in retrospect. In other contexts, Hay and numerous other figures have worked with broadly Jungian archetypes to comprehend genders in concert. Faeries often talk of such matters as balancing the masculine and feminine as well as orienting themselves toward various archetypal characters: most notably healer, shaman, trickster and priest.

Beyond such history, however, psychoanalysis appears to me to foreground certain reminders, a few helpful signposts for thinking subjects and their interdependence, their mutual reconstitution, their constitutive schisms and excess. As long as the ecology of mind still exceeds us, as long as we are still walking into a certain kind of darkness, into something that is unknowable, we might as well accept the falsehood and inadequacy of any account we might give. It is by no means clear that a diagram of mind based solely on the chemistry of neurotransmitters, on genetics or on evolutionary biology is more informative than one based on drives and on a subconscious. Indeed, there may well be a false dichotomy at work here, since, whichever diagram one prefers, there is considerable overlap in the uses to which the various components are put. On the other hand, it is quite clear that a model of the subject that rests on a notion of an internal homunculus simply replaces one oracle with another, that free will and rational thought are rather exceptions than the rule, or in any event that they are at best relative to conditions, and that identity and individuals cannot be taken for granted as selfsame starting points. Put another way, if subjects are wholly subject, if they are vulnerable to each other, entangled, interdependent, if ontologically, to say nothing of ethically, they must exceed themselves in order to be, then we might as well decompose them and begin to ask of what kinds of elements they are made. I take certain elements of psychoanalytic perspectives as signposts in this direction, particularly trauma and development, the play of significations, the realization that the operations of mind are largely invisible to conscious perception or reflection, and the situation of being shot through with drives that come from beyond ourselves, which we did not choose and which may not align with any particular concept we may have of our interests.

### 3 Intimate Events

“From elimination to elimination, where will we end up [...]?” (Tarde 1893, 37)

“... an intimacy that is neither free nor constrained, but something else.” (Povinelli 2006, 100)

*Giardia* are a genus of anaerobic flagellated protozoan parasites that may reproduce in the small intestines of several vertebrates. Their transmission requires them to move from the excrement of one individual into the mouth of another. Being microscopic, and hence commonly transmitted through unsanitary water and cooking conditions, they depend on contact and interpenetration with a friendly medium, animal or plant, dead or alive, finger or tongue.

A week or so before I first met the radical faeries in Tennessee, a physician in New York City informed me that giardia living inside me were responsible for certain severe gastric symptoms. The prescribed anti-microbial affected me like nothing I had experienced before. My mouth turned bitter and metallic at first contact with the tablets. While my previous symptoms cleared up within a day, an unfamiliar burning sensation took their place. I wondered whether I should cancel my trip, but plans had already been made, and I was to finish the course of treatment on April 30, three days into my visit.

On the evening of the second day, I stumbled up the knoll toward the covered four-seater outhouse known — euphemistically? — as the chapel. I was in severe discomfort, but alas, I would have to wait. Gathered before it I found a crowd of several hundred people. “The Kali ritual is about to begin!” Two held a large, heavy-looking gong; another struck it thrice, great peals echoing back and forth across the mountain. Then those assembled began to sing, the lyrics a local variation of a widespread neopagan chant. “*We all come from the shitter / And to her we shall return / Like a drop of poo / Flowing to the ocean.*”

A figure who seemed nearly seven feet tall waved their arms and exhorted us to sing more loudly. Known as Hadassah Gross, she was high priestess and officiant of the ritual. “We must invoke Kali herself!” she cried out. Two of the people up front lay down on the steps of the chapel. Another peal and a great strange being emerged from the outhouse, stepping down to us across the supine figures. Her long black hair flowed out in all directions; four arms bore a sword, a severed head, and magical implements I did not recognize. This was Kali, goddess of the outhouse, and also, I would later find out, Rosie Delicious in her role as Binky the Shit-Eating Clown.

“The hero must pass through the underworld,” called the high priestess, “and all faeries are heroes. Therefore breathe deeply as you walk through the chapel, and when you come out the other side, kneel and taste the prasād of the mother!” With this Binky turned around and lifted up her skirts, revealing a thick, brown, goopy stain stretched from her naked butt in a great oval down below her knees.

I was stunned. Whither the material demands of health? Was I now so deep in some other world that the inviolable laws of hygiene and personal health no longer applied?

Were these people unaware how giardia could be transmitted? And if they'd treat their health in such a cavalier fashion, apparently encouraging hundreds of people to join in such an act of scatological intimacy, what other precautions might they disregard?

We walked slowly up the three steps to the chapel. Certainly its smell was no illusion, nor were the flies, nor three sitting — and one squatting — doing their business in a tiny space, on display one after the next to this unlikely procession of several hundred people. I navigated the outhouse in spite of my wrinkled nose, only to find myself confronting “Kali” herself, invited to kneel and taste that thick brown stain. I was almost certain that scatology here was “only a symbol” — but what if I were wrong?

The prospect of a group of Euroamerican settlers in central Tennessee performing a ritual based on the Hindu goddess of time and death may offend some readers as much as the reference to scat. Perhaps Kali should properly be embedded in a broader sociocultural context, understood in relation to other Hindu divinities by people who have a lifelong connection to the Hindu cosmologies. To tear her out of such a context reenacts the painful relationship of Euroamerican settlers to the former colonies: the latter are objectified, transformed into a “resource” from which the settlers can extract and profit at will, and simultaneously become the ground of a discourse of racial superiority whereby that operation of extraction serves as proof of divine favor.

Much of the writing about radical faeries has centered on issues of appropriation, particularly of indigenous American spirituality and lands. For Scott Morgensen, one of the first anthropologists to write a doctoral dissertation on the phenomenon, the indictment of appropriation, cultural and material, appears to have been the primary mode through which the radical faeries could be made sensible. What could it mean, he asked, to say “welcome home” to a network of mostly white, mostly urban men, seeking an authentic spirituality on rural lands which were inevitably stolen from their indigenous occupants (2009a)? More broadly, it appears the grids of religious and cultural recognition under liberalism allow for legitimacy where religion and culture are supported by genealogy and consist in a concomitant abdication of autology, self-determination by individuals of their mode of engagement (Povinelli 2006) — i.e., some would say “real” religion comes from your parents. It is thus unsurprising that the question of appropriation should be a primary starting place for critical appraisal of the radical faeries and New Age counterpublics more widely. Yet is this the only question it is useful to ask of them?

I do not recall the Kali ritual to turn away my readers in disgust, though clearly I am running that risk. If likeness be the conduit of empathy, then it seems the path of empathy for those who would make religious ritual out of scat play must be steep and difficult. After all, most of us keep our mouths away from each others' excrement. Is such avoidance behavior not one of the things that distinguishes human from dog? The avoidance of excrement has often figured in accounts of social systems and civilizational development, for instance those of Sigmund Freud, Norbert Elias and Mary Douglas (“where there is dirt there is a system”). Notwithstanding the discovery that canine scat play can do serious work for the cultivation of healthy intestinal ecosystems, I begin this chapter with the story of a Kali ritual to emphasize my own all-too-material substantiality within a particular social confluence. The goal is not merely to qualify my claims to knowledge based on certain factors that might be a part of my background — my standing as a gay white male, for instance — nor even just to “situate” my knowledge (Haraway 1988a). I have been undone and remade

by intimate events such as this one through which I met the radical faeries. To begin with my own illness is to begin from a position of incapacity, to demonstrate how far I am from the apparatus of the effect of objectivity. I make no claim to knowledge based on certain given factors that might be a part of my background — my standing as a gay white male, for instance — nor “situating” my knowledge in a story that presumes my presence. To the extent possible, I wish here to deconstruct the opposition between self and other on the grounds that no self can be located which is complete or finished. Any story I might tell in which I might be an actor founders on the suggestion that I am; it is more accurate to maintain that I am not.

The ritual thus described was a small part of a larger event called a “gathering.” These are periods of retreat and celebration that collect heterogeneous desires, materialities, people, drag and camping equipment, to name a few. They are primary events by which radical faerie calendars may be organized. This chapter considers such gatherings, which are always gatherings-toward, openings to intimate encounter. I provide a general description of gatherings and contextualize my experience with the Kali ritual as exemplary of a certain operation whereby the usual hierarchies of spiritual and material, sacred and profane, clean and unclean, rich and poor, family and friend, are reversed, then deconstructed, to make way for what appears to be a refusal of all norms — but what is in actuality the institution of a new set of norms. Thereafter, I consider whether Povinelli’s notion of the intimate event, which lies at the liberal intersection of what she calls the autological subject and the genealogical society, might help illuminate these gatherings and develop conceptual tools for understanding kinship beyond heterosexuality and the nuclear family.

The setting for the ritual was a communal land project in Tennessee often referred to as a “faerie sanctuary.” The context was a ten-day-long gathering for Beltane, the neopagan feast day halfway between spring equinox and summer solstice. While the Kali ritual is perhaps an extreme example of an event that might happen during a Beltane gathering — and to my knowledge it has thus far happened only once — it expresses their spirit.

At the height of spring, contemporary pagans often associate Beltane with flowers in bloom, adolescence, the time of fastest growth and greatest power, with fertility, with sewing seeds of all kinds. In northern Europe, May 1 can mark the beginning of summer and a propitious time for planting wheat. The practices associated with this day varied dramatically throughout Europe; while some may now be enjoying a resurgence, the “indigenous” practice of Beltane celebrations appears to have largely died out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Generally, contemporary pagans rely on Gerald Gardner’s reinvention of traditional practice, the basis of a formidable publishing phenomenon, and in Gardnerian traditions Beltane is without doubt the holiday most associated with revolutions and sexual abandon.

While these faeries’ Beltane gathering does center on the ritual destruction and restoration of a Maypole, and the particular prominence of Beltane gatherings rests in part on Beltane’s sexual charge, the radical faeries are not primarily or even largely a Gardnerian sect. While there are some who are more-or-less devout neopagans, more draw on Buddhist, Hindu and Yoruba elements. Many also retain various traditional Jewish practices. Christianity is more-or-less absent, however: or rather, it is constantly present, present as actively rejected, present through its absence, through its refugees’ animosity and the well-founded skepticism of others. The radical faeries’ use of Gardnerian ritual is rather closer

to their drive-by appropriation of Kali: a circumstantial allegiance rooted in particular conduits like Donald Engstrom-Reese and others.<sup>5</sup>

Faerie gatherings occur throughout the year, and most have no intrinsic connection with Gardnerian pagan holidays. Their gamut is wide, with the smallest gatherings drawing 10 or 20 people and the largest close to 1000. Some are effectively low-cost “package holidays” at private resorts, hot springs and spas, such as the two gatherings each year at Breitenbush Hot Springs in Oregon, the Thailand winter gathering, or the “Generate” Gatherings at Saratoga Springs in California. Most, however, are DIY group camping trips in which anywhere from 20-200 participants set up tents and shared spaces, cook meals for each other and wear drag of all kinds. The only ritual likely to be encountered at all faerie gatherings is the heart circle, a confessional group therapy practice ideally structured around nonjudgmental listening. Yet participants throw parties, conduct workshops, and design any number of personal and collective rituals in each gathering as well. Such activities are materially and affectively entwined with gatherings’ sexual charge. Most gatherings make space for a degree of public sexuality that might be impractical or dangerous in the urban everyday, though the extent of such license varies from same-sex affection and cuddling or coitus in the sunshine on the knoll.

What makes faerie gatherings possible and necessary? While there is plenty of debate about who or what the faeries are, or what kinds of events count as gatherings, there is little question that their number and range has grown dramatically. The quirky, colorful, and playfully intimate RFD has been the primary journal of radical faerie “culture” since before the term radical faerie was coined. Like the faeries themselves, it appears at first to be something of a shifting object, playing what Povinelli calls the politics of espionage, whereby its identity is simultaneously fiercely claimed and yet endlessly slippery, sliding away just at the moment when it seems to make sense. Even the referent of the journal’s title conveys this type of semiotic play. With every issue, the letters “RFD” stand for something else. Issue number one was entitled “Rustic Fairy Dreams,” issue number one hundred, “Rough Feisty Dykes.” Each issue falls to an *ad hoc* editorial collective that chooses three words to become that issue’s title. While the contents vary according to the priorities of each editor, they nonetheless fit a certain format. Until the early 1990s, a substantial part of each issue consisted of letters, often grouped into two or three separate letters sections. From the beginning, the topics of other features cover the expected ground: gay men, mostly hippies, and nature. RFD has run repeated articles on herbalism, permaculture, anti-racist organizing, psychotropic plants, earth-centered spirituality and mythology indigenous to both North America and Eurasia. Since its second year, RFD has featured a “Brothers Behind Bars” section with every issue and often provided free copies to readers who are incarcerated against their will.

The call to the so-called first gathering occupies the top two-thirds of the back cover of RFD #20 (“Roaring Fresh Decisions”), which at that time had a circulation numbering around 2000 copies and was the vehicle by which the call was most widely dispersed. The text mentions Buddhist *dharma*, the struggle against racism, and assorted other left-wing causes of the day. For me, however, what is most interesting is what is not in the call, but below it, and elsewhere in the same issue. The bottom third of the page contains calls to at

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<sup>5</sup> Engstrom-Reese, among the most avid collectors of faerie lore in the Midwest, maintains a website on Celtic pagan and faerie ritual at <http://wearewalkinginbeauty.org/>.

least five other “celebrations” and “gatherings” throughout the United States. From the language it becomes clear that attendees already conceived several of the other gatherings as part of a series, and that the practice of gathering predates the “first gathering” itself. Hay’s choice of the term “conference” rather than “gathering” suddenly becomes significant. Indeed, the 1979 event is often mistitled in remembrance, such as in the 2009 call to its 30th anniversary in Wolf Creek, which refers to a “Spiritual *Gathering* of Radical Faeries.”

Consulting an archive of RFD’s early issues demonstrates that the so-called first gathering was actually the culmination of a decade of such events. Some from RFD’s public were already participating in such gatherings years earlier (Thompson 2011). A “Faggots and Class Struggle” gathering in Wolf Creek, Oregon, had already explored the intersection of Marxism and gay liberation. Murray Edelman, who lived in San Francisco through most of the 1970s, recalled the 1975 “Fairy Circle” he convened with Arthur Evans in the Haight-Ashbury. Many of the participants’ activities bear striking similarity to those of radical faeries today. They sat together in talking circles, cooked meals, and worked to understand — or co-create — a spirituality that took their sexuality as a sacred trust, a fundamental, an originary starting point rather than a signifier of a fall.

RFD’s readers appear to have been inclined to gather even before RFD came into being. From letters and articles in the magazine’s first five years, it is clear that gathering was tremendously important in the lives of those who participated in them. One might even conclude that gatherings were the ultimate reason RFD came to exist in the first place: much of the conversation in the first few issues of RFD focuses on another magazine, *Mother Earth News*, which the writers abbreviate “MEN.” The first issue of RFD reprints a rejection letter from MEN, which refused to print “Position & Situation” — personals — listings from gay men for fear of offending their readers, “many of whom are little old ladies in tennis shoes” (RFD 1974, 4-5). MEN — more precisely, its editors — reject the faggots, just as in Larry Mitchell’s influential *Faggots and their Friends Between Revolutions*, and a different counterpublic is formed. In issue two, the editors write, “We got a flood of letters. [...] We also include here letters from people who asked about a ‘contacts’ section” (RFD (“Reckless Fruit Delight”) 1975, 2). The first few years of RFD turn out to contain a staggering number of letters. Some issues contain as many as four separate sections of letters from readers. The phrase “seeking contacts,” which frequented gay personals in the era, is richly suggestive, through its reticence, of the sort of contact desired.

In his highly influential studies of print circulation and its effects, Benedict Anderson argues that, for certain southeast Asian nations, the distribution of newspapers helps to construct the sense of a national collectivity, an imagined community. Certain conditions had to be met before nations were possible: the decline of the beliefs that truth could only be discovered through a particular combination of script and language, that civilization was organized around particular divine monarchs, and that cosmology and history were indistinguishable, both united in stories of the dual creation of earth and man (1991, 40). He accepts that such beliefs were in decline and that their decline was part of a grandly cross-cultural historical trajectory. For Anderson, the history of the modern was a history of increasing secularization. Michael Warner implicitly corrects such a narrative by demonstrating ways that, in the 18th and 19th century United States, traveling preachers construct audiences for themselves precisely through the articulation of the world available to experience, an empirical / imperial world, with a cosmological or religious world (2002). In step

with Latour's critique of the notion of modernity-as-secularity (1993), Warner demonstrates that publics and counterpublics may be constructed around the circulation of many kinds of discourses, cosmologizing or no.

At first glance, emerging out of the distribution of a print journal, and certainly entailing a healthy dose of imagination, the radical faeries seem to be a perfect example of such a counterpublic. Yet this frame runs the risk of placing all the members of such a public on an equal footing. It might thus obscure the mechanisms by which that public necessarily excludes various others, and more than that — since the problem of exclusion is endemic to liberalism generally — it might blind us to the uneven terrain of power relationships within the counterpublic.

It is clear from reading these early issues that the prospect of coming together is precisely what brings many of the readers to the magazine. Queer historians know well the isolation that sexual minorities faced, and continue to face, absent access to the Internet and certain metropolitan centers. In 1970s Iowa, where RFD began, finding other gay men was a challenge that could involve long hours of driving and the risk of arrest. We may reasonably surmise that hippie sensibilities and countercultural imaginaries further reduced the possibility of connection with the "likeminded." Some from the readership of *Mother Earth News*, then, held fast by homosexual longings, decided to start their own magazine in hopes of an end to their isolation. The forms of connection they practiced would, in their turn, compel repetition and extension.

Homosexual desire suggests the possibility of interpenetration and entanglement. No doubt psyches may touch without or beyond the bodies which support them, but without doubt such imaginaries also produce bodily intercourse. Homosexual people have homosexual sex. People have sex. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether this colloquialism is precisely accurate — it might often make more sense to propose that sex "has" people — the situation is incomprehensible absent a proliferation of erotic play. Although those who speak of gatherings usually do not promise sex, its possibility appears to occupy pride of place. Gathering multiples the possibilities for erotic entanglement, and therefore amounts to a charged, compelling nexus for the rearrangement of positions and situations.

However one arrives at a faerie gathering, once there, a potential exists for a certain kind of shift. "She was ashamed to admit that she wanted it," one informant explained, telling us the story of one who had found her way to a gathering from a radical Christian family in upstate New York to whom she was closeted, "and yet there it was on display in front of everyone at the fire pit." In the Kali ritual, I had been asked to eat feces, or at least to consider myself eating feces, no matter if the dark brown stain was really an edible herbal spread, the Ayurvedic *chyawanprash*. On my way to the gathering, in significant pain from the *giardia*, I had stopped to visit my mother, a physician, who scolded me for what she could only understand as the result of some form of unhealthy, probably sexual, excess. Then, at the gathering, I was coincidentally invited to perform that same act, the possibility of which had so haunted my mother, transmuting it from profanity into a sacralized expression of my kinship with all living things.

Many, describing their experiences at faerie gatherings, cite a giddy, electrifying, vertiginous sense of freedom — the freedom to "be themselves," at times, or the freedom to

engage in various forms of erotic play. If we experience the gatherings as a freedom, then their opposite is constraint; they thus count as a reversal of everyday life. Accordingly, Anthropologist Michael Lecker highlights the work that reversals do at radical faerie gatherings, where the rules of everyday life appear to be turned on their heads. Drawing on camp humor, the bodily grotesque, clowning and drag, participants co-create stories for each other in which the poor win against the rich, love wins against war. Yet these are no ordinary stories, for they are embedded in a counterpublic space, an immersive and delimited environment which expresses and demonstrates such narrative reversals, elevating them to the status of cosmology.<sup>6</sup>

The scholar most known for the reversal hypothesis is, of course, Michael Bakhtin, who argues that medieval practices of carnival effected a powerful reversal of everyday norms, that it provided a forum in which the populace could enact their own norms independent of the official hierarchy. Bakhtin's is a "two world" account of society, in which ordinary, official, everyday world knows only constraint and the world of the carnival knows only freedom. The carnivalesque and the everyday are opposing standpoints. From this perspective, gatherings amount, like medieval carnivals and feast days, to "a second world and a second life outside officialdom" (1984, 6). This second world bespoke the possibility of an escape from hierarchy, of a more egalitarian society, of socialist revolution. "[A]ll were considered equal during carnival [...] People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations" (1984).

Yet why this impulse to describe gatherings in terms of the binary of freedom and constraint? Why should the figure of the reversal become the primary metaphor through which spaces of sexual license are understood? Certainly such an operation cites a well-known pattern. In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim makes a similar proposal, placing at the origin of "primitive religion" the moments of "collective effervescence" in ritualized performance, celebration and sacrifice. For Durkheim, religious life hinges on a binary between the sacred and the profane. If everyday work — milking the cows, fixing the roof, raising the children — is not religious, it must be profane, it must be the backdrop for the sacred. Thus ceremony must turn ordinary rules upside-down. In mainstream Christianity, sexual activity rests firmly on the side of the profane. Indeed, it can be understood as the origin of all profanity, since it was carnal knowledge that led to the Fall — and hence to the ubiquity of work, of struggle, of old age and death.

We inherit from Durkheim and Bakhtin a tendency to understand resistance, excess, sexual license, celebration, and generally any operation of ecstasy according to such a diagram of temporary reversal (see, for instance, Ehrenreich 2007). Harry Hay himself drew on such a structural diagram of sexual repression, choosing in 1948 to name his support group-cum-political movement, the United States' first known homosexual rights organization, after the Renaissance French *Société Mattachine*, a group of revelers based on the notion of the Italian court jester, the one party free to speak the truth to the king. The revelers take to the streets, celebrating the feasts of fertility with bawdy anarchic performances

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<sup>6</sup> Echoing Bakhtin's argument that the carnival cannot be understood as a performance, because it enrolls performer and spectator alike, Davis writes, "Real life was always deeply embedded in these carnivals, and not only because Misrule always implies the Rule that it parodies. Real people were mocked by the Abbays in clamorous charivaris and parades for their real everyday behavior: husbands beaten by their wives were led by a noisy, masked, and costumed throng through the town facing backwards on an ass" (Davis 1971, 100).

while wearing masks to protect themselves from the wrath of the authorities. Yet if the jester can speak truth to the king, it is only because everyone else cannot — and thus the Société Mattachine might also be seen as a symbolic concession that alleviates social tension only to bolster the regime. Contemporary historians most often take such moments of reversal in this light, arguing that they are not fundamentally subversive, that they “allow subjects to express their resentment of authority but do not change anything and, in fact, strengthen the established government and social order” (Muir 2005, 98).<sup>7</sup>

As Butler put it in her reflection on Antigone, “We are all supposed to be satisfied with this apparently generous gesture by which the perverse is announced to be essential to the norm. The problem as I see it is that the perverse remains entombed precisely there, as the essential and negative feature of the norm, and the relation between the two remains static, giving way to no rearticulation of the norm itself” (2000, 76). Furthering Butler's argument, I suggest that we see such experiences as reversals, as vertiginous, as freedom from constraint rather than a new set of constraints, because the possibilities for queer kinship have been powerfully foreclosed. That is, queers can have recognizable kinship only to the extent they organize themselves heteronormatively, in imitation of the nuclear family. The further their constellations move from the schizoid triangle of mother, father and me, the less likely are we to admit their associations to that privileged status.

Butler feels called to disavow the specter of limitlessness: “I remember hearing stories about how radical socialists who refused monogamy and family structure at the beginning of the 1970s ended that decade by filing into psychoanalytic offices and throwing themselves in pain on the analytic couch. And it seemed to me that the turn to psychoanalysis and, in particular, to Lacanian theory was prompted in part by the realization by some of those socialists that there were some constraints on sexual practice that were necessary for psychic survival and that the utopian effort to nullify prohibitions often culminated in excruciating scenes of psychic pain” (2000). A related genre in defense of limits emerges in the wake of HIV and AIDS.

So, what kinds of norms, or negotiations, are emerging amongst radical faeries and their friends? Many gatherings do provide a space in which alternate modes of intimacy can be practiced, recognized and reflected. The gathering's “container” — its relative isolation — allows for play that would be impractical and dangerous in many ostensibly “public” spaces. Nudity is relatively common, for instance, as is outdoor sex with any number of participants and onlookers. Many who go to a gathering will not have sex in public, or even have sex at all. Yet sex *animates* these gatherings without being precisely their *raison d'être*.

Faerie gatherings are hardly Reichian states of repression in a sort of arboreal social miniature akin to Shyamalan's *Village*. The felt connections between masculinity, militancy and homoeroticism work differently in faerie spaces. There is no centralized authority and repression is largely eschewed in favor of what is called “radical self-expression,” a construction that seeks to collapse feeling, intention and action into a single conceptual unit: the heart-centered self, the conscious subject, the faerie prince. Sometimes, radical self-

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<sup>7</sup> As is well known to gay historians, early Mattachine participants took pseudonyms and met at anonymous locations. Their ability to organize on the basis of homosexuality depended precisely on remaining unmarked and anonymous, which often also meant white and suburban. Thus the Mattachine Society, even before the debate over Communism, could not help but reiterate a prevailing racialization.

expression may figure as a form of sexual display, men young and old cunningly draping themselves in furs, rags, Day-Glo industrial plastics, showing as much skin as the weather may bear. Other times it may lead in other directions, with costumes running the gamut from high drag to pornography, from realist impersonations to abstract, loofa-like clouds of fabric. Certainly, radical *sexual* self-expression might lead one to all manner of activities from encounters with strangers, to ritual piercing, to the cuddle pile. Gay men are famously promiscuous, and the faeries are certainly no exception.

While it is difficult to find a faerie gathering call *without* some mention of sexual activity, it would be reductive and unhelpful to think these events merely as orgies in the woods. Gatherings do not consist in a sexual free-for-all or the elimination of all boundaries. On the most obvious level, many, if not most, people insist on various practices of sexual safety: consent, for instance, or the use of condoms. Most are highly discriminate in their choice of partners, admitting only those with whom there is “chemistry” or “connection.” The sexual and the erotic cannot be captured purely through mechanics, however.

Gatherings are not solely a space of sexual license, even if that feature is probably the most scandalous and challenging for outside observers. Even for those in the throes of a new-felt freedom, a more general individualization of consent and a voluntarism of engagement pervades such spaces: though little structure is generally in place to ensure that everyone does a work shift, dinner circles often include a call for self-designated dishwashers, for instance. Newcomers are simultaneously caught in a form of intimate engagement and left to their own devices to manage their “trip” for themselves.

One critique of gay “circuit” culture is that intensely-bonded, short-lived intimate experiences — at a rave, for instance, or on a gay cruise — may not conduce to the formation of durable long-term connections. As peak experiences, they may be addictive, encouraging those who engage with them to structure the rest of their lives around memories and expectations of major parties. Such events may arrange participants into cliques that share a uniquely vivid, pleasurable time of bonding but have little engagement with each other in day-to-day life, or little comprehension of what each others' day-to-day realities are like.

While the 60-70 faerie gatherings announced annually in RFD may superficially resemble a party circuit, and some participants may choose to engage with the radical faeries only through the rubric of temporary celebration, the faeries also offer sustained conversations on matters of ethics and spirit, a distinct mythos, and a community mutually entangled enough to continue the connections formed at gatherings through the rest of the year. Indeed, for those of us who live in faerie collectives and on the sanctuaries, the sharp contrast between gathering time and non-gathering time may be somewhat reduced. We might use heart circle as a regular practice of engagement with our friends. We might hold land, food and other resources collectively with our roommates and certain intimates. We might not be surprised to find half a dozen strangers on the couch of a sunny afternoon.

My first gathering, in 2001, was in many ways an experience of abandon. But as I returned to faerie spaces year after year, and came to know the community more deeply, things changed. Sexual abandon and wonder at the strange became an engagement with the specific stories and lives of the other participants. That is, people who began as strange beings, of a nature more-or-less inarticulable, dressed in all manner of drag and rags, become characters in an extended narrative of the community and its history — and also

characters in my life. I find that more and more of my time at gatherings consists of checking in with old friends, sitting in conversation on the events of the previous months or years. Just as Durkheim prescribed, the “God” of religious effervescence, when unmasked, is nothing else than the society of the other attendees. Indeed, the sexual charge of the gathering may only be relevant to a minority of those present, especially new visitors, especially young men. The rest of us may spend our time sitting on the back porch lingering over breakfast and coffee, chatting about politics, about sickness and health, and “spilling the tea,” that is, sharing all manner of radical faerie gossip.

The crucial point is that, for many faeries and gay men, the reconfiguration of sexuality suggested by the gatherings is not merely an exception to the rule, an occasional time of carnival or reversal that underwrites the norm, that serves ultimately to establish the norm through the operation of its negation. Radical faeries and gay liberationists do not abandon their sexual ethos so easily, leaving it at the gate of the sanctuary or the threshold of Sunday evening. Instead, participants at gatherings regularly express opinions on “how to bring the gatherings home,” how to extend the energy of the gatherings into their everyday lives. Their attempts to do this may lead them to new jobs or homes, or to abandoning jobs and homes altogether. Some manage this integration harmoniously, others do not. Yet the collective effervescence of gatherings proves, on closer consideration, not to consist simply in a temporary reversal of an oppressive normalcy. To maintain this is the case is to leave fixed in place the axis of freedom and constraint according to which “orientation” can only be heterosexual, condemning to pathology the practitioners of radical sexual politics. Ethnographers and critics must take seriously the possibility that alternate norms can become an everyday practice.

A bell rang out over the knoll and into the hollers. It was ten-thirty or eleven, the sky was blue and the day shaping up to be hot. Sated by a bowl of oatmeal and a pile of eggs, I sat on the back porch in languorous conversation. What signal was this? Morning meeting. Attendance seemed responsibly communitarian. I strolled out to the knoll to find a loose circle of 30-40 people, where I plopped my tush on a corner of a vast quilt. After announcements came the drawing of a Tarot card, the Sun, “for the day,” and then heart circle. An elaborate scepter of copper and polished rocks started its journey around the circle, and each participant received their moment to speak. The circle changed somewhat in this process; people drifted away, a few others joined. Most remained, seated on the quilt or on the ground beside it, listening in silence.

At first people simply checked in, presented their feelings and the details of their mood and health at that moment, but a few speakers in, the material began to deepen. “I’m sorry, this is going to take awhile,” one said, and then embarked on a story of their year. “My mother died,” the speaker explained. They told a long story of their mother’s sickness and the role they had played in her caregiving. “So much grieving! And — it’s okay, I’m moving through it, but I really need this gathering, this time to reconnect with my faerie family. I am so glad to be here.”

The next speaker honored that one and thanked them, then offered their own story. One by one the stories piled up, some joyful, some sad, and most someplace in between. At first I struggled to match the stories with the people, but the emotions piled up without any particular direction and eventually I lost track of who had said what. Individual stories at

times included an element of redemption, but the collective effect led not to the resolution of the stories but simply to their witnessing.

There was, perhaps inevitably, an element of policing. At one point someone began a long discourse into his depression, talking about the various SSRIs he had tried and his theory about the chemical imbalance in his brain. Some in the circle felt a degree of discontent, it seemed, and at one point someone called out just loudly enough that the speaker could hear him, "From the heart, girl!"

Another means through which gatherings become intimate events, heart circles perform more-or-less unconditional acceptance within the context of a particular speaker and their time with the talisman. Clearly, the ritual predates Harry Hay; talking circles of various kinds appear to have been widespread throughout human history and certainly were a feature of 70s consciousness-raising groups far beyond the faeries. Yet since the gatherings of 1979 and 1980 the radical faeries have made of heart circle a primary focus. For some, they are the uniquely appropriate time for expressing difficult emotions or dealing with issues that may be painful or shameful. They are a confessional space: one is encouraged to offer to the circle whatever is on one's heart. In the process one becomes known by the community, which recognizes and accepts the speaker through the act of their continued attention. In this way one's standing in the community is confirmed and underlined. Heart circles are an important part of the faeries' subject-making enterprises, creating people who are uniquely inclined to share with one another not just in the formal space of the circle, but around it as well.

Povinelli's "intimate event" codes a multifarious love as it has been enabled and sanctioned by Euroamerican laws and norms regarding marriage, social station and interest. It lies the intersection of the ideology of self-determination of the individual, which Povinelli terms the autological subject, and social determination by genealogy. Reading Randall Kennedy, legal scholar and race theorist, she writes, "Love is a political event. It expands humanity, creating the human by exfoliating its social skin, and this expansion is critical to the liberal Enlightenment project, including the languages of many of its most progressive legacies" (2006, 178). Here the "social skin" refers to the markers of race, class, gender, ability — the various grids that circulate in liberal settler societies to determine in part which lives count as livable and under what conditions. In her account, the "phantom nature" of the intimate event is that it is simultaneously distilled from all other forms of attachment — lust, greed, social rank, etc. — and yet can often require a little of each of them in order to be actual. Without delving into the homosocial theorization of democracy from Whitman and Carpenter, she nonetheless notes a continuity of scale between the supposedly voluntary collective created by the intimate event and the supposedly voluntary collectives of democratic representation.

The intimate event serves to underwrite and authorize a particular form of governance as consonant with a social contract, with a general will, thus demonstrating the virtue of a certain construction of individual and civilization. The "choice" of whom to love, the act of falling in love, is individuality in its perfect form precisely because, over the centuries of the European Enlightenment and its aftermath, it has been freed of explicitly legislated social constraints, at least regarding class (and eventually race, and eventually sex). What a contrast this is to the mainstream narrative of gay rights can be seen by comparison with the recent *New Yorker* article "Love on the March," a reflection on thirty years of progress

toward gay marriage from a Bostonian Protestant minister (Ross 2012). This is Povinelli's distinct mode of critical anthropology: of a narrative which has become among the most comprehensible and most treasured by gay marriage rights activists, she makes, not a triumphalist tale of liberal achievement, but a form of colonial rule.

The intimate event authorizes a politics of scale that links the individual to the nation, but also, in conjuring a self, it turns that self against itself, dividing it and producing a certain excess that cannot quite be wished away. The self who inquires of himself turns to look at something that cannot wholly be revealed, for who then would be doing the looking? Perspective requires a vector; more precisely, sensation cannot fully encompass the apparatus that makes it possible. Thus inaugurated in self-analysis, the self is immediately split against itself.

The intimate event also functions as a "proselytizing religion," since it requires an ever-expanding market in subjects available to fall in love (2006, 146). The wedding ceremony, in this view, must be read as polemic, as advertisement for a mode of conjugal linkage. Is the expansion of the intimate event in this way similar to the expansion of the ethical promised by recognition of the other in accounts such as those of Buber, Levinas and Harry Hay's "New Planet of Fairy Vision"? Buber and Levinas might be taken to task for not making more of marriage. After all, their ethics precisely depended upon recognition of others and yet women, for both, slip quietly from view. Buber's notion of recognition is closer to Hegel, who insists that recognition be mutual, that the recognition we desire is complete only when we can recognize that we are recognized by another. Levinas' work exhibits a contradictory relationship with God; while not explicitly religious in the mode of Buber, he nonetheless relies upon an account of a positive infinity which might be understood as the sum of all things. Harry Hay begins with the recognition of the (gay male) primary partner, extending eventually to additional lovers, to women and friends, and perhaps to all beings. For all three the notion of recognition as an ethical mode depends upon the assumption that recognition could eventually extend unto all things, yet that in doing so the operation of recognition itself remains constant. Such an operation necessarily achieves its own totalization; it depends on a cognition that at some point necessarily collapses the sensible, the conceivable, and the positive infinity toward which Levinas gestures. To put it another way, whatever sensation or concept I have of the world *is not* and *can never be* the sum of all things.

As an ethnographer of indigenous Australians and a friend and visitor of radical faerie worlds, Povinelli's frame emphasizes the problem of liberalism and especially the radical faerie appropriation of indigenous practices. While these are important issues, a focus on faerie milieux vis-à-vis broader legal and social discourse occludes power relations that emerge amongst those entangled in the genre. Her treatment of the faeries is to add context to a general description, not to thicken or deepen that description through a participatory engagement with radical faerie worlds. The lived experiences of faeries and their friends, in *Empire of Love*, appear to matter less than ways they can be embedded in a larger philosophical and political project. As other ethnographers of the radical faeries, and as I have done above, she notes ways that the faeries invert normative politics of gender and class, in the first case through drag and in the second case through stories in which an abjected underdog emerges victorious. Yet since Povinelli treats faerie gatherings primarily as occa-

sions for individual exploration, “self-autobiography as spiritual exercise,” she risks missing the very real constraints faeries place on each other.

Describing a Beltane gathering she attended, she tells a story of a dinner based on the theme of a fancy New York restaurant. I also attended this dinner at this gathering, which Povinelli and I both helped prepare. It was a significant moment for me: called the “New York” dinner, the idea was that attendees from the city might feel especially called to help with the work. Moreover, a good friend was the chef, having proposed the dinner and designed the menu. A professional caterer at the time, he had brought with him from the city no less than ten kilos of dark chocolate and various other supplies. Food preparation spanned three days; one night, three or four friends and I stayed up til three in the morning rolling pasta and assembling individual fresh ravioli for 300 people. The group of us, all friends with the chef, were relatively new to faerie gatherings and distinctly aware we were engaged in a form of service whereby he (and we) might be recognized as useful and important contributors to this social scene. In other words, while the ravioli were voluntary, we felt called by reciprocity and a yearning to imbricate.

The morning of the day prior to the dinner, I spent hours squeezing hundreds of limes for cocktails and lime-chili truffles. A decade later, my hands are still scarred and aged from the experience: after squeezing all these limes, I gave my hands a light rinse and then went out to sit and chat with a few others in the noonday sun on a cistern decorated with a mosaic of broken mirror and multicolored tiles. Unaware how photosensitizing lime juice could be, I was surprised when my hands started itching later that day and doubly surprised when, two days later, they had swollen into immobile claws filled with fluid, the effects of a third degree sunburn.

This dinner, which Povinelli describes in isolation as part of an extended ritual practice, was thus materially and intellectually consequential for me. For one thing, it offered a rare and tremendously valuable opportunity to spend time with a senior anthropologist. For another, it transformed my hands to this day. Yet beyond just my individual experience, it began a transition whereby my smaller clique, marginal to the faeries at large, became far more well-integrated. The food was a hit, and the chef, in part due to the talent and poise he’d shown in feeding 300 people so well, received an opportunity to move to California that summer to help with catering for an extended harvest on a farm that fall. Now a farmer himself, it would be the beginning of a major shift in his life.

The point of this story is to note that the radical faeries are not solely a social genre, a kind instantiated by aesthetics and self-identification. The language of social genre flattens both the affect that engagement in faerie worlds can bring, and the material relations of power that work through those worlds. Lapis Luxxury, a long-time resident of Short Mountain Sanctuary in Tennessee, recently put it this way: “People think we have all these connections or this privilege, but it’s really not the case, because you get out what you put in. It’s a part time job, the work you put into maintaining relationships. It is real work, like the work people do for their families. [...] That’s why I went over to [another faerie house in Berkeley] the other day. Spirit told me there was something up, and I needed to find out what was going on. Actually, for me, being a faerie is a *full* time job!” Though no one had precisely invited him, had he not made the visit, he explained, some of the people in the house might have misunderstood some agreements, might have thought less of him.

Lapis's comment resonates with my experience and that of many others. While the first-timer, or "virgin," might have few obligations and might feel a tremendous sense of freedom, the experience quickly changes. As time goes on, the real work of gathering and interconnection is revealed: creating and maintaining relationships.

Povinelli uses the term "immanent dependencies" to refer to the mutual entanglement of subjects rather than the classically modernist "social relations." What the newer term gets us is a sense that the master-slave dynamic exists not as an isolated opposition, in the sense of a concept and its negation or sublation, but as something that frames both of the actors and other things, as well, which are of them without quite being them. This is to say that the master-slave dynamic itself functions as only an effect of a certain prior binarism. "Dependencies" suggests a bidirectional transfer; the master is dependent on the slave, without whom his role would have no meaning, would in fact be senseless *per* Wittgenstein. I take this insight to point beyond the possibility of identifying who is the master and who is the slave, where sovereignty might be located, in faerie worlds. Not that they are outside of sovereignty — surely they are often at the whim of bigger fish and faster currents in the ocean of liberal governance — but that instead of a single rank, the classes or castes arranged one on top of the next like a stack of pancakes, one has a proliferation of axes of rank: class privilege, style, craftsmanship, youth, beauty, endowment, and so forth.

Gatherings can be viewed as a potential rite of passage, although the specifics vary rather more than van Gennep may have expected, radical faerie sociality traveling as one mode amongst others in most participants' lives. Moreover, in the Turnerian formulation rites of passage are understood as inaugurating a new phase of life or social status for the participant. Often they are organized around the stages of life, for instance demarcating puberty. Gatherings do not serve such a well-defined purpose for faeries; indeed, speaking of a rite of passage often depends on a conception of a singular society or culture for its effect. Moreover, as a label that may be adopted, or not, the claim that one *is* a faerie generally occasions fewer consequences than what one *does* as a faerie. Although the collective obligation and practices of participation in radical faerie kinship may be voluntary at the outset, and not everyone who goes to a gathering will emerge transformed, it is more a new type of labor that begins as one becomes enmeshed in faerie networks. It might therefore be more apt to compare faerie gatherings to the Moonies' mass weddings.

Imagining gatherings as a type of group wedding makes more sense than may at first be obvious. There is a period of celebration centrally animated by sexual activity and the exchange of shared substance. One takes on a new set of obligations, a new kin network and extended family. And the "socially exfoliating" effect of Povinelli's intimate event certainly moves through faerie worlds as an ideological form: what matters (or so faeries will claim) is not where one comes from, or the specifics of class, race and lineage, but that you are a faerie.

Oneida and Kerista relied on complex arrangements for balancing time between heterosexual pairs, which appear to have been conceived as the necessary setting for erotic desire even if preferentiality in partner selection was frowned upon in both communes. A few anthropologists have written about practices amongst various Pacific Islander groups known as *punalua*, which appear to have consisted in groups of brothers in exogamous group marriages with groups of sisters, but the 19th century sources for these legends are suspect and the arrangement has not received substantial scholarly attention since, as far

as I am aware. Swingers rely on an extensive code to ensure emotional fidelity to a primary relationship, conceived as mandatory for participation. The other gay “scenes” or circuit subcultures — the bears and leathermen of Hennen's book, among others — rarely give rise to similar feelings of universal solidarity, to the feeling of being a nation. Viewed as a polyamorous kinship arrangement the radical faeries may be unique.

## 4 The Political Economy of Touch

These days, everything has become political economy. The “original” political economy, of Marx and his immediate forebears, concerned a set of problems that arose with the emergence of nation-states, the better definition of borders, and the techniques and problems of population: how best to organize the resources under sovereign disposal so as to modulate various kinds of return? If one wished to ensure ample food was available to defer famine, it helped to understand the labor, time and resources required to produce that food, the means of its storage, and especially the agreements between people concerning its ownership and distribution. Moreover, it was not enough to understand how to produce food; it was also necessary to understand how it would be consumed, and over how long, when it would spoil, and what combinations of foods made for a sustainable diet. It is clear from the money and lobbying organizations assembled around such issues that they continue to be profoundly political, but it is also clear from the United States’ obesity and diabetes epidemics that they are profoundly material. They have direct consequences on the organization of bodies, on which bodies thrive and which sicken and die. Moreover, the political economy of food is one of the many conduits through which the prevailing grids of race, gender and class reproduce themselves.

Yet if everything has become political economy, then there can be a political economy of anything: not just food but also health, media, truth, or even abstractions like “propensity” (Thrift 2008). What, then, is the work that this term is doing? Of what are we trying to remind ourselves? It seems to me that “political economy,” as it is generally used in contemporary social science, indexes:

1. A field of complexity the particulars of which necessarily exceed our grasp. There being no avenue to comprehend all of the particulars in their uniqueness, we seek reduction both through the operators we choose and the models we create with those operators.
2. The irreducible entanglement of the qualitative and the quantitative. We have always had the sense that these cross over toward one another at the extremes: vastness, for instance, describes both quality and quantity. It is a scale that exceeds expectations, perhaps defies comprehension, even while it always implies a quantitative measurement. Yet political economy makes plain, with agonizing stories of loss and abandonment (Povinelli 2011), that every drip of a precious resource down the drain may mean a dramatic rupture, a break with experience. Thus political economy is always concerned, not just with abundance, but with scarcity, and the possibility or impossibility of being-without<sup>8</sup>.
3. A material distribution of effects thereby arises, as the vicissitudes of presence and absence, connection and disconnection, abundance and lack multiply themselves in many directions, move outward like ripples, combining and recombining with other effects, other political economies. What exactly constitutes a “good” depends on the

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<sup>8</sup> This is true even of Bataille's general economy of excess: while it appears to concern abundance, excess is not some quiet, sustainable abundance, a carefully-ordered system that conduces to healthy bodies. Rather, excess is precisely the specter of scarcity, the defiance of scarcity even as it moves toward its immediate return (Bataille 1988). It might thus also be a form of cruel optimism (Berlant 2006).

field under consideration; clearly, not just commodities, products and capital, as in the originary case, are “good.”

If these are indeed important traits by which political economies might be recognized, then as a (floating) signifier, a metaphor, a repetitive citation, a mode of scholarly practice, political economy does very serious work indeed. For we are always inclined to goad ourselves to thinking in terms of greater nuance and larger data sets, and political economy may be one such goad. Then again, like all such conceptual shorthand, it may be a form of epistemological self-deception when it leads us to avoid the work at hand.

This chapter argues for the political economy of touch. It promotes the general observations that touch is finite, that it is unevenly distributed, and that its distribution is a political matter. Touch can be the good, but there can also be bad touch, of course. The aim will be to think about a field touched by touch, to think through contacts and pressures of all kinds, through entanglement not just as a sociomaterialist metaphor but as an actual description of actual bodies. For the political economy of touch — the uneven distribution of touch and its effects — is consubstantial with the formation of sameness and difference, of schisms and unions; it is perhaps the critical collective logic.

What is it about the touching of bodies that removes itself so often from scholarship? Have we been suffering from a paucity of concepts around touch, of ways to describe its postures? It is certainly the case that certain touches are anointed, that they receive perhaps undue attention. Some touches occasion tremendous interest, such as those of marriage, of coitus, of birth and death — particularly death by violent crime. So too do the oily touches of criminal fingers, their trace remainders carefully assessed, documented, and held to the light of the sovereign in the person of the judge, the people of the jury and the occasion of the court. Compared to these, other kinds of touches may not much matter. Indeed, most touch is lost as soon as distance intervenes, all too quickly forgotten as bodies move on to new configurations. Particularly ephemeral are the “passing” touches, as between bodies crowded on a train or the parties to casual handshake. Memory does not generally relate every touch of every moment. To ask it to do so would call forth a galaxy of impressions and sensations, a series or congerie of moments transcribed into spatial impressions. Indeed, the mind might need to separate them, to separate the aches and pains of 13:49 from those of 13:52 by projecting them onto a spatial terrain (Carruthers 1990). Touch cannot be recorded and transcribed so easily. Most of it goes unremarked, unrecorded, unremembered. The reduction of the experience of touch to memories and records of events is thus one of the fundamental challenges of historiography.

I suspect that the keys lie in touch to more than a few mysteries, that if we could know comprehensively who was touching whom, and in what ways, at what moments, there is much that might be concluded. To speak of the political economy of touch is not just to speak about directly exchanging money, the literal economy, but about all the ways our relationships change in working with such ties. How might touch dominate and subjugate? How might touch or its absence figure as pleasure, as pain? How might shifts in who touches whom become events, moments when power relations transform? To argue for a political economy of touch is to argue that these moments are not innocent, that they are often unequally distributed, that their distribution is profoundly affected by “the political” — which is to say, power that cannot but expose itself, that it has no course save to “go public” in its leashing and rending of bodies.

Why not “the political economy of sex”? Sex is notoriously hard to define. Is sex just coitus? Is it mutual masturbation? One would have to define it as any form of erotic entanglement, which makes the issue rather more difficult, since the lines of eros may follow any of a body’s faculties (senses and appendages, surfaces and depths). Eros, moreover, may be invested either in scarcity or abundance of touch, the presence and absence of touch connected to the charge of eros only through the terrain of the psychic.

No doubt many faeries would agree that sexuality is repressed. According to this logic, gatherings are inherently subversive because reversing the rules of sexuality exposes and destabilizes the dominant order. It is a compelling idea often repeated, based in a classic countercultural reading of Freud, with Wilhelm Reich offering its apotheosis (Reich et al. 1970). Versions of this idea often favor politics that aim to increase the collective experience of pleasure. Transposed onto the history of the gay rights movement, the argument is that gay sex and those who flaunt it represent precisely such a reversal (Bronski 1998), and that this is their challenge to the reigning order: the challenge of pleasure. When Harry Hay named the Mattachine Society after the Medieval Mattachines, clown-like performers who could reverse the ordinary rules of society, appeared in drag, and for whom bawdy would be an understatement, it was precisely in order to continue a tradition of such subversive reversal.

The trouble is that the repressive hypothesis is untenable. Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* argues as much, not because the premodern era lacked policing and punishment for certain carnal acts, at least at certain times and places, but because it lacked the conceptual framework that would link such acts to one another and to the core of a being, to something like identity (1978). The operation of a rule on one occasion neither precluded nor necessitated its abandonment on another. A Foucauldian reading of a radical faerie social world would have to account for sexual abandon and license not as an exception to power, but as an operation that reinforces power in its very articulation of the two worlds distinction. There is no such thing as a temporary autonomous zone (Hakim 1991). It is not simply that the carnival maintains a dominant regime as a sort of negative side effect, although this may be true here as it has been elsewhere (Kracauer 1998, Willis 1988, Berlant 2006). It is also that these supposed spaces of exception offer norms of their own.

As I discussed in chapter three, a gathering is a private space devoted to public sex. While not excluding sex work, anonymous encounters, or cruising, such practices are not the norm at gatherings. What is the norm, rather, is a fast-paced, tightly articulated series of relational developments that seduce and entwine the attendees, often binding them closely together. Most attendees at gatherings come with close friends or make new ones rapidly. Heart circles can designate a space of potential friendship at which sexual encounters (or their scarcity) can be explored, celebrated or grieved. In other words, gatherings offer both the lure of sexual gratification and tools for handling the concomitant transformations such gratifications enact in relationships. For regulars, the people with whom one is entwined can sometimes become long-term friends. One may “process” one’s sexual and emotional lives with people who are neither confidential therapists nor anonymous strangers, but co-creators of a lineage which will extend to the next gathering and beyond. Moments of abandon abound, but for many, they may well be separated by long periods of discussion or foreplay with a sympathetic public. Moreover, relationships may shift dramatically whether or not “actual” sexual activity is involved. Otherwise distant people have

rare opportunities for face-to-face conversation. Another's imagination of one's sex life may reconfigure relationships quite absent the actual circumstances.

It would be difficult to argue sex is "repressed" in such a scene, but the scene does express a certain kind of order, and that order might be the basis of a certain emerging hegemony. In the highly generative article "Thinking Sex," anthropologist Gayle Rubin constructs a similar diagram, albeit to a different purpose (1984). The fulcrum of the article is a page of line drawings taken from a conference at Barnard in 1982. Like the planetary sex ritual, and also like da Vinci's man, Rubin offers us concentric circles punctuated by a series of rays. In the center of this "charmed circle" stand the heterosexual monogamous couple, perhaps dressed in the tuxedo and gown of wedding day. As one moves outward one encounters the unmarried, the polyamorous, sexual adventurers of all sorts, eventually the homosexuals and finally the pederasts. Rubin argues that the ordering of this charmed circle is profoundly social, historical, and amenable to change. She builds off the recent translation of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, part of the effect of which was to demonstrate that something previously felt to be "purely" biological, base, without cultural variation, did indeed have a history of its own. It is notable that although Rubin cites Foucault as arguing that desires are "constituted in the course of historically specific social practices," she also begins her commentary through observation of the ways that sexuality is repressed, and her article does not so much consider the possibility of an enabling power, a conceptual framework that might operate through proliferation and recognition rather than punishment. Like homosexuality, sexuality in general had been repressed. Her thinking thus offers few resources for explaining why homosexuals should go so quickly from apparently total vilification to celebration and engagement. Why should former "sex offenders" suddenly be praised as the ideal consumers of luxury goods (Chasin 2001) or lauded as the best corporate managers? To make sense of contemporary sexuality in the United States, we need to rethink sex as something power can enable and enroll, not just repress. Such thinking also helps shed light on the relationship between the faeries and the putative "gay mainstream."

When I came out of the closet, it was after several years of bisexuality, and it was with a great deal of trepidation. I was less appalled by the notion of homosexual sex, however, or the notion that two men should love each other, than I was by what appeared to be the unquestioned norms and stereotypes of "mainstream" gay culture. I knew gay men to be sexually promiscuous and obsessed with appearances. The latter might conduce them to spend hours a day at the gym, to buy clothes they couldn't afford, or to undergo dangerous plastic surgery. I may have found some of these young men attractive, but (I told myself), I didn't truly want to look like them or be like them, and so I didn't try. Yet over the years, I would be subject to a direct and immediate system of rewards for shaping myself in ways deemed sexually appropriate. Cutting my hair short, wearing tighter clothes, listening to Madonna — all turned out to have a direct and immediate effect on my sex life. Turning 30, it became clear that my sexual capital depended on regular exercise. To be "out" as a gay man was not to be liberated, but to be party to my own inexorable reshaping in a milieu wherein the reward for compliance was touch — and to some extent even affection and love.

A ritual performed in Iowa, site of the founding of RFD and early fairy collectives, expresses the centrality of sexual activity, particularly coitus, and I think conveys some of the ways that sexuality can be organized as an effect of power even as it is enabled. In an interview with anthropologist Michael Lecker, the Window Engstrom (Donald Engstrom-

Reese) described what I think of as the “planetary sex ritual,” a space laid out for ritual as well as sex, with the two directly supporting each other (2012). The participants marked a field with a series of concentric circles. The outermost circle was the designated place for supporters, perhaps holding hands. In the next circle were those who chose to kiss, and in the next circle those who chose to touch each other. Mutual masturbation occurred in the following circle, and oral sex in the circle beyond that. Fucking was in the center, commanding the attention of the periphery even if many could not or would not partake. One could move from orbit to orbit, closer or further from the center based on the level of one’s interest in any particular partner. Here in the center shone the solar anus and the tumescent member, the sexual act illuminating and heating all those in orbit around it.

What interests me is the notion at the root of both Rubin's diagram and the Widow Engstrom's: that a norm can be thought of according to a diagram of a circle, that the walls separating the sacred from the profane are necessarily circular walls, the artifacts of an enclosure. Like Rubin's subjects of sexual subalternity, the ritualists may not fully be free to move from orbit to orbit. One's inclinations may not be so easy to overcome, be they toward groups, BDSM or others of the same sex/gender. One cannot simply choose one's desires; rather, one must coax them, cultivate them over time. In the planetary sex ritual, moreover, the participants' freedom to move from orbit to orbit depends in part on whether the particular sexual act requires a partner. If the charmed circle in the center is reserved for coitus, is it open only to couples?

I wasn't present at the ritual I have thus described, and no one has been able to tell me precisely who occupied the center on that particular day. What I know about that ritual, and what it expresses about the radical faeries and related homosexual counterpublics, I know in part intuitively and in part on the basis of many conversations with my informants. Not universally, but for many people, much of the time, coupled coitus still occupies pride of place amongst sexual activities at the gatherings. It is central because it is closely tied to romantic and erotic fantasies that prevail outside of such spaces, and it is central because such fantasies never quite seem to go away even within such spaces.

For everyone who experiences the gatherings through sexual union, whether metaphorical or actual, Rubin's charmed circle springs back into existence. It may be reconfigured but it is no less actual. Am I going to get laid? Are *they* getting laid? Why wasn't I invited? Though this question comes in many forms I can scarcely think of one more vexing or more critical to most faeries' experience at gatherings. It is true that many, perhaps most, people do not have sex at gatherings, but there is that chance.

Like any other sexual cruising environment, on a certain level spending time at a gathering is like playing a slot machine. Will it be apples and oranges? Or will you hit the jackpot, see nothing but stars? Random reinforcement is devilishly addictive. The button-pushing monkey who knows food will drop out of the slot every time, or every third time, knows exactly how to get what she needs. When she is hungry, she can eat — or better yet, before she is hungry, she can do the finite, predictable labor necessary to secure her next meal. Yet the machine that only emits randomly offers her the twin devils feast and famine. On the one hand, instant gratification may be hers, a yummy morsel dropping into her greedy paws for barely any work at all. On the other, she may stand at the machine for hours or days, pushing the button again and again, only to be denied.

How could it possibly be acceptable for a good constructivist cultural anthropologist to invoke such a cognitive-behavioral reduction? If there are discourses that define addic-

tion in this way, do they not thereby constrain human experience? My intention here is to play with the notion; I realize that I'm invoking what could be called a sex-negative valence, and I want to underline that if I mention this pattern of random reinforcement, it is not to suggest a moral judgment about cruising or frequent sex, nor to suggest that there is some other, healthier alternative. A pattern of random reinforcement, it seems to me, conditions the behavior of living things in all kinds of contexts which are not normally thought of as addiction. A mere thought can be pleasurable or unpleasurable, the pleasurable thoughts conducing to their own return. Indeed, it is probable that even the child's use of language can demonstrate this pattern we think of as an addiction, since it is only sometimes that speech begets a response. Rather, my intent is to think about repetition and difference in human experience, to think about the ways that certain things get repeated and others do not, and to examine the ways repetition may pile on top of repetition and thence may emerge an entire social world.

One can imagine lives for which the sex machine is perfectly predictable. Couples may fall into a certain sexual routine; one thinks of the steady, plodding sexuality of Kundera's Tomas in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. And then, of course, there are those whom it brings sadness, pain, even torture, and those for whom the machine does not function at all. Yet listen in heart circle and you will find faeries haunted by desire. They may long for a fuck, a lover, a lifelong companion. They may long for recognition or good health. Yet long they must. Most times, even at gatherings, are not easy. As often as one hears tell of joy, connection and exquisite release, one hears just the opposite: stories of agonizing loneliness, profound isolation even in the midst of crowds. For many of us, gathering brings both of these; for many, the agony lasts longer and outweighs the joy. I can remember three or four big gatherings at the beginning when it seemed as though every year I'd spend much of my time wandering about, looking for connection. Impatient with heart circle or helping in the kitchen, I'd find myself caught by obsession. Where was the boy? Where were the hot ones, the smart ones, the ones for whose approving touch I longed so deeply? It is difficult to express the magnitude and intensity of this sort of craving. Often it feels unbearable. Often I'd cry every day, multiple times each day, gathering turned emotional gauntlet as I wondered how to find the Beloved. Did the Sufi feel thus when Shams-I-Din spent the evening with another man?

(You see him sitting on a bench and looking off into the distance, but you don't want to be too obvious. You walk up into the cabin, grab some water and then turn around. He just might be glancing in your direction as you head outside, so you veer off 20 or thirty degrees and walk right up to him. He smiles. Score! He's Matthias. You're Matthew. Really? Damn. He lives in Paris and he's Belgian, raised in the US. Delicious. Immediately this person turns out to be intensely similar, stunningly beautiful, etc. You shouldn't, but you let yourself get attached and you keep wondering when you'll see him. At the pool for an hour and he doesn't show up. Somehow, intuitively, it is clear he is with that other one, Otter. You shouldn't, but you allow yourself, you feel compelled to walk up the other gully, thinking perhaps you'll run into them. What a funny idea. After all, what's the chance of that in on 300 acres? Yet look, what is that form in the tent over yonder? Someone is standing? Someone is sitting? You move closer, and sure enough, it's them. Hey guys. Wave and passing by. There's interest so you walk back for a second. Boy is wrapped in a blanket and there is Otter, all of him. Damn. Extreme jealousy and then, also, you just want to be in the middle. What are you up to? Just going for a walk (I'm really trying to get out of here as quickly as

possible). We're heading down to the pool. I was just there, I've been trying to practice. Practice? Not very good at freestyle but, you say, you are trying to get better. Otter is a diver and he's just told this beautiful story about diving and meeting a fish nose-to-nose, so, you think to yourself, there is no way you are going to let boy compare you swimming side by side. Instead you say, maybe I'll see you there.

Have fun. Have fun. And then up the path, a few hundred yards, finding a shady spot along one side. Here. There is a manzanita, dark red and luscious, and here is a little shade. You sit and begin to relax, drawing the awareness to the breath. Will this help you let go of him, let go of the scandalous thing you have just seen? Perhaps in time, but for now the mind snaps back, it is like a dog begging for food, and the food that it wants is Matthias. A bright yellow bird alights on the branch and there go your eyes. It is life. It has a little grey on the stomach but that is an awfully bright bird for 4pm on a hot afternoon. And then there's a gecko. So much life. They don't know anything of your desire, your jealousy. You start to cry a little, then it is back to the breath. In and out. The boy comes back, the mind is still a hungry dog, but you will keep breathing, searching for a path that leads away from the agony you've just endured.)

I recall a series of conversations and an extended interview with a gentleman whom I will call Brook. In his early 50s, Brook suffers from debilitating anxiety and a speech impediment that can at times make it profoundly difficult to have conversation with him. The first time I met Brook, making an attempt to be good, I wanted to stay present with him when he tried to engage me in conversation. Often I found this excruciatingly difficult, since he seemed unaware of how distracting his surroundings were: people coming and going, other candidates vying for my attention. Apparently oblivious, Brook would trap me in banal politesse, in conversations that shouldn't have needed to be long. Because of his speech impediment, it might take him three or four minutes to say something that the rest of us might have said ten times faster. Yet perhaps a social sanction against interrupting others, or mistreating those with disabilities, made it difficult to cut him off.

I asked Brook why he kept coming back to gatherings. Was it because of the sex or intimate connection? No, he explained. If it were because of the sex he wouldn't bother, since he had never had sex at a gathering and found it difficult to connect with people even there. Yet as our conversation went on, it became clear that the *hope* of sex was indeed one of his primary motivators. There was a certain possibility of touch, and that possibility was enough, even as it failed again and again to become real.

Touch is not only an individual need but a collective need. Radical faerie phenomena depend on faeries touching each other — their hearts, their minds, their bodies — and they depend even more on faeries touching non-faeries. Indeed, a movement whose members produce few babies necessarily depends on recruitment. Touching non-faeries helps us ensure our own future prosperity, helps us ensure that a community will be available when we need it. Against the Shakers, 10000 people for whom sexuality was forbidden, or the Oneida Community, 300 people for whom an apparently liberated sexuality was in fact tightly regulated, the faeries measure up fairly well: even with homosexuality and the plague of AIDS, the number of faeries and faerie gatherings continues to increase as the phenomenon enters its fourth decade.

Yet to explain touch in this way says little about why and how people touch. The reference to "need" reveals the argument as a form of functionalism, a style of argument well-known to anthropologists. Though in its roots it is a form of systems thinking, perhaps an

application of a biological metaphor; functionalism can also be said to put the cart before the horse. (Most of) those who touch the faeries do not touch others on behalf of any collectivity save the presently engaged. The reproduction of the collective form is more often the side effect than the intent.

The stories I have recounted perhaps suggest better explanations, but can we even then term such deep longing, such craving, a *need*? To extend the language of biomedical affliction in this context might invoke the language of addiction. Perhaps we should understand an addiction to touch along the same lines as alcoholism, and treat it similarly.<sup>9</sup> Surely we would discover an appropriate quantum of touch, the range considered optimal to health and happiness, the reasonable allowance. It is striking for me how we return to touch, how stories that seem to bear so little in common nonetheless dance around touch, intimacy and Eros as moths around a flame. As much as, for upwardly-mobile young men on the path to a good gay marriage, for heterosexual neighbors and other outsiders, for concerned parents, the legislators of morality and mental health professionals, the radical faeries might seem to suffer from an excess of touch, it seems that as many suffer from a paucity.

Zac and I stopped at Wolf Creek one year on the way to the winter Breitenbush gathering. We'd brought our friend Dennis along for the ride in hopes he would get permission to attend, which involved negotiating a rather formal waitlist. At this time we were officers of Nomenus, the church that owned the land, and even though the group operates by consensus and moves most authority away from the officers, there was a tangible sense in which our spending the night on the way north amounted to an official visit. We brought much whiskey and chocolate to help the land get used to our presence and to reassure everybody we were grateful for their volunteer labor in keeping the doors open.

It was a lovely evening; I can still remember how the land looked as we arrived, far too late into the night for a rural schedule. The moon was just past full and the sky was clear. It was biting cold and we decided to pull privilege, turning left before the parking lot and driving up all the way to Garden House, the residents' main building. This was a ramshackle structure with no real bedrooms, just an L-shaped kitchen and sitting area, the land's only full-service bathroom, and a single warm room upstairs devoted to the ancestors and the sanctuary's book collection. It is a sweet structure, accommodating if drafty, and a testament to the faeries' perseverance: an earlier farmhouse on this site had been burned down by homophobic locals, so the legend went, and this one handcrafted where it stood. Accordingly, it was one of those rooms that shows the traces of many hands: beautiful notions and careful effort — for instance, in an elaborate if impractical mosaic tile floor — jutting up against clutter and dust.

A warm dinner awaited us and Garden House had clearly just been cleaned and re-furnished with a fetching new couch. We sat around til 1 or 2 hoping Dennis would hook up with one of the residents, then Zac and I went to bed. Guest accommodations were in a glorified garden shed out the back known as Alteria. We slept well thanks to power from the grid and good electric heaters more than any comprehensive insulation.

The next day we left early and Dennis stayed behind, concerned that if he went up to Breitenbush he could end up stuck in the snow with no place to stay. The subsequent four

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<sup>9</sup> Were this idea to catch on even more of the Castro's scarce public meeting space would be booked with twelve-step meetings; as it is, Sex Addicts Anonymous is the infant sibling.

days were unusual for me, as faerie gatherings went: Breitenbush draws one of the older crowds and is not at all a late night gathering. A large heart circle in a ski lodge assembly hall took up most of each day, while performances and meals took place with near military precision. Outside the lodge, we soaked in hot spring pools and languorous conversation, meeting new people and learning each others' histories, watching the steam rise to the clouds and deer poke through the melt a few feet away.

The feeling of bliss continued right back into our car and down the mountain. It carried us straight through the handcrafted kitsch and obligatory carbohydrate feast at the local diner, out onto I5 and back down to Wolf Creek, where the situation had changed.

It was late afternoon and the snow had melted. The land was a gray, muddy mess. Garden House couldn't have been more different from how it had been just four days before: both doors swung open, snow and mud on the floors, dishes were piled in the sink, and the new couch was nowhere to be seen.

"The worst kind of scabies outbreaks are psychosomatic outbreaks," my friend Dennis explained one evening some months later. I'd asked him to dinner to talk about his experience that weekend and the recording was my recompense. "And I've spoken to a diverse range of people from a wide range of backgrounds and I've discovered a wide subcultural prevalence of this psychosomatic scabies." Ever-helpful, Dennis performed the anthropologist as best he know how. After years of philosophy and critical theory, it was refreshing to hear him make a claim to knowledge in such a straightforward way.

"In fact, they are much more prevalent than actual scabies outbreaks. And I hesitate to use the term 'actual' because psychosomatic scabies are just as real ... it's really easy to suddenly believe that you have scabies, and if you're surrounded by a group of people with similar beliefs, all it takes is one person who passed through a few weeks back to leave scars on the community."

"Well, do you know who the original source was?"

"I'm not sure if Jay, the awkward guy, if he actually had scabies or just had a very intense case of psychosomatic scabies, but he was in fact patient zero."

"And was he covered in little red bumps all over his body, or a line of four little bumps between his fingers?"

"I cannot speak empirically on this matter as, at the time, I was covered in little red bumps that later turned out to be dried skin. You know, having a gift of mushrooms to the community ... certainly didn't help the perception of scabies ... but you know, it was interesting. It might have even cured them. Earlier that day I had gone to town to wash everything in the hottest washer machine in town, and I actually washed everything together and it was so hot that the red dye from my sweater turned everything pink. I came back to Wolf Creek to discover the couches had been burnt. I'm not sure who was there. We came back and there weren't any couches. I pointed out that that was an illogical action as all you have to do to eliminate the possibility of scabies is not sit on the couch for a week and the eggs will die. The response was, basically, those couches were unholy and they had to go. The couches were dirty, where dirty was some kind of intrinsic property, a fundamental taint. If you are in a space where couches can be burnt just because they are dirty, it's logical to have scabies even if you have no visible symptoms."

When scabies come to haunt faerie worlds, all forms of touch become suspect. An impossible isolation becomes the counterpart to faeries' otherwise touch-happy ways. When does isolation fold toward death, and when does it fold toward life? Two deaths came

to Wolf Creek in the summer of 2011: one died the midst of touch, in a pile of bodies who had been drinking in the forest cabin known as the Edge. He was said to have drunk a homebrew potion discovered in a secret forest cachement. The other was Spiral Hartsong, a decade-long stalwart of Wolf Creek and an expert on wildcrafting native foods. He'd had scabies for a year, refusing nearly all touch so as to protect us, or so he said before he hung himself.

## 5 Homonormativities

“Before Gay Shame,” David Halperin opened the infamous conference by that name in 2004, “There was already gay shame.” He then spun a historical tale of queer practice that moved backward through Gay Shame the activist group, through Sarah Schulman and through Freud. He might as well have said, and with much the same meaning, “before the clone, there was already the clone.” Herein I make two parallel arguments. The first, a historical argument, is that 1970s and 1980s gay clone discourse worked to delegitimize and obscure the production of actual homosexual normativities. As improper copies, clones were “consigned unto death,” as Jasbir Puar would have it, in a frantic attempt to create a charmed circle of gay livelihood against the emerging AIDS crisis. The second argument, more speculative, is that the clone has lived on, in a complex and variable afterlife in which the workings of historical pre- and non-gay clone discourse are still apparent. I argue Lisa Duggan’s notion of homonormativity echoes this discourse, and, while I share its political analysis and agenda, the notion may unintentionally impede attempts to know and nurture alternative sexual normativities.

Prior to and outside of the *gay* clone, the clone has long born the “taint of fraud,” becoming the “object embodiment of ... genealogical shame,” as Sarah Franklin explains (26). Lacking originality through the proper reproductive mixture, the combining of two different parents to produce something new, the clone appears to lack individuality and substance. Baudrillard picks up the same theme, linking it to the *doppelgänger*, the double as the loss of authenticity, an operation that appears to reduce identity to a pure surface effect: “[T]he subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death” (95).<sup>10</sup> Like Benjamin’s replicated work of art, the double loses its aura irretrievably. On the surface, this subtle death is a loss of individuality and quality. In this sense the trigger could be homosexuality, but it could be many other things as well. The threat of sameness has arisen through Communism, as in 1950s myths of Soviet conformity. It has arisen through technology, in PC and Apple “clones,” software piracy and the extensive assemblage about them. And Hollywood horror movies about aliens and zombies continue to evoke this threat (Stacey). Strictly speaking, however, that supposed individuality was always already lost: this is the point made when Butler places the psyche prior to and outside the subject, when she argues for identification as a rejection of and response to an originary mimesis or loss (1997). It is copies without originals all the way down. The clone is thus the perfect proof of a certain kind of nonfoundationalism, of emptiness; it pushes that emptiness back into view, threatening with its recognition (Boon).

The ordinary tale of those who came to be called clones — as related by Levine, Holeran, and parenthetically Chauncey and D’Emilio — goes something like this. After Stonewall, it became possible for some gay men in urban centers to congregate relatively more openly. Their signifiers did not need to be dissembled or concealed in the way of the closeted 1950s and 1960s. The possibility of gay liberation led some of them to consider the question of their (re)presentation, to question pathologizing accounts of homosexuality as

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<sup>10</sup> This subtle death haunted homosexuality through the absence of reproductivity since long before the AIDS crisis, as the work of Leo Bersani in particular makes clear.

a failed copy or mockery of heterosexuality, the gay man as the incompetent mimic of the straight man. With the advantage of physical proximity and institutional support from gay and lesbian businesses and landlords, it was no longer necessary to pick the homosexual out of a room full of straight men via, for instance, his “swishy” gestures, effeminate clothing or green carnation (*pacé* Wilde). Such conditions favored signs of sexual and economic competency, such as work clothes, short-cropped hair, and jeans frayed to suggest sexual availability. Gay men could now be *real* men, appropriating masculine symbols into their own erotic lexicon. This fashion spread like wildfire, bouncing back and forth between San Francisco and New York, radiating outward to less established and wealthy gay ghettos, till finally adopted (and, so the story goes, destroyed) by mainstream designers and straight men. By the decade’s end, however, the sheer prevalence of this drag reduced its effectiveness: rather than distinguished among gay men for his masculinity, the clone became *cliché*, and unreflexive adherence to his code less effective. The clone came to be associated, moreover, with an unexpected sickness and death. In this context one would expect the gay clone to pronounce an ambivalent identification at best. Indeed this appears to have been the case; the term was first of all pejorative, working to delegitimize certain emerging sexual normativities and obscure recognition of those whose imitations helped create them.

In its deployment to refer to those who bore this new gay masculinity, the “clone” may have originated in 1976-7, when *ex muris* scholar and local gadfly Arthur Evans claims he first used it in one of the “Red Queen” broadsides he was pseudonymously wheatpasting about the Castro (personal interview, May 8, 2011; see also *Christopher Street* 71 [Dec. 1982]). I am not in a position to evaluate his claim, but it is clear that this “just so” story of the clone is a fairy tale, and not just because Evans also takes credit for the term “faerie” [*sic*]. Rather, it’s a fairy tale because, before the clone as signifier, there were already clones: men already dressing, walking, talking alike in an idiom built of remixed working-class masculine archetypes: cowboy, construction worker, lumberjack, athlete. Before clones there were nellies and swishies. Before *both* was the “straight man,” heterosexual masculinity standing in as origin and model. Before the straight man, the illusion of prior identities built of compulsive and compulsory repetition. For gender itself, as “a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (Butler 313), had always been a parody.

The gay clone, in a sense, was a parody of a parody. It was not fully or completely a gender. Rather than origin or identity, gender consists of open-ended and performative reiteration constrained by compulsory heterosexuality. Yet that constraint also obliges the attempt to fix certain points as unquestionable, logical, transparent: for instance the claim that one’s gender is because of one’s sex or chromosomes, or that being female, being male, being gay or lesbian is what one is absolutely, transcendentally, prior to the changes and developments of social life. It turns out, however, to have been difficult for anyone to have unambivalently identified themselves as a clone; the earlier connotations of the term carried right through into its deployment on (or against) gay men. Indeed, one finds the trace of mockery across all the major contemporary sources for the clone. Every Village People album cover amounts to a carefully-posed self-parody. Evans’ broadsides denigrated clones in order to praise faeries and faggots. And for Andrew Holleran, “a clone came to stand for a homosexual male with no individuality, no imagination, and no heart” (14).

Levine’s *Gay Macho* is especially problematic and revealing in this regard. It can be read as a cautionary tale about what might happen when one takes a category of observa-

tion (and an insult, at that!) as a category of analysis. On the other hand, it can be read as the prescription of an ideal type which has come to signify a particular era in gay sociality, and which has lived on, zombie-like, after Levine's death and the death of clones like him.

Levine sets out to study "clones," mostly in the Village from 1976-1980. In his account the collective clone becomes an actor, an agent of sexual activity, of consumption, of fashion and hedonism. Yet it is unclear — a few quotes from informants notwithstanding — how many of the men he interviewed would have used the word "clone" to describe themselves had Levine not prompted them to do so. There is thus an awkward ambivalence to Levine's work that suggests the crises of representation had not made it to NYU sociology by the early 1970s when he did his coursework. On the one hand, Levine is gay and he is clearly interviewing his friends. On the other hand, he treats the clone as an Other to himself and never admits which of those friends — if any — are his lovers. This leads to odd circumlocutions, simultaneously presencing and distancing. "I should have known better than to go to the baths at 6:30 on a rainy Sunday evening [when there was a line and they were crowded] ... [b]ut I had to do this — the research required me to observe the baths on circuit night" (77). It is always the research, and never desire. Levine is unable to admit that he himself is a clone, and though he is implicitly investigating himself, he never writes reflectively about his own experience or examines his entanglement in his field site as actor and culture-maker as well as researcher. His informants' voices become harder to hear because one has the sense that Levine was the first, or most blatant, to inform them they were "mere" clones. Every time his informants use the word "clone" to describe themselves one hears abjection and social isolation. One informant, whom Levine identifies as "New York clone, age 27," says: "I live in an all-clone world. All my friends are clones. I live in a clone building, in a clone neighborhood, and work in a clone bar. My family stopped talking to me and I stopped talking to my straight friends" (30). Of an older man who has watched fashions come and go, he writes: "[H]e then looked me in the eyes, and said in a voice dripping with sarcasm, 'Just look at these clones dear. With their pumped up bodies and thick mustaches, they all look so "butch." But I remember them when everyone was "nelly." What a joke!"' (55).

By 1982 the term "clone" had come to signify the victims of the plague. In *Christopher Street*, Andrew Holleran wrote of the clones: "The men were very attractive — clones usually are; that's the joke — but there was a look of the past about them. By the end of the Seventies there was even something sinister about clones: an association with amoebas and opportunistic infections. I met the best-looking clones seated across from me in public clinics, doctors' offices, waiting for our laxative to work. One came to associate a handsome man with stools in a paper cup. A clone was a person whose past made him a candidate for diseases no clone wants to get" (17). Holleran's dance around self-identification is indicative, and similar to Levine's. Though it's implicit at the doctor's office, he doesn't admit to his own identity as a clone until more than halfway through the article. Clones are always Other, appreciated for surface more than substance, even when one is thus appreciating oneself.<sup>11</sup> Of the half dozen letters *Christopher Street* printed in response to Holleran, only one appeared to show direct self-identification with the clone, and this was from a man

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<sup>11</sup> An extensive literature on sexual objectification is also relevant here.

born and raised in Noe Valley, just over the hill from the Castro. His parents, knowing he was gay, had helped him select his adolescent wardrobe accordingly.

Michael Kimmel, Levine's posthumous editor, has fewer qualms. Kimmel is explicit that Levine was himself a clone and praises him as a Gramscian "organic intellectual," one of those who emerges directly from an oppressed class of people and retools elite concepts so as to serve their liberation from hegemony. Yet Kimmel chooses to edit and publish not just Levine's dissertation, but in the same volume his later essays, which consist of a series of analyses of the AIDS crisis and the responses it provoked and which do not discuss the clone, or masculinity, at all. For Kimmel, Levine's death ironically becomes the proof that he was a real clone, and structurally, the book itself comes to reflect the very failure of the clone lifestyle. Not even the one published monograph on gay clones could be a *real* book on clones. Though Kimmel disavows Freud's "failed man" theory of gay male narcissism, he structures Levine's book as a failed imitation of ethnography.

While the "classic" gay clone died with the AIDS crisis, in another sense the clone has never really left us. Clone styles have become ubiquitous elements of urban hipster fashion, denoting whiteness and often a politics of multicultural liberalism or at least tolerance for homosexuality. Worn Out West, the Castro's clone uniform store, is one of few retail establishments in the neighborhood to survive the changes of AIDS, gentrification and the .com boom. Many, homosexual or not, might recognize themselves in descriptions of clone fashion even if they do not recognize the clone within themselves:

"Frank looked like a well-groomed lumberjack. Everything he wore was tailored and matched. His jeans and plaid Pendleton shirt fit perfectly. His black, wool, watchman's cap matched his black Levis and the black in his shirt. His red thermal undershirt matched the red in his shirt. The brown in his leather belt matched the brown in his hiking boots. No real lumberjack ever looked so well put together, so coordinated in color, his outfit fitting so perfectly" (61).

Along with the deterritorialized signifiers of fashion, gay and lesbian conservatism — a bemused surprise for *Christopher Street*, which in 1982 devoted an entire issue to the matter — has continued to grow and thrive. The late 1990s and 2000s have brought extensive discussion of the notion of "post-gay" identities for a certain section of the homosexual elite that can afford to let go of homosociality and markers of alterity (no green carnations here!). They have brought also the enlistment of GLBT populations in homonationalist discourses that contribute to US and European militarization against Islam and collude with the war on terror. These developments, as well as the focus of many gays and lesbians on maintaining property and social status, have become central preoccupations for twenty-first century queer theory.

Lisa Duggan, one of our most important analysts, introduced the term *homonormativity* to refer to "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (179). The term rapidly became widely circulated, cited in scores of sub-

sequent articles in queer theory and GLBT studies. It's important because it allows scholars and activists in queer studies an easier conceptual handle on certain trends within our midst, and I am by no means arguing to retire it. Yet there is something strange about the term nonetheless. It promises demobilization, domesticity and consumption — precisely the promises of the American dream, as eloquent an expression of heteronormativity as there has ever been. Yet homonormativity lacks the resources of heteronormativity for producing these outcomes. After introducing the term, Duggan explains, "I am riffing here on the term heteronormativity, introduced by Michael Warner. I don't mean the terms to be parallel; there is no structure for gay life, no matter how conservative or normalizing, that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling" (191). Thus homonormativity is a copy of heteronormativity, but with a difference: gay life lacks the "structure," the "institutions," that make the reproduction of heteronormativity possible. If, extending Butler's argument, heteronormativity is like compulsory heterosexuality in that it must constantly be reiterated, then as compared to it, homonormativity indicates a lesser or failed capacity for that very reproduction. Heteronormativity and homonormativity must both reiterate themselves through signs, practices, speech acts, and so forth, but they do not do so equally. And so homonormativity itself is not parallel to heteronormativity, but rather it is a lesser repetition, a repetition with a difference, a failed copy, a clone.

There are some dangers here. Primarily, homonormativity is not, strictly speaking, a copy of an original. Duggan is clear about this. The terms are not parallel, and homonormativity designates something distinctly different from heteronormativity. Meanwhile, conceptually, heteronormativity is only barely an "original invention" even if Warner can take credit for introducing the term. The slippage with compulsory heterosexuality is too easy. After all, discourse works through the play of the repetition and difference of signs whose very open-endedness is their possibility. Much of the notion of heteronormativity is itself a copy, a clone, just another step in a vast collecting and scattering within which there are no originals. Yet homonormativity does designate an orientation toward heteronormativity; after all, it makes the same promises. There is thus a second danger, that homonormativity could reveal heteronormativity as itself having always been without substance, that it could appear to destabilize heteronormativity as an analytical construct by renaturalizing the pursuit of demobilization, domesticity and consumption. "We all want the same things," someone might observe, "look: even the queers."

I would like to understand sexual normativities in a nonessentializing way, and it seems to me that Butler's deconstruction of identity must be a necessary starting point. Moreover, thinking carefully about the copy helps me to avoid the search for an original or an essential. Yet it seems to me that there are *other* sexual normativities which do not make the heteronormative promises, and that these normativities have not received adequate consideration in the last decade of queer studies. We've done very well in taking the conceptual vocabulary of queer studies and applying it to other domains, exploring its articulations with nationalism (Puar), with genealogy (Povinelli), with globalization (Manalansan). Yet the existing work on sexual normativities leaves much to be desired (Muñoz and Halberstam are happy, but limited, exceptions).

As an example of such nonessentializing work on sexual normativities all I can do here is gesture toward another paper that could be written, focusing less on *mechanics* of

identification than on precise, more fine-grained *mechanisms* for identification in practice. That is, on precisely what points did clones imitate heterosexuals? On what points did they imitate each other? “The clone queen puts on clonegear as if it equipped him with some atomic raygun — as if clothes were a substitute for personality — with which he shoots Attitude as he goes through the streets annihilating pedestrians: Wonder-Clone” (Holleran 17). The observation suggests a Tardean re-reading of the literature on surveillance and the male gaze, suggests even that the (gay) male gaze might be made of imitation-rays.

As I have argued, thinking through the clone suggests we set aside the operations that delegitimize and obscure in order to bring to light productive possibilities. For the improper, illegitimate, failed copy may not just threaten its original (if one could be found), threaten identity or assumptions of substance. It may also be a failed copy in the sense of an *imperfect* copy. As Larkin showed in Nigeria, noise in a signal, or error in copying, itself helped produce a consciousness of the limitations of the colonial regime (2008). If the gay clone’s errors in copying heterosexual masculine styles lay in tight fit and sexual suggestiveness, it is fair to ask whether those very errors might not be the origin of something else entirely.

## 6 Harvest Season

The radical faeries, as usual, have taken over one of the grassy lawns of Civic Center Plaza for San Francisco Pride. With full blessing and funding from the event management, they've enclosed the lawn with fences draped in fabric, rugs and tapestries of many colors. The décor almost prevents the space from recalling the primate pen at the zoo. There are two entrances. One is labeled "entrance" and the other "exit," and both turn corners such that it's not quite possible to see into the space from the outside. Hundreds of people are in line outside one entrance; as they move toward the front of the line, they're greeted, offered hugs, asked if they consent to witnessing nudity and possibly sexual behavior, and finally hit up for a donation. The greeters wear bright colors. Some are in drag; others simply wear shorts or underwear adorned with feathers. Meanwhile, the faeries and their closest friends walk freely in and out of the other entrance, the one labeled "exit," which is in fact entirely unguarded.

On the lawn within, freedom appears to consist in sitting around in small groups on blankets, sometimes sharing picnics and drink, often sharing cannabis brownies and passing around pipes. At one end there's a stage. A DJ spins and about 100 people are dancing. At the other end, gauzy curtains mark the entrance to a cruising space and it's possible to make out naked forms within wandering to and fro in search of connection.

Some of the faeries present as women, some present as men, some present as drag queens. Some present as girlboys and boygirls in genderfuck drag, others carefully carve out a space of hermaphroditism or strive to move beyond gender entirely.

"You can't define the faeries," goes an adage hegemonic in the genre. Another: "ask ten faeries and you'll get twenty answers." A deep-rooted antinomianism serves purposes of mystification. Many of the elders and lifers, moreover, profess anarchist, feminist and antiauthoritarian principles that predispose them against clearly-stated doctrine (in fact, many faerie doctrines are quite clearly-stated and oft-repeated, but that's not the official story). The faeries are known to attempt strange, disruptive performances, as when a line of them, all shapes and colors, flee the "freedom village" and instigate a spontaneous kiss-in on the walkway outside. "Kiss-In!" they yell, "Kiss him!" Some beat drums and others run through the crowd, grabbing and kissing unsuspecting bystanders, or encouraging them to kiss each other.

It seems that where the faeries go, cannabis is sure to be found. The following vignettes are an initial attempt to think through the animacy of cannabis in understanding this social genre and the communities of which it is a part. How much of the faeries' flash and glitter can be traced back to the operation of THC? While I distrust functionalist and overtly reductive answers to this question, and indeed it may be impossible as phrased, cannabis nonetheless functions, it has its own animacy, its own economics, it creates its own places outside of spaces and times outside of time. For if hashish once let time slip through a certain critical theorist's fingers like gold dust, then today cannabis buds seem to let the play of reason and nonsense glitter like diamonds.

### *Faggot Power*

It is the mid-1970s. Three queens from San Francisco embark on a cross-country road trip in a Volkswagen bug. They've painted it hot pink and scrawled "Faggot Power" on each side in large letters. They pledge to make the entire journey in brightly-colored drag.

Afterward, they relate they encountered very little opposition or protest. The one time a semi powered by and someone leaned out the window yelling, they said they couldn't tell whether he wasn't one of them, too. Maybe he was just saying hi.

The most difficult moment came in Kansas, when they were pulled over for speeding and the police chose to search the car. We're told they found a bag of cannabis and threatened arrest. The queens compromised, emptying the contents on the side of the road.

### *Safety Consciousness*

The Hare Krishnas have Krishna Consciousness. The faeries have safety consciousness. More direct than loading you with watery, sugary, buttery foods and then hauling you up stairs to the temple for ecstatic dancing, faeries just seem to pass around the pipe.

Wing heads into the smokers' tent. "I'm in need of a safety meeting."

Those who join the conversation that follows immediately adopt a campy hyperbole, speaking more loudly, with clipped rhythm and a wider tonal range than purely casual conversation.

"Oh dear," Kay replies, "We don't want you to be reckless! We must review safety procedures immediately!" Oftentimes the brogue conjures a management meeting or training for camp counselors. The pipe and weed will be referred to as "implements of safety consciousness."

Inevitably, a few minutes into the "safety meeting," there is a lull in conversation. THC and its variants have passed through the alveoli and into the bloodstream. A small percentage of them have passed across the blood-brain barrier, really a distributed filter composed of tight junctures between capillaries and the cerebrospinal fluid. They attach to cannabinoid receptors that can also receive the endogenously produced neurotransmitter anandamide, albeit with very different effects. While anandamide appears to make short-term working memory more facile, and is produced in deeply absorbed states of concentration, THC makes short-term memory more vague and steady concentration more difficult. At night, it reduces the number of sleep spindles, which may be responsible for refracting new information from the frontal lobes into long-term storage in the cerebral cortex. We can probably assume that the smokers are "safer," then, from retaining as much about each day in long-term memory. Their frontal lobes may also be less fully refreshed after a night's sleep.

Of course, the chemical effects of cannabis are in wide ontological and ethical dispute.

### *Faerie Yoga*

The door slides into the wall. The room is full. There are naked men and pipes being passed around.

Over the years, the teacher has gotten larger and more laconic. He steps us through the poses but does little to correct us. He no longer feels obliged to practice alongside us, rather sitting to one side on a couch or tending to things brewing on the stove.

Today, he explains, is a special day. An important teacher has died, an old hippie who was responsible for introducing many 70s and 80s San Franciscans to yoga. “He was a great advocate for smoking marijuana as an aid to practice,” the teacher explains.

“I’ll be leading a special practice session next week on 4/20. It’ll be at the main Ash-tanga studio, where Sri Pattabhi Jois teaches when he comes to visit. Class starts at five, but I encourage you to arrive at 4:20, and don’t worry — I’ll take good care of you.” From the chuckle it seems everyone knows what he means.

### *Planting*

The year is 2004 and it’s early summer. I’m broke. In this context when my friend Auntie asks me if I want to work on his farm, it’s easy to jump at the chance. I don’t realize I’m in for one of my life’s most difficult weeks of labor.

Somewhere in northern California, I’m not really sure where I am. Russian River? Eel River? Something like this. It doesn’t really matter anyway. The point is that where we’re going, we should be far, we should be protected, we should be secret and also secretive.

After a ten-minute drive down a bumpy dirt road, we come to a clearing in the forest on the edge of a large ravine. There’s a yurt. We stop for lunch and I play with the dog. He’s huge, trained as a Czech police dog, I’m told, and his name is Dank. He’s wet and pretty furry.

After washing the dishes, Raven and I climb on board a quad and head down the dirt track. It’s my first time on a quad and I’m a little freaked out by the controls and the possibility we might flip over. I’m freaked out also by my friend, who’s not exactly known for measured consistency. Better learn to drive this thing myself, I think.

Ten minutes later we’re riding around an outcrop that leads down into the ravine. The dirt road has obviously been cut quite recently; there’s an enormous pile of earth, no weeds or plants yet, that’s been shoveled over the edge to collapse in a huge pile twenty feet below. We’re riding fast and I put my arms all the way around Raven’s waist, hoping we don’t spin off and wind up down the ravine ourselves. And then we round the bend, and below, I see the field — euphemistically referred to as a “garden” — and I laugh out loud.

It couldn’t be any easier for the Feds to pick us out from the air, I think. Who knew that elite outdoor marijuana farmers grew their crop in polka-dots? A bulldozer rested at the field’s edge, cooling off after spending much of the past few days digging just over 1000 4’x4’ holes in the side of the hill. The battered landscape makes me think of Swiss cheese.

Our job, it turned out, would be to fill each of these thousand holes with two blends rich, black, high-grade soils. Auntie had dictated the plants would grow best in a bed of organic topsoil which he’d had trucked in from farms down on the seacoast the day before.

The topsoil lay in a huge, mulchy mass, and at the time I didn't realize just how hot it would be. Years later I can still smell it: chicken shit, fish bones and decaying moss, acidic, pungent and steaming in the Mendocino heat. What we had to do consisted of shoveling the topsoil into wheelbarrows, pushing it up the hill to one of the bulldozer pockmarks, then dumping it in. Each hole demanded 3-4 wheelbarrows full of topsoil; when it was done, we'd make a depression in the center and fill it with an "inner circle" of the finest grade of topsoil and additives. By the end of the week a single young clone, 6-8" tall, would grace each polka dot, a tiny speck of green in the center of each black circle, all standing out clearly against the pink and yellow of the dry California hillside.

A little shoveling and pushing a wheelbarrow uphill may not seem like much, and in the grander scheme of things, perhaps a week of ten hour days isn't, really. But multiply four wheelbarrows by 1000 holes, and you have an awful lot of pushing and shoveling. Each day I'd sweat and sweat, my hands quickly rubbed raw through the garden gloves, and each night I'd sleep deeply and wake up stiffer than I'd been before.

### *Blueberry Farm*

The boys lay about in a heap on the lawn. Many are high, some quite high. The operative conversation takes place on the edge of the scene, where one particularly winsome young man chats up an older man with a tattooed skull and a dreadhawk that drapes most of the way down his back. Neither is smoking. The young man prefers klonopin and the older man may actually be sober. "Yeah, I'd like to get into farming," he says, "and my friend said he'd put up some of the money." His friend is a film director of some renown, so this is no idle comment. "And I think I've found the place."

That autumn, Blueberry Farm would be a boon for the faeries, one of the most legendary harvest gatherings of the decade. Over 100 friends and family, mostly queers, would arrive and stay for days, weeks, in some cases even a couple months, chopping down 8' tall plants and working feverishly to trim the leaves into saleable product before the rains came and mold set in.

### *Honza*

It's Sunday morning. The door's rolled up at a warehouse next to the train tracks in West Berkeley, and inside folks have left potluck brunch contributions on two long folding tables. I stagger downstairs with a steam tray full of scalloped fried potatoes and I'm surprised to see Honza. I haven't run into him for months, and here he is, with his ex Zed. He looks completely different: still tall and blond but now thin, grey-skinned and taciturn too. He's been sick all winter with complications of HIV, but my understanding is he's decided the meds hurt him more than the virus.

He's more difficult than he was to talk to. It is unclear whether he remembers me; he says hi without elaboration or gesture, then stands silently in the room. He's next to Zed, yet he seems out of place, or perhaps just oblivious.

Honza steps out into the driveway and I overhear Zed say something, sounding ominous, about the virus crossing the blood-brain barrier.

The following winter I hear he's in the hospital again. This time is his last.

After Honza's gone, some wonder if the turning point wasn't his farm gig. He'd gone in as a partner the year after the big bust, which turned out to be the first of several. Farm conditions were more austere and Honza spent a good part of that summer living in a tent.

The thing about a bust is that no one gets paid. Thus the pain of the law ripples through the shadow economy.

Even the threat of a bust or a casual encounter with the law can prevent critical encounters and transactions. And if the bust does happen they confiscate or destroy the product. Sometimes the weed goes up in smoke, sometimes they throw it on the back of trucks and cart it away.

Some said Honza had bet everything he'd had, and he'd lost.

### *Harvest Season*

Does it make sense to talk or write about a migratory labor pool that is regular and intimately definable only for a crudely selected partiality? On the one hand, the networks and circulations under consideration here are fully enmeshed and interwoven. Any border is problematic and can but be a cruel tear if we try to pin it in place too precisely. There is a real vagueness about who is and is not a faerie; moreover, there is a real interpenetration with other networks. Some of those other networks circulate and reproduce themselves through interwoven festivals and counterpublic events. They span all sexualities and mostly reiterate heteronormativity in a hippie idiom under different rules of public and private, encounter and exposure. There are gatherings for didgeridoo enthusiasts, queer anarchists, witches, mutants and dancers of every description. Burning Man looms above all. On the other hand, the faeries may show distinctive patterns of trust and openness forged on erotic common ground. It's easy to know your friends are not Feds when you've seen every aspect of their survival, when you've seen them naked and high, when you've watched them, or joined with them, in coitus. This means there is a distinct risk in writing down the observable patterns. With the wrong circulation, such a text could do considerable harm. I'm struggling with whether and how much to change; moreover, the faeries are easily found if you choose to look for them. Some might disguise not only the names but even the state. I'd have to fictionalize the entire subculture to hide all the incriminating information.

Every year scores of faeries migrate to northern California for the medical marijuana harvest. Twice as many are already here. Gigs come and go, at times they must be chased or cajoled, at others so many hands are needed that folks recruit everyone around.

Of course, there is logic to this system of exchange. Landlords and farmers are at the top. Ideally one farms one's own land; if this is not possible, interrelations become highly variable. A delicate arrangement must be worked out that will nonetheless reflect the relative financial resources and cannabis expertise of the parties, among many other factors. Growing cannabis at scale is expensive, particularly in the first few years of one's operation.

Next, the most important interlocutors consist of skilled labor: perceived "experts" in cannabis cultivation (if any are necessary), the guy who drives the bulldozer, the electrician. As the season progresses their importance will diminish and the critical connections will be with distribution.

Finally there are the helpers, such as planters, watchers and trimmers. These are the migrant labor of medical marijuana, and it is for a chance at one of these gigs — and training, and the possibility of more — that so many people arrive or remain in northern California every year. Negotiation for a position begins at least six months in advance. Repeated good sex, intimacy and friendship are tools to be used in arranging the right position. The goal is not so much a primary relationship with a farmer as to create a space of trust within which the sensitivity of cannabis farming's (il)legality does not pose an obstacle and, moreover, one is seen as a pleasant companion, an entertaining friend, someone the farmers would want to have around.

For some able-bodied faeries, harvest season will be their main source of income for the year. If they're lucky enough to earn \$5000 or more by the end of the year, they'll go to Thailand for the winter. Earning less means sticking around, finding some other job, or perhaps WWOOF or work trade in Hawaii. The peripatetic will often return in the midst of the following spring, just in time for gathering and festival season. At the festivals food and shelter are relatively easily come by. It's possible to make the connections that will result in their next steps.

### *Court Order*

Paul rings our bell on his birthday because, he says, obviously distraught, he doesn't know where else to go. He'd been up all night fighting with his erstwhile boyfriend. "He hit me," Paul says, "although I didn't think he meant to." The boyfriend had been up all day and all night before they crossed paths, binging on liquor and coke. Paul doesn't say what, if anything, he'd been consuming himself, but their history together had been tumultuous and punctuated by frequent conflict for more than a year.

Now, Paul says, he's just come from a court date where he was exhausted and inarticulate, and where the judge assigned to his case refused to accept one of the alternative community service and drug counseling programs designed for GLBT San Franciscans. Instead, the court demanded he enroll in a much more expensive "standard" treatment program that consists of weekly roundtable discussions with other addicts, gay and straight, and includes random drug testing.

The irony is that his conviction is for two misdemeanor counts of possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute. He'd been pulled over driving back from a farm the year before, and had made the mistake of admitting to the officer that there was cannabis in the car. He's therefore been ordered to attend (and pay for) rehabilitation from his cannabis addiction, at a time when the real dangers in his life were alcohol, cocaine and domestic violence.

### *Envisioning Gathering*

Saturday morning at ten, thirty people have gathered in a purple Victorian in the Mission. They meet for an "envisioning gathering" which aims to bring together a wide swath of people to reflect on the travails of the radical faerie church, Nomenus. Since its inception in the mid-1980s, the church has been plagued by procedural complexity and internal conflict. Its bylaws — virtually without parallel and mostly untested in case law — define every member as a director and strip all but the legally-mandated powers from the officers. Ra-

ther than a board and management hierarchy, this church is to be governed through consensus of those present at a series of overlapping, interlocking discussion circles. The bylaws define a structure within which consensus is supposed to emerge organically from the interlinked minds and hearts of participants in circles in their own communities, which interlock as necessary to make decisions on matters of concern to all.

The envisioning gathering has an advantage over regular meetings in that it has no executive purpose or powers. Rather, the intent of two days of discussion is to create a welcoming environment for Nomenus participants, past and present, to share their experience and hopes for the future.

Many are surprised by the number of people who've shown up. Attendees include numerous past presidents and one of the founders, the individual most responsible for drafting the bylaws and creating the consensus process. The prevailing story is that working with Nomenus is frustrating and painful, that the process chews people up and spits them out, that they rarely return after a few years of engagement.

After an opening invocation and grounding from the current vice-president, we're invited to introduce ourselves, name our experience with the church and our expectations for the weekend. It takes fully an hour to complete this first round of introductions. At some point shortly after the invocation, someone packs and lights a large, heavy pipe packed with cannabis.

Those who will choose not to partake exchange are a minority. They know this, and they also know each other. A series of quick, mute glances pass around the circle between the sober, any judgment kept strictly implicit, nonverbal and subtle. Though somewhat aggravating, it's understood that a non-smoking meeting would quickly make the participants impatient and would result in more frequent breaks, individuals entering and exiting as needed to medicate themselves.

In this context of hegemonic consumption there is a general feeling of relief after the first person lights up. Somewhere down the line, someone else lights another. Soon there are multiple pipes in progress around the circle, moving much more quickly than the speakers' baton, a heavy amethyst sphere about three inches across. By the end of the introductions the pipes have made five or six circuits and a cloud hangs heavy and visible in the air.

The participants continue to get stoned throughout that day and the next. When someone is repetitive or overly emotional, I wonder how much of what they say can be attributed to the agency of the cannabis. Certainly, most will remember only a small fraction of what is said as the crystal ball moves round and round, constructing their narrative of these events based on feelings, affect and personal prerogatives as much as detailed evidence or transcript. Some of the younger men, both the most sober and the most passionately engaged, will attempt to make their own gloss on the weekend's events take its place as the hegemonic narrative.

Though four out of five participants are white, the men vary in other ways. They span a wide range of socioeconomic classes: several are HIV and Hepatitis C patients living on disability in SRO hotels in the Tenderloin, while several were born into wealth or retired young, their assets more than adequate to provide for their physical needs. The owner of the house in which we sit retired at 30 in 1991 after having helped write a popular software

package that sold millions of copies. He is amongst the most devoted stoners in the circle and much of his last decade has been spent creating the elaborate polyhedric stained glass lampshades that hang from the ceiling. He is also, perhaps fortunately, among the most laconic.

One of the problems with tracking and doing justice to the thing-power of cannabis in this setting is that it is impossible to know who was already stoned when they arrived or whose residual levels were so high as to condition their presence and participation even before the pipes went around. And even beyond variables of class and age, the faeries gathered here differ in other ways. They may be recovering from stroke, posttraumatic stress or taking too much acid. They may be suffering the psychic and mental effects of advanced HIV infection. They may be convinced, as is the case for a man in his sixties named Boa Nudist, that they are shamans who have the capacity to receive and convey alien messages.

The consensus process demands a forced and often paper-thin equality. A circle is not an oval. It is generally difficult to deny someone the right to speak or to move forward with a project or decision if more than two or three people are staunchly opposed. It is therefore necessary to work with almost anyone who can come to the circle and demand to be heard, since whatever their capacity, it's possible they'll be recruited as part of a dissenting bloc. Thus the process demands respect for many voices even as it is clear — at times very frustratingly clear — that the participants are not equal with respect to their abilities to do the work or execute decisions that are made.

### *Minute By Minute*

Amnesia is perhaps the most pervasive and immediate effect that cannabis produces in the collective. It is frequently difficult to know what decisions were made at a meeting or even whether any decisions were made at all. Moreover, there is a slippery and porous border between affirmation and decision. Even participants who are both present at the same meeting often disagree about the nature and referents of the discussion in retrospect.

At times when participation is high, then, Nomenus becomes neurotically archival. It becomes important to have minutes, transcripts and audio recordings of all committee meetings. But the church has proven unable to keep all these records in a single location or to preserve them in an organized fashion over decades of participation from hundreds of volunteers. Moreover, periods of high activity usually end when one faction gains too much control, or painful and apparently irresolvable conflicts drive people away from the process. This is usually coeval with a breakdown in trust that leads to further decentralization of recordkeeping. It becomes unimportant and undesirable to leave records in the hands of people with whom one might possibly disagree, or who might scrutinize them for signs of one's own wrongdoing.

A proposal that participants in the most important meetings be sober, or at least refrain from smoking during the meetings themselves, ran into an immediate obstacle from some members. Medical marijuana patients, they avowed their participation would be impossible if they were denied access to their medicine.

## 7 Time of Monsters

*“The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters.”*

— Zizek 2010, 479 (attributed to Gramsci)

On the hill behind the barn, out of site behind tall grasses, bushes, saplings, all the helter-skelter of young forest regrowth, you find a clearing dominated by an installation that might once have been a fountain. An empty pool presents an equilateral triangle extending toward you from the hillside. At first glance it appears a product of stonework, but then, uncannily, it brings to mind a gothic drag queen who’s seen better days. The pool is thoroughly cracked, shot through with grasses eager to do their work. What might have been stonework turns out to be lumpy concrete spread over chicken wire, a landscape architect’s equivalent of Play-Doh. The centerpiece is a two-foot-tall gargoyle perched on the pool’s raised back wall. One wing has fallen off completely, and another is cracked in the middle, the remaining concrete held tenaciously by chicken wire, but the eyes and gaping mouth are unmistakable, and within the latter you can just make out a dry, rusty pipe.

Chopping vegetables for dinner, you ask an older man about the fountain hidden on the hill. How did it come to be there? He says merely, “a lost faerie with more vision than sense.” Behind him, a resident snorts, “That Fucking Thing!”

For many at Wolf Creek — including the cartographer of the most commonly-circulated land map — it is simply called That Fucking Thing, no one quite sure what to make or do with it. Part of the problem is its position — fifty feet above the barn, well water is unavailable and there’s no immediate water source save rain. Then there is the unavoidable fact that the sculptor had no previous experience whatsoever. And not least, that no one has maintained or repaired his work since the summer it was first built. Yet That Fucking Thing is more than an oddity, a curious unfinished project out of view on a hillside. For in its own way it illustrates a certain pattern, the logic underlying a certain *illogic* present throughout the rest of the sanctuary.

Wolf Creek, it turns out, is not only blanketed in unfinished projects, it is literally constructed out of them. The most solid building is constantly changing, a material renegotiation of the terms by which the actors, human and nonhuman, assembled around, in it, underneath it will engage with each other. In this sense the buildings at Short Mountain or Tassajara or Esalen are unfinished as well. Building is after all political, and *not* building is equally political; we will always find humanity and many other species closely imbricated in the production of any “actual” ecosystem, not to mention the social circuits of economics, globalization and racialization (Kosek 2006). Yet beyond mere historicity, at Wolf Creek, nearly every aspect of the built environment — thanks to logging and bulldozers, this includes the land itself — bespeaks the abortion, failure or alteration of a previous plan. The gargoyle atop That Fucking Thing can be taken as a diagram or illustration the monsters — or are they spirits? — who appear sometimes at Wolf Creek, insisting that the best-laid plans must change. In this regard, Nomenus and Wolf Creek show a remarkable viability, a capacity to continue, to endure. From their strange assemblage of organization and disor-

ganization has emerged a painful cycle, not fully satisfying to anyone yet doggedly persistent, and while this cycle certainly was not the *intended* outcome, it is with us nonetheless.

Nomenus' cycle of confluence has three consecutive stages, which I call the times of shock, of building and of monsters. The first is a period of readjustment and uncertainty which follows major conflicts and changes in personnel. Often the time of shock entails grief and struggle to focus efforts in a productive way. It is marked by possibility but available volunteers may not have the knowledge or permission they need to contribute, while longstanding contributors may not be clear how to relate to each other, settling into a new cast of characters and new ways of applying the governance process and bylaws. Thereafter, a time of building will commence, new energy and accomplishment attracting more voices and renewed interest from old members. Conflicts inevitably emerge, however, as the old members return and emerging working groups struggle to protect and formalize what they've learned. Finally, the time of monsters is the time when everything falls apart, when mutual recognition becomes impossible. Usually, it begins with a crime. "I was wounded," speaks a spirit. "My first cry was of pain; my second of anger." Hurt by some accident, some failure, some harm done with or without intention, suddenly consensus is no longer content with its limits. It can only proceed via some form of expulsion, via destruction or division. The monsters must be driven out whether they appear as recalcitrant communards, traveling faeries pre- or rehabilitating to chaos, or invisible vermin surmised guilty of widespread epidermal disruption.

Beset by such beasts, we should not be surprised Wolf Creek has earned something of a reputation as a "problem" sanctuary beset by conflict and struggle. The stories that follow track Nomenus' cycle of confluence through a tangled undergrowth of stories and legends, blockages and flows, actions and bylaws. Rather than treat Nomenus and Wolf Creek as a community struggling to find sustainability, or a radical faerie utopia oppressed by the patriarchal norms of the law and the state, I look to actual effects of such discourses and actual outcomes of the consensus process. My goal is thus to characterize what *is* rather than what *should be*. What rough beast has here been born, its hour come round at last?

The Great Circle of Summer 2009 was particularly difficult. A new corporate secretary could not be elected; three days of acrimonious discussion had revealed that two of the participants would block any candidate acceptable to the rest of the members, who were dead set against electing either of the pair's preferred candidates: each other.

Great Circle did, however, manage the election of Zakkums the Nefarious Stranger as president. Zakkums was an outspoken anarchist and former organic farmer. He had visited Wolf Creek numerous times over a few years but it only came to him to seek the presidency after his second sparsely attended Men's Gathering. As the gathering that followed and most directly imitated the original Spiritual Gathering of Radical Faeries, the 1979 convocation with which the faeries are often held to have begun, the Men's Gathering was for some the *raison d'être* of the organization and hence Wolf Creek Sanctuary. Yet many perceived the gathering to have become moribund, with few people attending and a perception amongst younger faeries that restricting membership based on sex and orientation was misogynist and anti-trans. Zak knew this, but he also knew the Men's Gathering was the one place the younger faeries of Portland and the Pacific Northwest would cross paths with the

first generation faeries of the old Nomenus San Francisco. As Zak saw it, then, the key to reviving Nomenus was to revive the Men's Gathering.

Shortly after his election, it became clear to Zakkums he'd taken over an organization that was deadlocked. For years, decision after decision had been blocked by a small number of people, generally due to conflicts with a couple "bad seeds" and a majority — at least of the most experienced, consistent participants — dead set against them.

He was especially bothered by what appeared to be a constitutional crisis: since the bylaws specified there had to be a corporate secretary, Great Circle's failure to elect one meant that the members were failing to live up to their bylaws. Zak announced he saw no choice but to suspend operations if the bylaws could not be followed. He embarked on a month-long project, calling 50-60 members to introduce himself, ask for their input, and encourage them to participate in a special meeting. He also signed up more than a handful of newbies.

Under the Nomenus bylaws, a special meeting of the membership can be called at any time with sufficiently "public" notice and the consent of at least 25% of the members. And as he talked to the membership, Zak said, he discovered a common theme: complaints about the Daemon Within and Court Jester, the two who had blocked the election decisions. His solution was to remove them from the governance process.

Daemon was already quite infamous. The full form of his faerie name, self-chosen, was "the Daemon Within." Many referred to him simply as "the Daemon" or "He Who Must Not Be Named." He had made few friends through his participation in the radical faeries' discussion forum on Tribe (*tribe.net*), where he was among the loudest voices for male-only space and particularly prone to explosive, aggressive verbal attacks against women in the forum. He was at the time in his late thirties or forties, and he lived alone in rural California on land belonging to an elder faerie who had long since stepped back from the Nomenus governance process.

The first time I met the Daemon, I knew immediately who he was without any need for introduction. Here was a large, rather short man dressed in black robes and a trench-coat, with similarly dark hair and a wide pale face. The hair fell to his shoulders underneath a simple silver-colored coronet. More than most radical faeries, he looked like a Tolkienesque pastiche, and this was fitting, since his behavior on Tribe demonstrated incontrovertibly that in the parlance of Internet forums he was a troll. More than wardrobe and hair, however, his face was contorted in a way that suggested his emotional life had involved a great deal of anger. It seemed as though a storm cloud hovered above his distinctly furrowed brow.

The special meeting took place on a conference call line with participants from five different states. Physical groups had assembled in San Francisco and Wolf Creek, with about 30 and about 10 participants, respectively. I attended the meeting in San Francisco.

The Daemon's objection began the moment the agenda was read. The special meeting, he said, could not consider whether to revoke his membership because this purpose had not been announced in the email he'd received inviting him to it. Instead of having the freedom to set any agenda by consensus of those present, the norm at other Nomenus meetings, he maintained the special meeting was obliged to stick closely to its purview as published in the call.

The next few speakers all argued this was incorrect and stated that their main purpose in being there was to ask the Daemon to leave. Only Jester jumped to his defense, and proposed there was no point in considering the motion as he himself would block it.

Zak's immediate response was that if Jester was going to block the motion, Jester too would be asked to leave. The two attempted to object, reciting the familiar principle that two members who supported each other could never be removed, because each could block the motion to remove the other. But this time, the crowd was not hearing it. Indeed, many attendees saw themselves as taking over Wolf Creek for a younger, more trans-friendly crew of organizers, and while they were enthusiastic about the possibilities for the sanctuary most had come to see removing the two as the first step toward making their plans a reality.

The assembled masses were already so decided on the need to eject the Daemon that the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Indeed, it became clear that quite apart from quorum requirements, the large assembly — 40 members was many more than at most Nomenus meetings, even many Great Circles — served primarily to demonstrate to the Daemon the strength of the force arrayed against him. And indeed it was a powerful resource: for when the Daemon threatened to speak to “the elders,” San Franciscans who had been part of Hay's inner circle such as Jerry the Faerie and Joey Cain, others immediately countered that those elders had already been consulted and that they too supported the Daemon's expulsion. In the weeks that followed, repeated threats to take legal action would run aground against the strong implication that even the Daemon's landlord concurred with the decision requiring him to step back. In the four years since few have raised questions or doubts as to the merit of this decision; indeed, the more recent conclusion has been that continually obstructing the consensus process amounts to a failure to serve the organization's mission, and thus disqualifies the obstructionist from membership *prima facie*.

Whether the Daemon Within and the Court Jester were indeed the “root causes” of Nomenus' deadlock from 2006-2009, their expulsion served as a galvanizer: it energized Zak and his supporters, demonstrating to many observers that Zak was capable of instigating a wide convocation of faeries. For a while things did indeed move along more easily. The rhetoric was of recovery, of baby steps, of establishing new procedures and a new culture. The following year would see a spike in donations, volunteers and attendees at the summer Men's Gathering. I spoke with many who felt a palpable feeling of relief in the wake of the eviction. “Nomenus has been constipated for years, and we've just gotten it moving again,” one said. This would turn out to be a refrain I'd hear again and again after “monsters” had been expelled — including especially the perception that *this time* things would start to run smoothly, that *this* new consensus and *this* new team represented the solution to Nomenus' longstanding woes. Yet such language appears to accompany every significant change in Nomenus' volunteers, and while it may be phrased in terms of revolution, it is also an ordinary part of a recurring cycle.

Past the fountain, down toward the meadow, you run into a small building, two screen doors side-by-side. It is an outhouse. Entering one, you find an enclosed chamber: plywood walls, a modest floor, and a flushing toilet. The latter bespeaks a reassuring normalcy; it whisks the stuff out of sight. Unlike the composting toilets elsewhere at Wolf Creek, it is

more-or-less clean and odor-free. You shut the screen door and marvel at how easily we are comforted by the apparatus of contemporary sanitation; seated, your eyes fall on a couple sheets of paper wheatpasted on the wall. It is a newsletter article, "The Wondrous Story of Flush the Magic Shitter." The story of the outhouse's construction by Mouse, one of its main builders, is also an instructive manual on faerie process.

Once, long ago in Faerieland, the little faeries in the woods discovered that they didn't have enough places to shit whenever there were large gatherings of them on their sacred Land, and it was decided that work was to begin at once on a new, magickal flush system, to whisk away their faerie offerings to a beautiful tank, where the offerings could live in harmony and comfort, deep underground and far away from the delicate noses of many of those collected. So the faeries had meeting after meeting, where they discussed the issue, time after time. Wondrous! It was eventually consensed (this is a highly magickal process that the faeries use to decide the important things in their lives, a process which can go on at times for what seems like forever, but which will eventually create new topics for discussion. Don't try to understand this, the faeries are VERY mystical.) that there would indeed be a fabulous septic tank installed, right under the very feet of unsuspecting faes! No more would those who organized the gathering have to pay huge fees to rent portable offerings receptacles from the mundane world, which were often smelly and considered to be decoratively challenged (Mouse 2000).

Following this beginning there ensues a seven-year process of starts and stops. Many plans will be made and materials will be bought, again and again, only to decay or find use elsewhere. "From the burnt ashes of each attempt, however, another, even more fabulous try would result in a mysterious absence of any actual building." Only after much frustration, long delays, and the visible rot of a partial structure in front of an unusually large, active wintertime community, does the final movement begin. "The faeries at hand need to reach their absolute limits around the issue, and Make A Decision." Three weeks later, after a construction process of intense focus and ongoing injury, Flush would open for use.

The outhouse's story is instructive on a number of levels. Its combination of scatology, camp and references to mythology and children's film no doubt demonstrate a certain faerie aesthetic, one in which a figure of childhood, of innocence, makes sacred — if sarcastically — and renews engagement with a certain raw materiality. Moreover it offers a definition of consensus as a form of mystical activity, suggestively indicating the conflicting imperatives materially at work at Wolf Creek. Above all, perhaps, it becomes clear that consensus is often *slow* — and action even slower, perhaps altering the consensus or requiring new points of consensus due to changes in prevailing conditions.

A fundamental problem is that the collective which must reach consensus is widespread, amorphous and constantly shifting. Given knowledge of the church's meeting process and a modicum of cunning, anyone left out of a decision can easily return to filibuster until the situation changes to their liking. For those living at Wolf Creek, the process can be key to basic necessities such as shelter, food and water. New faeries can show up at any time

with new agendas, ideas and modes of engagement. Just as easily, experienced contributors can vanish due to conflict, life changes or disease. In the mid-1990s, it is said Men's Gathering and Great Circle lost to AIDS half their members every year.

Given such shifts in personnel, it is remarkable that so little has changed with the structure of meetings and the techniques for producing and managing "consensed" decisions. The bylaws, written when Nomenus was conceived first as an umbrella organization for a series of sanctuaries, specify local Coordinating Councils (CoCos) in a series of cities, circles that communicate with each other through published minutes and semiannual Great Circles. In recent memory, however, there has been only one CoCo, with many attending via conference call. To this the presiding bodies quickly added a Community on the Land (CotL) meeting; while there was never formal consensus that the newly-purchased land *should* support a year-round intentional community, it became apparent quickly that consensus or no, there were always faeries "on the land." Eventually, CotL became the meeting that dealt with guests and "long-term visitors," the ambiguous multitude between short-term visitors and permanent caretakers. The latter, under various names, are appointed by Great Circle, charged with the management of the sanctuary in accordance with Nomenus' mission and priorities, and report to CoCo rather than CotL.

The most frequent matter for CotL is who can stay and who can go. Visitors are often expected to report on their contributions, monetary or otherwise, and their plans for their time at the sanctuary. Visitors can be controversial, however, and as a regular meeting of Nomenus, CotL quickly came to include participants by conference call. In recent years, this has led to a separate, face-to-face "land meeting" at which the "community of those living on the land" ("CotLotL" happened for some) has met to coordinate, figure out work projects, and find its own identity against the voices from afar.

The question of who can stay and who must go becomes a preeminent matter for Nomenus as a whole. Since residents at the Sanctuary require the consensus of the entire Nomenus community, residency agreements are reviewed and approved or denied at each of the semiannual Great Circle meetings. A substantial portion of the meeting time goes to these proposals, as various people speak to whether they like or dislike the person in question and what they think of their contributions, motivations and character. Some years, visitor policy can be equally controversial, or whether Nomenus membership should be expanded beyond gay men. The latter has inspired so much debate that I cannot begin to summarize it here, or do justice to the written works that consider it (Stover 2005). Suffice to say that given the possibility, the question of admission and expulsion comes to take over every other concern; indeed it becomes a question of shared substance. This question is not limited to humans; the status of dogs at gatherings has been tremendously controversial, as have questions of pets, livestock, beekeeping, weeding and planting. Taken together, these matters produce and shape "the community" and "the land" themselves.

The constancy of topics can also be seen as an indication of failure, of the lack of progress. Projects get started and then abandoned. Work is done poorly, or not at all. Indolence translates into compassionate self-love, a nurturing engagement of the spiritual journey. Buildings are planned and then never built; years later, under different management, they must be revisited and discussed, debated, planned again, a certain enthusiasm generated — only so they can be never built again.

On one visit, I spent more than a week working with four other people to lay tile in what was to be the new kitchen in the barn extension. The old kitchen was in a corner of the barn's main room. Nearly a decade before, pest control and sanitation issues had led to the construction of an up-to-code barn extension in anticipation that the kitchen would be moved, but battles over gender and the subsequent blockade by the Daemon and Court Jester had led to years of delay.

Determined to make progress, we bought tiles and cement and grout, poked through mounds of old building supplies to salvage what was already on the land, and tiled the floor as best we could. Our three-day project turned into eight as we ran into various shortages and complications, but it got done. I left thinking I'd be cooking in the new kitchen come fall, but I was wrong. Three short weeks later, the kitchen crew for the next gathering came to the conclusion they didn't like the plan to move the kitchen into the extension, preferring the openness and communal vibe of the current kitchen. They delivered their petition, six feet tall, in red paint on the drywall of the new room, decrying the existing consensus as authoritarian, insufficiently responsive to contemporary participants' wishes. Aside from replacing broken appliances, kitchen renovation has been at a standstill ever since.

The constancy of themes in the minutes can also be seen as a triumph. The configuration of elements has allowed for persistence, perhaps even the emergence of an institution. Several gatherings a year and the overall growth of radical faerie phenomena have provided a constant supply of fresh volunteers. And as outlined in the Nomenus bylaws, the requirements for major change are quite demanding. Many decisions can be made only at the semiannual Great Circle, and some may have to be made several times, by *several* Great Circles, before they are considered valid.

Three sit on the porch of a cabin in rural Tennessee, twenty meters down a ridge. The eldest is perhaps in his forties; he wears overalls and a cap, both stained from living and working in the woods. The next sports a heavy brown beard and a long slip of a dress, dark blue, ending in a tattered lace. Finally there is a young man in his twenties. They're reading aloud, each taking turns, and hooting with laughter.

"I am coming back and I want the cats to be with me because they're my companion animals. I'll be back and forth, travelling for periods of time. I want to be a caretaker in training here, but I need my cats."

"I don't know the history, but we can't just accept your cats because they were born here. I don't think that's a valid consideration."

"What if I make new birdhouses and put bells on the cats?"

"It's not feasible. There are ground-dwelling birds and you can't watch them all the time."

"I can keep them in my tent."

"That would be ridiculous and cruel. I know you're trying to do everything you can. I'm disappointed that you haven't gotten further than this. We've given you days to come to grips with the situation and you've made no movement. The land can't support your cats. I will only consent to your cats if the other cats leave."

"What do you mean that the land can't support them?"

“Support probably isn’t the right word. “Bear” is better. The land can’t *bear* them.”

“It’s the wildlife that can’t bear it. If we double the number of cats, we double the impact on the wildlife.”

“The largest killer of songbirds is cats, second only to human habitat destruction. A single housecat will kill two hundred birds a month. Bells are ineffective. We’re talking about birds, but the cats kill three times as many mammals as birds. And that’s not even considering the damage to the amphibian population! Well-fed cats are the worst, because they have more energy and therefore do more killing. The number two cause of bird extinction is cats. As a community, we need to put the needs of other species before our own.”

Breaking off from their staged reading, the bearded one asks, “Do we put the needs of other species before our own?”

“Well, it’s lovely when we do.”

“Thank god we *don’t*! We’d never get anything done!”

“Our cat certainly doesn’t kill that many birds.”

The conversation continues, eventually slipping back into the staged reading. The trio sits on a porch at Short Mountain (the sanctuary in Tennessee) but they’re reading from *Rad Dish*, the Nomenus/Wolf Creek newsletter. The dialogue has been printed as the minutes from a Nomenus meeting that took place at Wolf Creek. In repeating it, they’re engaged in a citational textual practice involving the collective experience of many other people, some quite far distant. Beyond queentalk on the porch, the meeting will be cited in many different ways. In San Francisco especially, dozens of people will check in about the Nomenus process, once and future participants expressing compassion for the presently entangled as well as opinions, stories and critique. Their comments might make it back to the live meeting through a conference line, various people chiming in to present their understandings of such matters as the behaviors of cats, the responsibilities of community and the importance of history. One might read, verbatim, from a book alleging cats’ lion-sized capacity for environmental destruction. Another might recall past consensus around cats and the peculiarities of past cat-owning residents. To engage the Nomenus consensus process is to enter into this transmission of citations, to recall and recompose events, stories, reports, figures and conversations for the benefit of an occasional, peripatetic but nonetheless collective circulation. Consensus itself — the collected set of resolutions and decisions — is a living, mutable thing. Save the bylaws, no one can be exactly sure what past consensus has been. There is no authoritative document on the matter — or rather, there are many documents on many matters, but no consistency underlying how points of consensus are reached, noted, announced, organized or evaluated. To create such an archive, whether through an email list, CMS or some kind of paper file, would inaugurate a new center of authority. Instantly, a new politics would emerge centering on the power and discretion of the archivists.

Elsewhere in the same newsletter, there is an article by Vibrant on the miracle of birth. For Helix’s cat Cleo had just then chosen Vibrant’s clean laundry as the birthplace of five hungry kittens. Helix had promised to remove them, but no one objected to the presence of the other cats and no one seemed particularly inclined to hurry him. Yet with Donny and the two cats at issue in the conversation above, people paint every day as a crime against local wildlife of unspeakable proportions. This leads some to wonder whether the

anti-cat crew is really as anti-cat as they seem, or whether their real goal might be to remove another long-running caretaker in favor of a new crew of residents. Whatever the case, the discussion does not end until Donniy has been reduced to tears, his boyfriend of the time has left the room, and the two are ordered to remove the cats (and by implication, themselves) within 48 hours.

At the sanctuary in Tennessee, Wolf Creek's travails can become good fun, an occasion for mockery. It's particularly amusing to some that difficult conversations like this are published, that the minute struggles and pains of individuals become material for a widespread, amorphous public reflection. That this is so, however, reflects a history that speaks to many of the same ideals and ethics that animate the Tennesseans' own home. Unlike Short Mountain, Nomenus and Wolf Creek publish their minutes in a newsletter, *The Rad Dish*, distributing them to an occasional public of several hundred readers. Three or four hundred people will have the opportunity to read the sad tale of Donniy and his cats, to peruse transcripts of various meetings (structured minutes are a rarity), or to learn who was banned from Wolf Creek for a mysterious psychotic break.

The cast of characters for this serial drama changes quite frequently: based on published minutes of the Great Circles, it can be determined that even after the worst of the dying ended in the late 1990s, turnover remains steady at fifty percent from year to year. People move off the land or stop calling in to Nomenus committee meetings, or both. They are driven out, sometimes shunned, others submitted to excruciating cross-examination or excoriating criticism. Sometimes withdrawing the gift of their presence and labor is the only way they can make clear how deeply they're hurt. Other times, they simply leave, too cold, lonely or sick to continue living four hours from the nearest major city.

Without consistent residents at Wolf Creek from year to year, *The Rad Dish* serves as a principle archive of Nomenus' collective memory, mined for past decisions and evidence of existing consensus. Yet it also amplifies conflict and disagreement, sometimes focusing in minute detail on the complexities and disagreements implied in such matters as which truck to buy, how to pay for propane, and how participants are to behave toward one another. As a result, for many, it serves as index and certification of Nomenus' ongoing dysfunction.

Consensus is central to radical faerie ethical and spiritual practice (cf. chapter eight) and formal consensus is the norm for legally incorporated radical faerie organizations. Elsewhere, it takes place with rather less heartache and spectacle. In Vermont, Faerie Camp Destiny has successfully raised funds, acquired permits and begun building an up-to-code facility on community-owned land. A few have been asked to step back from the governance process, but such events have not taken the form of an existential crisis or led so immediately to the disintegration of active participant groups. The lack of a permanent residential community at Destiny reduces the stakes somewhat, since few if any people depend on Destiny for shelter or livelihood. A better parallel might be Short Mountain in Tennessee, which a dozen or more people count as their permanent home. Short Mountain's consensus does indeed come to controversial and often surprising results. People are asked to leave with some regularity. Yet the process and its participants do not change nearly as much as with Nomenus and Wolf Creek.

The Nomenus process is reviled more thoroughly than any other I have found in faerie worlds. Why do we hear groans when Nomenus is mentioned? Why do so many offer their opinions behind the scenes, in casual conversation, but decline to attend the official meetings? To choose consensus is to choose to slow down, and none of these projects moves very quickly. Yet more than the others, the Nomenus process is not only time consuming and tedious, it is prone to agonizing conflict.

Some argue Nomenus and Wolf Creek are cursed. In one version of this story, Nomenus was cursed with Wolf Creek. The purchase of the Wolf Creek Sanctuary came quickly and unexpectedly for some of those who donated to fund it; the founders had initially envisioned a sanctuary somewhere closer to San Francisco, perhaps even toward Los Angeles. More than halfway to Portland, Wolf Creek was for some the wrong sanctuary from the very beginning. Another version of the “curse” story holds that Wolf Creek was the burial place for a gang of Chinese immigrants, forced laborers, who built the railroads only to be put to death by their bosses and buried in an unmarked mass grave near the north end of the land. Ever since, it is held, their spirits have ensured that whatever white men do along Wolf Creek shall fail, periodic rituals of appeasement and exorcism notwithstanding.

It goes almost without saying that such stories have been nurtured by the frustration and anxiety of generations of volunteers unable to solve the organization’s persistent problems. Yet they also portray the troubles of Nomenus as intractable and without solution, offering little hope for the future. The alternative, more common amongst active participants in the meetings, is to diagnose Nomenus’ various problems and offer solutions to them, advice as to what should be improved or what capacities need to be developed. Such a mode operates quite widely through the varied sites in which Nomenus comes to be; its stories are of error and lack, but they proffer the reward of salvation.

Danny Belle argues, and he is not alone, that Nomenus is mired in a misunderstanding of consensus’ entailments or a misapplication of its processes. Often one to whom it falls to describe consensus process and interpret the bylaws, Danny is a precise and forceful speaker. Consensus works best, he would say, when a small group of participants know each other well. It requires time and consistency to understand the issues and, moreover, to understand each others’ views well enough to predict concerns and intuit proposals likely to work. As I understand Danny Belle’s perspective, if there are problems with Nomenus’ use of consensus, it is because participants do not understand this constraint and put in place appropriate structure to help separate responsibilities into working groups that know each other well.

Others put the blame on a lack of resources for damage control and conflict resolution when differences arise. Verbena, a longstanding community elder with roots in Starhawk’s Reclaiming Coven, has argued in favor of this idea. In his analysis of an extended conflict between caretakers that led to months of argument and a subsequent breakdown in trust between participants in the Bay Area and in Oregon, Verbena wrote:

“It’s worth remembering that none of us have evil intentions, although people aren’t always easy to deal with. We don’t have good tools available for conflict resolution, the organization we inherited sometimes doesn’t work smoothly, and it’s hard for people spread all over the West Coast to reach agreement

about managing a Sanctuary that's been a place of such intensity and transformation. It's so easy for all of us to fall into the habit of demonizing those who we disagree with, rather than communicating with them. Let's each of us resolve to avoid that habit, for the sake of the countless faeries who come to Wolf Creek."

He synthesizes core normative ethics for Nomenus. First, the central importance of gathering (Howe 2001, Morgensen 2009). Faeries are faeries even before they arrive. They seek out Wolf Creek because of a sacred trust; fate or energy draws them "home," and implicitly it will continue to do so. At the same time, the collective is large. Its members hail from New Mexico through Vancouver, with a few beyond. Seattle, Portland and San Francisco each have distinct radical faerie scenes with their own flavors and dominant personalities. As gatherings have come year after year, so have the numbers grown who could find themselves moved to join a Nomenus conference call. There is thus a continuous and progressive exposure — the point Danny Belle makes — to new participants with whom conflict could arise.

Nonetheless the thrust of Verbena's analysis is to speak to those times when communication breaks down, when a certain monstrosity emerges, implicitly unspeakable and unintelligible. It is clear that such times emerge often and that they threaten Wolf Creek's project fundamentally, at an existential level. Moreover there is a lack of "good tools" for resolving conflicts. This last is surprising: if the second step of subject-subject consciousness is a practice of nonviolent communication and active listening (see chapter two or Burnside 1997), should it not be the case that resolving or transcending conflict is precisely the goal of the most central practice of the foundational ethic? In other words, implicit in Verbena's commentary is the admission that subject-subject consciousness is not really the practical norm. It is still, however, a normative ethical program, as suggested by Verbena's pronouncement of a fundamental benevolence: none have evil intentions and therefore no one deserves to be demonized or cast out from the circle of speakers, those with whom it is worthwhile to communicate and with whom consensus is possible.

Despite the overt difference in focus for Danny Belle and Verbena, both points of view lament the conflict and turn to intimacy for its resolution. They are thus not so far from the view of another faerie elder, Boa Nudist, for whom the central problem is that since the 1980s radical faeries have lost their way. "The first gatherings were different," he says. "We didn't have all this conflict and argument. People were really excited to listen and hear each other. *Everyone* came to heart circle and they stayed for hours — sometimes all day." Most of all, he argues, "people *loved* each other." Without a foundation in love, for Boa Nudist, subject-subject consciousness is impossible and consensus cannot be achieved. The political or normative function of the consensus process is sensible only under the aegis of commitment to a certain radical faerie spiritual practice, from which people have lost their way; thus without loving connection and subject-subject consciousness, the process is doomed to fail.

The arc of Boa Nudist's story is clear: the first gatherings were an originary state of union, from which the contemporary process has strayed. It has failed to live up to the explicit program of subject-SUBJECT consciousness, which includes "non-possessive love."

Boa Nudist has translated faerie history into one of the most familiar forms in Western thought: the fall from Eden. Like the Biblical archetype on which it depends, his narrative conjures a world in which the pure forms are all present from the beginning. At first glance it seems entirely different from the progressivist accounts of Verbena and Danny Belle, but it also reflects a more influential fall narrative widely reproduced in faerie worlds: if the purpose of gathering and sanctuary is to heal the damage done by heteronormative oppression, they presuppose a prior state before the damage is done, a state of innocence or wholeness from which the present has already fallen. For Hay, Burnside and the early Roscoe, this space was occupied by conjectural history of a primordial *berdache*, a third gender (but recognizably gay male) figure who functions as shaman and prophet for the noble savage. Since Nomenus has fallen from grace, subject-SUBJECT consciousness is not being practiced, and it becomes clear that the collected faeries haven't fallen from grace, or that their healing has failed. The entirety of complaints about Wolf Creek throughout faerie worlds thus amounts to a collective fall narrative, one that carries with it the possibility that sanctuary may not feel all that nice, may not come in the form we expect.

Travelers in faerie worlds, given desire and mobility, may find themselves in a number of different localities: New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland or Atlanta as well as rural sanctuaries in Vermont, New Mexico and Alsace-Lorraine. They may hear many tales of Wolf Creek: compared to the other sanctuaries, it may be described as old, mysterious, pagan, spiritual, raw, intense, transformative. It is rarely described as easy, relaxing or comfortable. Still, many will seek out the creek, whether for ritual, gathering or retreat. Many more will fall into its aegis directly. Visitors both current and prospective will have occasion to reflect on their own experience, transforming self-reflexive autobiography into spiritual text (Povinelli 2006). Wolf Creek will become a part of that text, events there entwined with the other threads that, entangling, produce the effect of a self.

At the sanctuary, residents, visitors and relevant others will find themselves vulnerable to “whoever comes down the driveway,” obliged to triage and possibly accommodate all visitors. Often, visitors will be wanderers and in some way queer. They may arrive already knowing they seek out a spiritual experience, having heard of Wolf Creek in some other faerie space. Or they may be interpellated as such despite more mundane intentions — for instance, to relax, get away to the woods or party. Either way, beyond simply a discourse of autobiography, they will now be drawn bodily into a particular form of radical faerie askesis.

To remain at the sanctuary, they will eventually be asked to attend and speak to various of Nomenus' meetings. There, other residents will introduce them to the decision-making process and explain that the community's highest value is to ensure everyone is heard and every concern is taken into account. Yet as they remain on the land week after week, the newcomers will find themselves transformed. First, the major bearings: norms of behavior, particularly as regards food, sex and drugs, and the place names that coordinate the space within which they dwell. As they “plug in” with the others, perhaps preparing food, turning compost or maintaining the garden and buildings, they will discover themselves learning a whole genre of stories concerning past and present inhabitants. They will learn that every entity has a means of approach: human and nonhuman residents, even the altars scattered around the land. To live collectively means a complex range of interdependencies, a series of shifts and adaptations that reflect the needs of the various others.

Of course, in this sense, all lives are interconnected, always already collective. As against the enforced sterility of a suburban home, designed to isolate its precious nuclear cargo from the dangerous world outside, a rural land collective may often mean complex mutual accommodation and a porous built environment. Therein, subject-SUBJECT consciousness will demand an openness, a vulnerability, to a series of others who may not be able to return the same gesture. As visitors stay longer on the land, they become more attached to the products of their labor and the specific habits and arrangements they've developed to make the community work. Yet little continuity emerges at the level of daily practices. Knowledge of the past is lost as people come and go, and any others in the consensus process may alter or block existing practices. To live collectively might be to make an attempt to find a way of life among other lives. It may put ethics into practice, and for the faeries, it appears to become a powerful form of ethical training.

Strangers and new participants become Nomenus officers very quickly, often in their first year of involvement. So stained are longer-term members with the residue of old conflicts that it can be easier to reach consensus on an unknown quantity. Other than lack of experience, an easy concern to set aside when options are scarce, no one generally has reason to block the newcomers. Instead, newcomers allow the old salts hope for a resolution to Nomenus's persistent problems. They can offer fresh energy, eager to work — at least until they themselves become embroiled in conflict and the cycle repeats. These cycles do not remain the same, but neither do they differ all that markedly. The governance process moves, like the gatherings, through a familiar process of enchantment and disenchantment. The time of monsters is simply the period of greatest disenchantment.

For at least a decade, one widespread story about Nomenus has been that it is held hostage by endlessly bickering, politically retrograde, conservative — and therefore “dirty”? — old men. One past president describes Nomenus as entangled in a “culture of no” in which it is much easier to stop action than to take it. In part formal consensus process is designed for precisely this outcome: as opposed to Robert's Rules of Order, a main goal of consensus is to ensure that many opinions and views on a matter are presented and legible to the collective. In the ideal case, no action is taken until everyone has had an opportunity to present their thoughts and feelings. Yet this theory falls apart under closer inspection. While long-term participants do have a right to return, and can indeed pop up “out of the woodwork” to express their opinions or even block changes that concern them, the roots of Nomenus' struggles go deeper. Such figures appear at best occasionally; they may have been an important factor in the conflict around membership and gender in the mid-2000s, but in practice, they are more likely to tell stories than to block action on matters related to the sanctuary and gatherings. Moreover, at most meetings, by far the majority of participants will tend to be relatively new to the community: residents and visitors at the sanctuary, officers, etc. If these newer characters find themselves unable to change a point of consensus, it is more because the bylaws' requirements for many changes are stringent than because of direct conflicts with elders. Indeed, having spoken with many of the sanctuary's surviving founders, it has become clear that they would generally welcome change and feel quite deeply pained by the struggle and conflict that has marked the church's history.

Likewise, Nomenus' problems run deeper than simply poor consensus technique. It is true that new participants often have little experience with the process, and that facilita-

tion and conflict mediation practices have varied and been applied inconsistently. While, in theory, any new member can block consensus, in practice Nomenus participants deploy a wide variety of techniques to keep meetings running quickly and to manage the decisions those meetings make. When a meeting occurs, almost everyone agrees prolixity is bad, though afterward they may — in periods of greater organization — publish detailed transcripts or minutes that document conflicts and the circuitous tangle of discussion more clearly than points of action. Yet any given working group tends to overcome these problems when participants are working well together.

When serious conflicts arise, however, they rarely figure as a single blocking voice against the community as a whole. Indeed, the meeting to remove the Daemon and the Jester was exceptional in the degree of unanimity the participants expressed. Usually, there are multiple voices with multiple perspectives; in practice, isolated participants rarely “take the meeting hostage” by blocking. Indeed, it was relatively uncontroversial when, at the advice of Danny Belle and myself, the church changed the wording of their test for consensus. Although the formal requirement for consensus has not changed, and neither has the right for a single member to block, we have changed what we say in the process. In the old style, the facilitator would ask for concerns, then standasides and blocks, repeating the word “block” at least once on every point of consensus. Now, the facilitator asks, “are there any remaining concerns which have not been sufficiently addressed?” The idea was to discourage people from blocking simply by avoiding the constant reminder that blocking was an option.

When there is an active working group, a set of people in regular conversation with each other, its members largely anticipate and avoid blocks in advance. That is, if it becomes clear that several people *intend* to block a motion, or that raising the motion will provoke conflict, character assassination or lengthy argument, generally participants avoid raising the motion in the first place. As this pattern emerges, and communication between active participants increases, a terrain of politics develops prior to and outside the official meetings. Many meetings then become *pro forma*, relatively efficient and routine; indeed the instinct to avoid long contentious meetings is so great that real conflicts may not be addressed until they are too big to ignore.

Thus, a full answer to the question of Nomenus’ dysfunction must go beyond simply consensus technique. No amount of mediation will resolve conflicts that people do not wish to resolve, any less than training, by itself, is sufficient to bring people to agreement. Rather, one must ask *who* is being asked to agree, on *what*, and for how long. When one does, it becomes clear that Nomenus faces conflicting instructions, perhaps a “double bind” (Bateson 1972). It is asked to keep open and expansive, incorporating any come who may, yet its members are asked to reach consensus on as many details as possible, on complex, contingent, profoundly *local* problems immanent with the operation of a remote, rural faerie sanctuary. Moreover, past attempts to create structure and delegate responsibility to smaller committees or working groups have consistently failed. They founder at the moment they face sufficient internal disagreement or a sufficient number of people from outside the committee disagree with one of their decisions. At that point, there is no one who can dismiss the concerns simply on the grounds of the delegation, because doing so betrays an ethical failing and thereby undermines the speaker’s position. For if Nomenus is a church, if it is intrinsically expansive (as the mission statement suggests), and if one of its central tenets is Harry Hay’s idea of subject-subject consciousness, then the collective that must reach

consensus on any particular matter is simultaneously *open-ended* and *vulnerable* to anyone who may. As discussed in chapter two, a form of consensus is the radical faerie spiritual practice *par excellence*. Spreading the radical faerie “religion,” creating new faeries, means precisely expanding the collective with whom consensus must be reached. Thus full agreement is always foreclosed, or rather, postponed until the very *end* of time, not just the end of the time of monsters but the end of *all* time, when there is no longer any possibility of reincorporating the collective body.

Looked at as training for the revolution, as askesis, all of this makes perfect sense. It is even intuitive. Perhaps askesis is the goal; perhaps training new faeries in subject-subject consciousness and related forms is worth all the heartbreak and frustration. If this is the case, we might see Nomenus as an instructive example of *failed authority*, an educational experiment not unlike the radical faerie equivalent of a fundamentalist Christian Halloween hellhouse.

Barring external changes, for things to be otherwise will require an enormous collective letting-go. Society need not be defended. There is no “community” that must be continually reinvoked, reassembled in new ways that (perhaps?) take into account all difference under one overarching aegis. This is not to reject feelings of affection, generosity and filiation; rather, it is to note that such feelings, by themselves, do not an institution make. Nomenus and Wolf Creek come to be what they are more through confluence, imitation and repetition than the intentions of a founder or any normative set of ideas and practices. When it appears the “community” is at its strongest, often it has just flung itself together. An immediate problem demanded a response. With the high turnover at Wolf Creek as well as in the extended network, it cannot be assumed that the “community” is a constant thing from month to month or year to year.

Witness the way faeries in Portland coalesced around fundraising during a tough winter a few years back: largely Beltane gathering participants, the organizers were in many cases not members of Nomenus at all. Indeed, many of them do not identify as faeries, but they do identify Beltane at Wolf Creek as an important, even essential part of their year. These people came together to create a Beltane fundraiser, which was in reality a Nomenus fundraiser, because there was a problem afoot that directly affected them.

Why give a place at the table to a cellular metaphor run amok? Wolf Creek is no walled garden, dangerous world outside and perfect, angelic faeries inside. The most immediate dangers are already on the land; those outside it are largely imagined. Let this account exemplify a particular form by which an effect called *community* can be maintained. It takes for granted the prior existence of the collective, the social, implicitly based on a boundary between the dangerous world outside and the good, pure realm within. I have been struck many times by the ways this form undergirds discourse and authorizes all manner of judgment. To invoke community declares obligation and authorizes punishment; the specter of care haunts all such invocations whether offered or withheld. Distrustful of authority or dominance, for the faeries crown and mantle often settle here instead.

Certainly, community refers to the possibility of care, suggesting a circle of benevolent others. Yet it also invokes a border, a boundary; it reiterates a decidedly Hegelian concept in which thesis and antithesis are clearly separated, each implying the other. If care can be proffered it can also be withheld. More troublingly, the question of membership is taken

to be settled in advance, implicitly legislated by an outside sovereign that inaugurates the order of things. In male-only space, the panoply of women and transgender queers may not be welcomed or recognized. What is troubling is that beyond the strategic concern of “safe space,” raising the question of membership comes to pose an existential threat to the collective itself. As the perfect inversion of the reward of membership, of inclusion, the operation of exclusion becomes implied by and coextensive with the community’s idea of itself. In short order, one has the whole problematic of liberalism: Who counts as man and citizen? How much variation is too much? And to defend our walled garden, must we not except some sovereign from the very norms which conduce to care within, whoever or whatever that crowned monster might be? Moreover, the community form all-too-often begets a fall narrative (Milburn 2003). A walled garden may be penetrated and threatened by dangerous others; the impure may be cast out, condemned to wandering and death. The fall narrative inaugurates an eschatological time, an imaginary in which we will eventually return to the garden. It dramatically forecloses the possibilities for the sanctuary and Nomenus, effectively forcing them to be all things to all people: spiritual practice, church, homeland and lifeboat. Yet each of these priorities all-too-often conflicts with the others.

At Wolf Creek, “community,” like “land,” becomes an object of idealization and adoration, yet its referent remains frustratingly vague. Certainly, there are many concerned people to whom one might turn for care, support and knowledge, just as there is dirt below, and trees, and a creek down at the end of the meadow. Yet each of these is profoundly unfinished and open-ended. Moreover, *what* and *who* exactly they designate varies depending on who is speaking and in what context. When the operation is made to treat them as fixed realities, as objects of unmindful veneration, they lift off from the actual lives and materials entwined around Wolf Creek and become instead like gods, transcendental categories therefore insulated from any kind of revision or reinvention.

My argument is that That Fucking Thing, Flush the Magic Shitter, or the aborted kitchen renovation are all better guides to understanding what is going on at Wolf Creek than are such transcendental categories. If we look at what actually *is*, perhaps we can make choices without feeling an obligation to realize all visions for Wolf Creek at once. Since its inception, the radical faerie genre has grown dramatically; new homes and sanctuaries continue to emerge. Perhaps Wolf Creek would do better to be *something* — some limited thing — for just some people; perhaps a collective letting-go and a *limiting* of Wolf Creek’s mission would enable it to be more immediately sustainable and easier to manage.

“The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth.” Any good Marxist would know what Gramsci likely meant by this phrase: the old world was capitalist, while the new will be communist. The chronology is given in advance; the beginning and end points are known. Perhaps Gramsci, writing such a phrase from his prison cell, would have felt some tiny reassurance, some comforting faith in the inexorable march of history and dialectic. It is easy to see the radical faerie equivalent. The old world was capitalist, yes; the faeries inherit this much at least from Marx through Hay. It was also patriarchal and straight, a world ruled by Men on the basis of a thorough occlusion of faggot brotherhood. Against this, faeries must seek a vision of a different future after the collapse, marked by egalitarian fraternity and faggot love. Like salvation, such a timeline postpones all satisfaction until the end, until the present is no longer and we transcend ourselves, finally measuring up to our impossible ideas of “community” and “land.”



## 8 Matter of Others

The faeries knew him as the Duchess and many regarded him as the *grand dame* of the movement during his lifetime. Articulate, overwhelmingly intelligent and deeply inspirational to many of his followers, Harry Hay laid claim not only to founding the radical faeries but to founding the US gay liberation movement *in toto*. It must have been easy to believe that he was an exceptional figure. Arguing as I do that the radical faeries meaningfully preceded Harry Hay, and that they are the outcome of a particular erotopolitics of the body as much as the specifics of his teaching, I have tried to focus more on the faeries' present than their past, to ask not only about the movement's roots but about the ways it has transformed in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I have thus far given little consideration to Harry Hay's ideas or his particular history with the faeries.

Harry's historical record has often been a function of his charisma. In John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman's *Intimate Matters*, one of the definitive monographs on sexuality in the United States, D'Emilio recounts the story of the Mattachine Society and places it at the origin of the US gay rights movement (1989). The narrative left Harry in a central place. At a conference in his memory at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in New York, some speculated that Harry might come to be seen as a gay counterpart to Martin Luther King.<sup>12</sup> D'Emilio appeared to dash their hopes when he recalled Harry, however, arguing that as he had read further he became less convinced that there was a linear connection between the Mattachine Society and its efforts in the early 1950s and the currency of sexual liberation in the late 1960s. The gay rights movement, he now argued, might better be seen as epiphenomenal to changes in urban land ownership that had led to the emergence of the so-called "gay ghettos." He spoke about meeting Harry in the desert in New Mexico, about the experience of being in Harry's presence, about the way Harry made him feel the world anew. He spoke about how enchanted he had become in Harry's presence, and how that enchantment had carried into the writing of his book. Yet later, he explained, he found himself less drawn to separatists than to other figures, like Bayard Rustin, who had helped win political change more directly. Harry, D'Emilio observed to the infuriation of many at the conference, was no Dr. King.

Yet the ability to show others the way to a change in consciousness, a new sense of themselves and their place in the universe, was central to Harry's role. This is the charisma of a spiritual leader *par excellence*. If cosmology frames and guides pragmatic thinking when it reaches its moments of impossibility and breakdown, then the encounter with Harry, to the extent that it taught a new cosmology, could have very long-lasting effects. Clifford Geertz noted as much in his well-known hermeneutic definition of religion, which revolved around the notion that religions offered "a general order of existence" within which people lived their lives (1966, 90).

When I delivered much of the present chapter as a talk at the Harry Hay conference, some who had known him apparently took it as an attack. I heard that I had misinterpreted subject-SUBJECT consciousness, that the *real* subject-SUBJECT had never been objectifying

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<sup>12</sup> This may yet come to pass, though if it does, I suspect it will be one small part of a general reevaluation of spirituality and religion in the United States, a marker of the transition into a regime in which it could be possible for sexual revolutionaries or pagans to claim a translatable mantle of moral authority.

in the way that I apparently argued it was, and in particular that I had no appreciation for how intelligent and complex a thinker Hay had actually been. I had expected that such critique was possible, but, knowing the faeries, I had hoped that my talk would be taken in stride, that no one would become defensive because there was nothing to defend, and that anything that might be taken as an argument for Hay's failure or abjection might be taken up and transformed. Why should faeries who are so good at deploying the cleansing magic of camp — who transform each others' critique and abjection at every turn into performance and celebration — be defensive about a patriarch who taught, among other things, the critique of patriarchy, the spiritual relevance of antiauthoritarian practice, and collective governance through consensus? I suspect gatherings could not be seen as a space of liberation, and the message of release from patriarchy could not be seen as plausible, if it were promoted by a patriarch, or if power relations came to be seen as inevitable even in gathering space.

Subject-SUBJECT consciousness was Harry's ethical practice, his exhortation to good behavior and categorical imperative. Rather than relate to the other as merely an object, Harry explained, “something to be used, manipulated, essentially controlled,” gay men had a special, rare capacity to see others as “subjects, equals, LIKE OURSELVES.” Harry developed this idea during the 1970s; his biographer Will Roscoe describes it as an attempt to unite Marxism with gay liberation and his emerging concern with spirituality. Subject-SUBJECT consciousness was, for Harry, the particular class consciousness, the collective consciousness, of gay men.

It is not that subject-SUBJECT consciousness is a lie, or that it does not teach a spiritual truth. I have taught it myself, both as a way of understanding a particular moment in the history of the faeries and gay liberation and as a way of opening a conversation about mindful awareness, concentration, nonattachment and compassion. I have observed that subject-SUBJECT consciousness can be used in a way that directly serves the latter principles. When faeries are asked to view each other with subject-SUBJECT consciousness, it can serve as a reminder to pause, to be more considerate, to think about other beings as equal to, or even prior than, oneself. I have observed people *practicing* subject-SUBJECT consciousness in a way that is, indeed, directly consonant with Bradley Rose's description of it as a “sixth sense” . Rather, the trouble is that spiritual truth is a particular *kind* of truth. Cosmological truths are often contained within the enclosures of their discourses, amenable to critique far more from within than from without. The truth of subject-SUBJECT consciousness, like the truths of evangelical Christians, thus can only be revealed under certain conditions and in certain ways (Thompson 2011, Luhrmann 2012).

One theme that recurs throughout the faerie spiritual writings is the theme of independent revelation, of critical questioning, of the individual path. In the first decade of the movement several of Harry's followers were particularly careful *not* to acknowledge him as a guru, as for instance when Roscoe writes, “Another version of victim thinking appears when fairies perceive someone to be a guru or authority figure. Of course in the hetero world this is a valid criticism ... but I don't see a power elite of fairies.” He went on to challenge gathering attendees to step up, to express themselves freely. “If anyone tries to be a fairy guru they will only succeed if other fairies let them” (Roscoe, Rose and Miles 1984, 8).

Was Harry the radical faerie guru? Certainly, his influence was partial and his authority incomplete, especially by comparison to cults oriented toward explicit hierarchy.

There were almost immediate challenges to his authority. He, Roscoe and Rose were dismayed by the emergence of neopagan ritual at gatherings, for Harry had not set out to create a radical or queer adaptation of neopaganism. Rather, his message was always about the gay experience in its specifics, about studying homosexuality's existential questions and answering them in ways that allowed for a hopeful future.

However great Harry's influence, the rhetoric of subject-SUBJECT consciousness has become a key mechanism of power for radical faeries. We discuss it frequently. It is a core element of heart circles and we often invoke it when dealing with anger, disagreement and conflict of all sorts. To do so authorizes a particular mode of communication as authentically radical faerie, linking the speaker to Harry Hay. It provides a distinctive logic and guidelines for tone similar in many ways to nonviolent communication, working to exclude certain forms of interaction while including others. If it is not usually the most salient for newcomers, if it is not as obvious as gender play or homoeroticism, it is particularly relevant for organizers and facilitators of faerie spaces.

In what follows, I develop a more precise formulation of Harry's subject-SUBJECT consciousness in the context of ideas from Buber and Levinas, to whom his bear a family resemblance. I demonstrate that, while Harry may have pointed to important spiritual truths, subject-SUBJECT consciousness did not achieve its denoted goal: it was, both in practice and in its conceptual formulation, primarily objectifying. Hay's followers may take comfort in the knowledge that Hay was scarcely alone, however, for I show that the ideas of all three men are susceptible to the same critique. On the basis of these examples, I propose that all totalizing ethics entail a teleological reduction of the other. I conclude with speculation as to alternate modes of ethical reflection based on Derrida's critique of Levinas.

Hay has been described as a founder of gay liberation and of the radical faeries. Some have made the claim that Hay was first to invent the "cultural minority thesis," the idea that GLBT folks amount to a class with a particular, distinctive history and a collective claim to rights, to legitimacy in the eyes of the state. While I admire considerably Hay's trenchant defense of gay liberation and class warfare and his iconoclasm, I find I cannot defend such claims to foundership and inventorship. A century ago, Emma Goldman advanced the notion that homosexuals should organize to demand their rights as a political class, and she did so with awareness that they had much in common and had developed collective forms of life unique to their situation (Kissack 2008). A fairy circle, moreover, met in the Haight-Ashbury at least four years before Hay, Burnside, Kilhefner and Thompson issued the call to the "first" gathering, conducting heart circles, rituals of renaming and communal sexuality. Thus it is not to bolster these myths that I turn to Hay's ideas, but to respond to the prevalence of subject-SUBJECT consciousness discourse in faerie worlds. If, indeed, Hay's idea maps an important "faerie space" of ethics, what becomes possible (or impossible) for those who navigate by it?

One starting place is to note that Harry Hay posed the questions with which he framed the so-called "first gathering" not to the individual but the collective: "Who are *we*? Where do *we* come from? Why are *we* here?" Ever the Marxist, Hay's intention was to constitute a class, not individuals, because the individuals came ready-made. For Hay among other mid-twentieth century gay liberation activists, pride discourse demanded fully-formed individuals. The closet was (and for the most part still is) understood as a matter of

revelation, not creation. Coming out revealed a self that had already been formed, a truer self that made a claim to authenticity.

The critique of authenticity, however, has a long tradition and is rather hard to avoid. An authentic thing must be authentic not only compared to inauthentic things but in its very thing-ness; if the essence of a thing is to be a whole or a unity, then no authentic thing can be possible. It has been amply demonstrated that there is only the idea of the whole, no whole in actuality. To put it another way, there is no ground in nature, no grid of races, genders or other differences inscribed so deeply as to be historically immutable or unavailable to inquiry (Moore, Kosek and Pandian 2003). To accept such critiques is ultimately to accept the construction of homosexuality, but such abstract philosophical argumentation offers no guide as to whether that construction took place in the distant past (as in the theory of evolution prior to Gould) or the recent past (as in Foucault and the mainstream of contemporary queer studies).

Perhaps with good reason, the various ethnographies of the radical faeries scarcely mention subject-SUBJECT consciousness. The essays and letters in which Hay formulates the idea are not conceptually complex or intellectually subtle, but they are difficult. They are an epistemological pastiche, throwing together chosen ideas from widely disparate disciplines with little consideration of context. The use of block capitals and exclamation points make his work difficult to quote precisely. I find myself wanting to tone him down, consign him to lower case, defend the seriousness of my own text against the melodrama of his. Hay's essays are so embarrassingly overblown that even his primary student and hagiographer describes them as turgid. Subject-SUBJECT consciousness, it seems, is where Hay walks off into an abyss of new-age psychobabble. Lacking the seriousness of Martin Buber or even Larry Mitchell (1976), it feels almost superfluous to point out some limitations of his thought. Yet many faeries do recognize Harry as founder, and subject-SUBJECT consciousness is arguably the apex of his thinking on gay liberation. What are we to make of this term? Who (or what) are Hay's subjects, and what on earth are we to make of consciousness?

The philosophical conversation on the subject lies roughly at the intersection of mind and body. It has been many things to many people: assumed, necessary, known, as Kant would say, analytically *a priori*, and then transitioning, over several hundred years, to be understood as a particular felt self, a form of imprisonment within history and our bodies. The latter is roughly the contemporary view; I do not dispute it, hoping only to reinscribe a certain more recent transition. It appears that Descartes' position is in decline across the disciplines, Smith's rational actor no longer *sine qua non* even in economics.

If mankind suffered a grievous narcissistic wound at the turn of the 19th century, I understand this to have been caused by a thought virus — a meme, if you prefer. At first its peculiar action was to reorganize bodies across the world onto couches and into chairs, toward musty offices and steep consultation fees, through the action of a mass-mediated spectacle. Publicity meant the widespread distribution of certain ideas, Freud's notion of the subconscious challenging its receivers to recognize they were not even in control of their own minds. As the virus spread, it transformed, implicating less the psychoanalytic apparatus than the widespread conversation on sociohistorical construction. In the *École Normale Supérieure* of the 1950s, Lacan, Sartre, and Levinas were the old guard, perhaps accompanied by Levi-Strauss. The limelight would be stolen, and the intellectual history of

late 20th century Euroamerica framed, by Foucault and Derrida. Foucault would argue that the subject was properly an historical subject, shaped by expert discourses that created new realms of knowledge and, in doing so, arrogated to themselves and to the collective perception the powers of organization and disposition. Derrida (and from a very different angle, Deleuze) would argue that the subject was always already divided against itself, that the very notion of the subject implied all-too-clear a concept, all-too-firm a border, and that we might profitably investigate the space between subject and object. Phenomenology, not discourse, demanded as much.

Harry Hay's subject, on the other hand, is one in which Cartesian certainty meets Freudian repression as the only possible response to compulsory heterosexuality. "To update Descartes," Hay announced in 1970 (194), "*cogito ET SENTIO ergo sum!*" Hay wants the self to be transcendent, prior, complete in its self-evident existentiality. Homosexuals' "psychic architecture" or the "Blueprint of our Minority nature"— Hay's terms vary — is it at work reshaping us from the moment of birth (196). Yet this blueprint comes not from society, from "the shape and substance of Male Chauvinism," but from spirit. There is no metaphysics of immanence in Hay when it comes to the question of oppression. To understand the self as legitimately and irrevocably a homosexual self, Hay needs to place the question of desire prior to culture, prior to oppression, rooting it at times in genetics and at times in spirit.

Hay is writing on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement, and the context is of speaking truth to power through self-affirmation and self-expression. A distinct identity requires distinct, unshared knowledge, and for Hay such knowledge is primordial. The effect is rather like transposing Lenin's theory of ethnicity (one land, one people, one language) into the United States, *mutatis mutandis* given the distinct situations of homosexuals, women and African-Americans. The challenge is that that distinct knowledge must be transcendental, must originate outside history, and cannot concern social oppression. "Today Blacks are making it unmistakably clear that no *Whiteman* has ever been able to describe or project what it means, and feels like, to be a self-appreciating Black," yet, in the immediately prior paragraph (194), "the Homosexual Minority knows the bitter harvest of being the Village Nigger!"

For Hay the Cartesian, my thinking and my feeling are what is certain, essential, above conditions of change. As with Freud, a particular psychic architecture transcends the conditions of development yet without leaving the subject in control of their own mind. That is, the architecture consists of a diagram of a certain form of mind that represents absolute subjection. At times he describes the homosexual psyche as fundamentally marked by the father's rejection, but the latter is not at all the cause of homosexuality. There is a prior need, a call to Spirit, and it is strong indeed: "No allegiance, no sanctions, no taboos or prohibitions, no laws have ever been encompassing enough or powerful enough to stand between us and the pursuit of our Dream." What was that dream, with its "clear unflinching flame"?

What *is* it that we know of ourselves that no Heterosexual as yet has begun to perceive? It is that we Homosexuals have a psychic architecture in common, we have a Dream in common, man to man, woman to woman. For all of us,

*and for each of us, in the dream of Love's ecstasy—the God descends—the Goddess descends—and for each of us the transcendence of that apotheosis is mirrored in the answering glances of the lover's eyes. FOR WE SHARE THE SAME VISION—Like to Like. Heterosexuals do not partake of such a communion of spirit. Theirs is ... other. And—in this mating of like to like—what is it we seek? Not the power and vanities of dynasty, not wealth or property, not social contract or security, not status, nor preferment, as does the Parent Society. We seek union, each with his similar—heart to mirroring heart—free spirit to free spirit! (195)*

Here, a primary lack becomes the essence of a new identity through the “dream of Love's ecstasy” — certainly attachment, companionship, love and its pursuit but also orgasm and its pursuit. Hay's vision reeks of semen; like many other two-worlds cosmologies, it is necessary both that spirit descends and that the earthly ascends. Raised as a Roman Catholic, Hay apparently cannot avoid articulating a vision of spirit as the transubstantiation of a still-unmentionable sexuality. Hay's account of sacred sexuality is thus not an account of immanence but of transcendence. In contrast with later queer spiritualities that would develop detailed spiritual erotics of the body, such as Joseph Kramer's School of the Body Electric, Harry Hay and John Burnside tiptoe around coitus, taking refuge in polite dissimulation and metaphor. Moreover, as a model of the psyche Hay's account assumes a fundamental lack; it is perhaps closer to Lacan than Freud. Unlike Lacan, however, Hay's homosexual answers this lack not with the transposition and return of the phallus but with the recognition of a mutual similarity, a fundamental sameness.

It should therefore come as no surprise that in the first essay in which he explicitly uses the term subject-SUBJECT consciousness, “Gay Liberation: Chapter Two” (1976), Harry is clear that it begins with the *monogamous* gay relationship. “To call another into being,” he writes (211), “to continuously challenge one's self *and that beloved* other into being and becoming the total exponents of that souring growth and development each is capable of — the Love-Dream and ANALOG VISION [sic] of Equals — is what the Gay monogamous relationship is all about!” It is in the *monogamous* relationship, with time and care, that it becomes possible to see the other in the new, non-objectified, subject-subject way. Though he will later change his view somewhat, in this essay Hay comes across as more explicitly monogamous even than Whitman.

One might read this vision as the apotheosis of gay narcissism. To call another into being, wouldn't one have to *create* that other being, or at least address an other that was somehow *otherwise* than being? That is to say, perhaps Hay defines *being* as being (monogamously) gay. Perhaps no one else — lesbian, bisexual, straight, polyamorous — can possibly be recognized, therefore can possibly be a truly living, livable other, another to whom one might adopt an ethical relationship. Subject-subject consciousness would then figure as ultimately objectifying, even solipsistic. Hay supports this implication when he begins to flesh out its distinctive responsibility: “each choosing of his own volition to be responsible for himself, each choosing of his own volition to be responsible to the others of his chosen fairy ring!” (214) — since there must be some limit to the number of fairies who can fit in the ring, who get, as the saying goes, a place at the table.

By 1980, Hay's vision is somewhat different. Rather than focus on the monogamous relationship, he emphasizes that subject-subject consciousness is possible in *any* relationship, even those with "trees and birds and rocks and Teddy Bears" (, 1980, 258). Yet, though monogamy does not play such an explicitly central role, gay men, for Hay, remain "cornered, frightened, rejected little Sissy-kids" seeking to assuage their loneliness through seeking out (and, through the faeries, finding) a great desire, the boy, the lover, "*him*" [sic]. Framed by the experience of the 1976 gathering in Arizona, Hay writes of an inheritance he assumes is common and distinct. He insists it is only in this relationship that we understand the full import of our childhood fantasies. It is therefore through this desire, presumably most often frustrated, that subject-SUBJECT consciousness, the "Gay Window," becomes a possibility.

In both essays, and indeed throughout Hay's thinking on the matter, the most important distinction is that between subject and object. Even the distinction between subject and SUBJECT (Hay's caps) does not serve to move the analysis in the same way, for Hay neither considers the latter in its particulars, nor pursues the consequences of a unitary other, an other as whole. Rather, he draws a sharp distinction between subject-object and subject-subject forms of relationship, and that distinction is pivotal for his entire analysis. For me, the problem is that Hay's notions of subject and object are indissociably rooted in his social and economic position. One has to conclude they reflect the legacy of colonialism and his Stanford education more than any human universal.

The relationship subject-object assumes self-identity, self-definition and agency on the part of the subject and a certain passivity on the part of the object. For Hay, the object is "to be used, manipulated, essentially controlled" — precisely the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized, of the property owner to the "resources" under his purview. In particular, the subject-object relationship is the only one possible between men and women. Though women are the more powerfully objectified, they too relate to men in a subject-object mode, for Hay — that is, they are capable only of imitating the male relationship to themselves, proffering a weak equivalent without any originality or room for improvement. Though he is careful to state at the outset he speaks only from a "gay perspective," Hay's diagnosis reiterates sexism rather than undermines it. That is, it makes no room for historically changing relations between the sexes. It makes no room for other relationships to other beings.

The worker does not relate to the object necessarily or solely as something to be used, manipulated, controlled because his essential experience is that of *being* controlled. He is paid a wage or paid for his output. The capitalist's control over the worker transposes itself onto the object, the raw material, which mirrors the capitalist's control in the demands it makes of the worker. The worker engages with any recalcitrance — knots in the wood, perhaps, hardness or softness, flaws of all kinds as well as all manner of peculiarities — precisely because of the control of the capitalist, because the worker is already objectified. It is thus equally accurate to say that the worker relates to himself as object and the raw material as subject.

The same might be said of the so-called "primitive" by contrast with the modern (and we have, of course, never truly been modern), or of the view of science by the uneducated, the view of mysticisms by the uninitiated, and so forth. In short, the relationship between subject and object that Hay describes is first and foremost a relationship of owner to

property. Since the owner-property relationship has often not been the norm, and has varied considerably, it follows that Hay's objectifying relationships to the other must always be shot through with non-objectifying relationships. To describe others only in terms of two possibilities, subject and object, misunderstands the nature of power, since the other either is a form of property, or is the same, equal to oneself. Since any meaningful standard for intersubjective comparison would itself have to be objective, a false equality might, indeed, be no different than totalization. Which form of consciousness applies when the other in fact exerts an inexorable force upon us, *compels* us to recognition as a matter of life and death?

By 1980 Harry merely *starts* from the encounter with the gay (white) male beloved, expanding his concept thereafter to describe a quality which could imbue all relationships, "romantic" or not. He does not mention monogamy. Rather, he gestures to Sufi mystical practice, ascribing to Omar Khayyam the elusive, highly-valued capacity for engendering subject-SUBJECT consciousness. In this vision, relating subject to subject becomes the basis for a universalizing project.

How much credit can we really give Harry for thinking along these lines? On the one hand, feminism has a long engagement with the notion that the patriarchal relationship between man and woman comprises a relationship between subject and object, and certainly Hay began with this point of view. On the other hand, Hay's proposed escape from such thinking might seem a little too easy. For Hay, subject-subject consciousness is rare and difficult; it has scarcely been achieved in history except as the distinctive contribution of the "third sex," and it is largely inaccessible in man-woman relationships. At the same time, it is straightforwardly accessible, a form of consciousness that opens up to gay men the moment they develop a strong same-sex (same gender?) attraction. It is thus historically transcendent and, on the other hand, present even without or before "culture" or the "social."

Hay's account of subject-subject consciousness thus parallels Freud's account of the Oedipus complex. While it appears to be a theory of development, it poses as a universal, rooted in experiences that are entirely generic to a naturalized form of embodied encounter. It is no accident that Hay's most immediate and vocal critic, Mitch Walker, would turn to Jungian psychoanalysis and the agonism of the repressed shadow self, in which the very act of denial functions as an affirmative proof, and only the analyst, the leader, can inaugurate a regime of transparency. In fact the leader offers not so much greater transparency as a new discourse with particular norms and different — though still not fundamentally adequate — objects of knowledge. Those who were part of Hay's circle will remember the discussions of internalized homophobia, which could become another variant of such a repressive hypothesis.

Subject-SUBJECT consciousness relies on a transcendental totality — a Hegelian positive infinity. In the final analysis it is a deistic and authoritarian philosophy that serves to install its speaker in a place of mastery, the sole translator of a world beyond ours to which only he has access. By 1980, Hay had parted ways with historical materialism. Hay was no philosopher, and his writings are better read as the manifestos and doctrinal pronouncements of a cult leader.

## *Buber*

Subject-SUBJECT consciousness frequently finds comparison in Buber's I-Thou relationship. Buber distinguishes I-Thou relationality from I-It relationality via a series of comparisons that at first glance look quite similar to Hay: presence from object, whole from part, encounter from experience. Yet while Buber argues for a necessary "exclusivity" to the I-Thou relationship, he apparently never thought of this as solely isomorphic with romantic, sexual love. He identifies an axis which runs from a single — perhaps monogamous — partner on the one hand, to a Christlike love of "all mankind" on the other. He denies that "experience" is a form of I-Thou relationality, nor also ideas, conceptions, plans, yet he also affirms the exclusiveness of that relationship — the idea that one can enter into it only with one's whole being, holding nothing back, leaving no part of oneself behind. It is impossible for an I-Thou relationship to be instrumental, since a goal or a plan would necessarily divide, pitting presence against imagined future. The latter is an internal object but an object nonetheless, and thus harbinger of a return to "I-It" relationality.

Buber qualifies, however, that exclusive relationships are possible not only with other beings but also with God, and indeed asserts the relationship with God as distinct from all the others. "Every actual relationship in the world is exclusive; the other breaks into it to avenge its exclusion. Solely in the relation to God are unconditional exclusiveness and unconditional inclusiveness one in which the universe is comprehended" (Buber a, 143). Thus the exclusive relationship with a tree, a person or a piece of mica necessarily depends on some limit, a difficult border which, in the I-Thou relationship, can be encountered but not experienced, comprehended but not conceptualized. Buber's is thus a paradoxical ontology, for it requires that there be things before things, that an entity have some self-semblance without recognition as such, but instead just as "Thou."

Buber's notion of "exclusiveness," however, amounts to a theory of concentration and potentially awareness. Demanding that I can enter the "I-Thou" relationship only with my whole being, unabashedly, without reservation or agenda, Buber outlines a space from which distraction must be wholly and entirely absent. The exclusiveness of a monogamous relationship is not the exclusiveness of a focused mind, but it seems to me that in the 1976 essay, monogamy serves something like this role for Hay. By 1980, the notion has receded somewhat. Efforts to read subject-SUBJECT consciousness as a changing quality, or to update it for changes in the political context, seemingly run afoul of this altered and reduced role for inquiry.

## *Levinas*

Then there is Emmanuel Levinas, in anthropology a subject of rumor and mystery. Certain contemporary ethnographers, most notably Nancy Scheper-Hughes, have turned to Levinas to defend a fieldwork methodology that embraces activism and a partisan defense of human rights and a commitment to the people's side of the class struggle (1995). According to this reading, ethics describe a set of conditions that give rise to human sociality. What Levinas calls Being is the consequence of an ethical relation with the Other, particularly in *Totality and Infinity*, which tends to be Levinas' most inspiring work for this particular reading (1979). In transcending myself for the other, I respond to the ethical demand posed by the face-to-face encounter. Before all possibility of sociality, prior to our own subjection

thereby, the face presents a silent plea: “thou shalt not kill.” For Scheper-Hughes, Levinas offered a way to be an anthropologist and a crusader at the same time.

Judith Butler returns to Levinas in *Prekarious Life*. “[W]hat binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other’s address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will” (2003, 130). She notes the “critical consternation” at Levinas’ philosophy and the usual limitations readers find therein. For one, the face, though not necessarily a human *face*, is nonetheless a *human* face. Further, an infinite obligation to the Other — at the expense of one’s own self-preservation — tells us nothing about what to do as witnesses to violence done by one Other to another. Yet despite such criticism Butler will argue for a return to Levinas in pursuit of an understanding of representation and dehumanization as well as a “possible Jewish ethic of nonviolence.”

Levinas’ object might be described as an absent presence; in my admittedly partial reading, the object has vanished from his phenomenology almost entirely. For Martin Heidegger, Levinas’ teacher, objects had been more central. How could one have a relationship to things? How could things be available, accessible, or possible? Heidegger offers an extended series of concerns with the built environment, the technological world, the transformations of industrial modernity and the possible breakdown of the relations between subjects and objects that he knew well. Levinas, on the other hand, had been a French prisoner of war. As a young man he arguably witnessed the breakdown that Heidegger had feared. His work addresses violence as a breakdown not of subject-object relations but of subject-subject or rather intersubjective relations.

One of the central issues for those who would compare Buber and Levinas is the question of their mutual understanding of reciprocity. For Levinas, responsibility to the other is entirely nonreciprocal and hierarchical. I cannot demand the other address the call of my own face. Rather, ethics consists in an infinite subjection before the other. Buber is less clear; in the first edition of *I and Thou*, he does at times describe the I-Thou relation as reciprocal. Yet he also he describes an I-Thou relation with a tree. Does he mean to imply the tree reciprocates? In the Postscript to the 1957 edition, however, Buber clarifies that while the I-Thou relationship *may* be reciprocal, it is not necessarily so. “Everything,” he writes, “from your own experience of looking day after day into the eyes of your “neighbor” who needs you after all but responds with the cold surprise of a stranger, to the melancholy of the holy men who repeatedly offered the great gift in vain — everything tells you that complete mutuality does not inhere in men’s life with one another.”

If our only concern regarding subject-SUBJECT consciousness were the way it conjures a false equality between subjects, thus neglecting power, then Buber or Levinas would be a corrective turn. All three authors, however, appear to be susceptible to two other critiques, in that they are dependent on arguments for assimilative recognition and a positive infinity.

### *Assimilative Recognition & Positive Infinity*

Can one properly have a subject-SUBJECT or I-Thou relationship with another that is not, at base, a relationship with God? A concept, one might argue, cuts through experience to

shape and form an idea. A concept is an activity of the brain. We do not argue that beings without language have concepts *per se*, though clearly recognition may conduce a reaction. In the Postscript, Buber clearly regards relations with teacher, doctor, servant as different from each other. Except perhaps in the case of God, Buber's I-Thou relationship must therefore follow recognition. Yet hasn't recognition been shaped by history? One may fail to recognize another because one lacks a certain sensitivity — to sight, for example, or sound, or social graces. Following Darwin, one's very being must be shaped by history, by changes that sooner or later come to determine the capacities for recognition I-Thou necessarily requires.

To defend the recognition of the other in the case of a person, or even (for Buber) a tree or dog, one has to make some kind of argument of similarity: that recognition be extended in the case of beings near to ourselves, made familiar, made similar, but dispensed in the case of beings more foreign. For Hay as well as Buber and Levinas, such an ethics appears most frequently as a form of humanism. Buber goes farther than the others in considering what relation might mean with nonhumans; his work includes several passages reflecting on the problem of the speech or speechlessness of animals. Hay appears to have considered only the cases of secondary lovers and friends. He is describing the view from what he calls the "Gay Window." For Hay nonhumans always boiled down to "nature" or "the outdoors." Perhaps having grown up in southern California in part on an orange farm, the son of a colonial administrator and real estate developer, he saw them primarily as a space outside heterosexual civilization, a resource to draw on for human invention and freedom, rather than myriad beings intertwined with us at all times. Levinas focuses far less on the sexual or romantic, but he adamantly requires that the other be human, for his ethics consider the preconditions of human sociality and he cannot let go the evidence of language.

Could one have an I-Thou relationship with one's own breath? Could one's own breath be Other? Such a relationship can be exclusive, in Buber's sense; indeed, an exclusive focus on the breath is the core of Theravadan *shamatha* practice. On the other hand, what an uneasy limit subtends this "You"! Suppose I practice, as is advised, by directing my awareness to the nostrils and there observing the flow of breath. Absent the nostrils, the breath has no shape and there is no limit distinguishing it from mere wind, distinguishing *this* air from *that*. On the other hand, absent the air, my nostrils remain still and silent. Perhaps awareness in fact *constructs* the breath as something that can be experienced.

An even more difficult example is the case of intestinal flora. Can one have an I-Thou relationship with one's own bacterial "interlocutors," for example the intestinal flora on which good digestion depends? Certainly, they are other to us. They are living beings, enmeshed in ecosystems which are at once *us* and yet *not us*. For those who suffer from irritable bowels, the population and diversity of intestinal flora is a matter of quite serious concern. Yet we have no direct mode by which to perceive the health and diversity of this population. It is not a matter of an aggregate perception of a gas, of countless molecules indistinguishable except as a collective. Air touches, it passes, it soothes and caresses. Yet even as a collective, intestinal flora are one step further removed. We do not perceive them directly. Even supposing they come to exist in the wrong proportions, and we have had too much cheese for dinner, we yet perceive naught but air. We perceive traces of bacterial presence but we do not in any way perceive the bacteria themselves. An idea, a concept, necessarily

mediates any relation one might have to a “You” in this case. We require an idea to open for us the possibility of bacterial lives, of their existence.

There is a limit to how far these men can take us, writing as and when they did. Why concern ourselves with such extreme examples as those above? Each looks to ethics to make possible certain kinds of life, precious but threatened. For each, the dangerous vector is a matter of human relationship. Today the situation has changed. It has become clear that relations between humans and nonhumans matter as well. When bees are threatened, I am threatened. When the great currents change, I change. Assimilative recognition is therefore inadequate to ground an ecological ethics because similarity is not proximity. That which is close enough to affect me is not necessarily similar to me.

But, one may argue, even if I know nothing of bacteria I can relate to You, the stomach, You, the gassy chambers, and I may come to know a set of more-or-less arcane correspondences between the portal of the mouth and the reaction of the stomach. Thus I may cut back on dairy, or gluten, or sweets, and the stomach offers what feedback it will. Perhaps, with one satisfying belch, the air flows out and does not return. Does recognition of the stomach not offer an equivalence to recognition of the intestinal flora? In this case, one might find it no more necessary to recognize *giardiasis* than to recognize a certain body of which it is a part. If that is so, however, why recognize anything *except* everything? But God, for the Hasids and other faithful? We are but small, more-or-less indistinguishable cells, tiny and altogether dispensable fragments. If, as Buber writes, it is only in the case of God, of a grand unity, that exclusivity and inclusivity are one, then any other “You” that is recognized must point the way back to God. “You” becomes God at its edges.

Hegel understood that great unity — not necessarily God — as a positive infinity. Being infinite, it knows no bounds of space and need not be limited or altered by any other outside itself. It is complete. “[T]he image of the true infinity, bent back upon itself, becomes the *circle*, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without *beginning* and *end*” (1999, 149). As Martin Hägglund comments, “Levinas attempts to criticize [Heidegger] by referring to the other as a positive infinity. This position is untenable, since such an absolute Other would be an absolute Same” (2004a, 55).

For his part, Hay also relies on a positive infinity, traces of which I think we find in ways faeries use such terms as *spirit* and *capitalism*. A notion of positive infinity may have motivated his use of all caps for the second subject in the 1980 essay. Next to such a transcendental, all else pales. It becomes irrelevant whether we recognize individuals or not, since all individuals are no more than a path to a great whole.

Thus my reading is that Levinas, Buber and Hay all rely on a certain holism, a theory of a unitary whole that lifts analysis out of the realm of the particular and hitches it to a transcendental known only to the prophet and ideologue. An ethics of inquiry hovers dangerously on the edge of religious dogma, in severe danger of being pulled in. Hay could defend his all-too-common encroachments — the tendency to be aggressive and bombastic in conversation, the unwanted tongue pushing down reluctant throats — as subject-SUBJECT precisely because, in such a formulation, it is not the specifics of the other that matters but rather the great unity of which that other has already been made a part.

Hegel offers us another infinity, the negative infinity of infinite displacement and innumerable others. This is closer to the notion of infinity commonly known from

mathematics, in which it is impossible to conceive of the largest number or the smallest interval. Following Hägglund's reading of Derrida, such an infinity names a process of displacement without end, a spacing and movement which is intrinsic, fundamental, which necessarily becomes time in that any spatiality in which movement is possible requires duration. "The temporal can never be in itself, but is always disjoined between being no longer and being not yet ... [thus] time itself is constitutively out of joint. Or more exactly: time itself is the impossibility of any 'itself'" (2004b). Any marking of time's passage implies an identity through time, some separation from time which allows for the mark, but this identity will always break down upon close inspection. It is in itself the possibility of its own decay and death.

Against some who have argued that the works on justice and hospitality represent an ethical turn in Derrida's thinking (e.g. Bernasconi and Critchley), Hägglund argues that this entails a false assimilation of Derrida's thinking of radical alterity to Levinasian ethical metaphysics (2004a). The notion of responsibility constitutively requires its own "scandal and aporia" (Derrida 1995, 68), since there are always other others who have not been considered. "What makes it possible to be responsible is thus at the same time what makes it impossible for any responsibility to be fully responsible. Responsibility, then, is always more or less discriminating, and infinite responsibility is but another name for the necessity of discrimination" (2004a, 56).

For most faeries, such a conclusion is likely to seem pessimistic at first glance. Is subject-SUBJECT consciousness really so objectifying? Are our efforts to be inclusive so inescapably fictional, exclusive despite all gestures to the contrary? Certainly, this line of argument skewers a few holy tenets of faerie "orthodoxy," if there is such a thing. I think, however, that a rigorous thinking of finitude also offers a certain form of hope. If all totalizing ideologies necessarily have some point at which they break down, then the grip of no despot or religious zealot can ever be complete. While Harry Hay may have wanted to be a guru and revolutionary, may have wanted to found a movement and ordain acolytes who would carry on his work within all its constitutive limitations, a decade after his death radical faeries remember him just as often, if not more, through criticism as adulation or blind acceptance. If Harry Hay was a failure as a cult leader, that very failure left us an inkling of the failure of all such ideologies, and perhaps a healthy skepticism as well.

There is a common thread, I think, linking Buber, Levinas and Derrida, that remains to be explored. I find it not so much in Harry Hay's writings but it winds through faerie milieu nonetheless. To frame it I turn to Hay's lover, John Burnside, whose formulation of subject-SUBJECT consciousness in his essay "Relating Subject to Subject" (1989) was in many ways the most precise and elaborate.

Arguably, it was in Hay's relationship with Burnside that Hay came closest to behaving according to "loving-sharing-consensus." Burnside co-signed several of Harry's papers on the radical faeries and gay consciousness, and was by all accounts the caregiver, more consistently emotionally present and less wedded to the political struggle. His account of subject-SUBJECT consciousness is lengthier and more measured, relying on examples drawn not from his earliest same-sex longings but more immediate and recent experience in the growing faerie scene.

He begins, much as Hay did, distinguishing subject-subject from subject-object forms of consciousness. For the course of much of human history, writes Burnside, we had been predisposed to relate to each other through domination — as, for instance, “either actor or one who is acted upon; teacher to student, buyer to seller, doctor to patient, parent to child, man to woman” (1997, III.15) — thus maintaining unnecessarily a state of war. To counter this, one first laid a foundation of “non-possessive love” and thereafter practiced a particular form of generosity toward the other which consisted in agreeing to disagree and studying a matter until a perception was gained that transcended either point of view in its care and complexity. Without subject-to-subject relations, we were “guarded, separate, and essentially apart”; with it, we might “merge, yet preserve perfect individual identity and autonomy” (ibid). This, taught Burnside, was Walt Whitman’s “adhesive love,” the brotherhood between men he maintained would be the basis of true democracy.

What is interesting about Burnside’s text is not so much its general arc as his choice of examples. The first concerns a young couple in an argument about the Civil War and the second a meeting to plan a faerie gathering. In the first example, the two young lovers, one from the North and one from the South, discover a painful disagreement. Yet instead of breaking up over it, or arguing about it, or simply agreeing to disagree and letting the matter drop, they become consumed in Civil War research, learning as much as possible about the war in “every available moment.” Over time they discover that they are both right, and neither, because truth is more complicated than any single interpretation can allow.<sup>13</sup>

Then there is his second example, a group of forty faeries meeting to plan a gathering. They choose to “trust each other’s loving interest” (ibid) to ensure all voices are heard, by which I surmise that the meeting was conducted as a heart circle, without crosstalk. By the late 1980s, heart circle was a well-established part of faerie sociality and especially the gatherings. Subject-SUBJECT consciousness was to be learned and demonstrated in the context of these heart circles. In heart circle, one learned to make as much time as necessary for each person to speak (but only in his or her turn), ideally offering receptive, mindful listening without judgment or preconception. Conducting their meeting as a heart circle, he wrote, “It became clear to all how the gathering had to be conducted ... in only an hour, leaving the faeries the remaining three hours in which to enjoy each other” (ibid). Quite aside from Burnside’s tender euphemism, the description elicited reactions of hilarity and stunned disbelief from Nomenus members to whom I read it. We all knew that our meetings were endlessly fractious and ridiculously specific, inevitably consuming all the time available. If a working agreement had been reached not to conduct business meetings in the heart circle format, it had been reached precisely because heart circles could so easily be taken hostage by a few people who might feel it necessary to speak at length, over and over again, rendering moot any form of agenda.

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<sup>13</sup> The Civil War was the central ordeal of Whitman’s life, and its use serves to link Burnside’s essay to a longer tradition of theorizing the US gay male experience through a simultaneous bid for freedom and an allegiance with the nation as the site and guarantor of that freedom. Would his story have been possible if the young couple were of different hues, perhaps one tracing his ancestry through the slaves? Would it have been possible had one been illiterate, or simply uninterested in history? It’s crucial that they both have the same response — and that the effect of that response is to make their individual bodies more docile, buried in books and far from harm.

On the other hand, such consensus represented, in many ways, the logical end-point of Harry's subject-subject consciousness. John characterized non-possessive love as that which comes into being "when I am able to see that love is not just concern for my own good, that what I want equally if not more than all is all good things for you because I know how wonderful you are as a self-created being, and I feel that so fine a person must be protected and given space to grow in." Yet even on the basis of non-possessive love, there remains a profound separation between the lovers: they are vulnerable to painful disagreements, to stumbling upon "areas of intense concern" which could "throw us into fierce combat."

In the examples, what soothes and avoids such combat is the work of discrimination, which I prefer to call attention. The lovers pay attention to available data and stories about the Civil War, only to discover reality is more complex and indeterminate than the conflict between them can allow. The meeting which takes place as a heart circle relies on its participants to pay attention to each other, since it is only through that attention that they can know their concerns are being raised, give adequate consideration to the concerns of others, and develop a consensus as to the way forward.

The theme of attention is also important, in different ways, for reading Buber, Levinas and Derrida. Buber's I-Thou relationship appears to be a pre- or nonverbal turn and address, an act of focusing and directing attention toward another as such. For Levinas, attention appears more in the account of recognition, the question of which faces can be seen as faces and how one would know when one confronts another. Finally, Derrida's necessary discrimination, while it is without doubt the operation of a concept to exclude or divide, implicates the work of attention and recognition in the question exactly *how* any given concept excludes.

Were I to reconceive subject-SUBJECT consciousness, I would do so less through questions of subjects and identities and more through the question of consciousness. It seems to me that to be conscious of someone or something requires a minimal operation of mind. We pay attention in some minimal way even when we react "unconsciously," through the operation of reflex and embodiment, and in a fuller way when we respond consciously. A possible ethic, then, accepting its own inherent limitation and finitude, would be a practice of paying attention. Innumerable others there will also be, other others who fall outside the horizon of consciousness, but the inherent failure of responsibility does not at all imply an inherent inadequacy of mind to any particular situation. Circumstance implies proximity and consequence; it implies that when determining the issues at hand, not all guesses are equal. Unless one pays attention, after all, how can one understand others and the matters they raise?

## Conclusion

In her *Dialectic of Sex*, a radical amalgam of Freud and Marx widely influential in framing 1970s second wave feminism, Shulamith Firestone argued that the nuclear family amounted to a form of torture. Parents were indentured servants forced to imprison their children within the confines of a single home. After the revolution, children might be conceived in test tubes, incubated in laboratories and raised in socialist collectives (Firestone 2003). For his part, Harry Hay also read Marx together with Freud, adding mysticism and mythology as appropriate. He did not usually advocate quite such a violent revolution, nor often speculate as to what form might have replaced the nuclear family. Yet if he had, a more distributed, porous collective might well have played a part. The challenge of such collectives, implicit in Firestone's vision as much as radical faerie debates around gender, is the challenge of emergent change, of incommensurability. Which bodies would be recognized, desired? Which would be consigned unto death? We have no guarantee that genders will remain the same, for instance; indeed, the evidence suggests that they will shift and transform, any polarity returning reconfigured such that its terms and associations might be nearly unrecognizable. We will never be sure whether that polarity we seem to observe in the world is the polarity of memory, of habit, or whether our observation is not more accurately recollection, an insistence on shaping the world into the mold of the past rather than engaging it anew. The spectre of utopia haunts all such projects.

Family forms continue to change. We have seen that the nuclear family itself is a relatively recent invention, product of urban real estate patterns and the industrial division of labor. In the United States following the oil crisis of 1974, two incomes become more and more necessary to support a home and children. New forms of migration emerge. The gay rights movement, by demonstrating the occasional imbrication of sexual minorities with corporate capital, quickly wins widespread support. Indeed, sexual freedom in private and romantic freedom in public become the index of liberal tolerance, simultaneously enabling diverse queer lifeways and underwriting projects of imperial aggression against Islamic countries (Puar 2006). Many queer critics question the movement's headlong rush toward marriage and military service, asking why we should wish to participate in social institutions which had for so long served as instruments of our exclusion and subjugation. As Michael Warner argues in *The Trouble with Normal*, that which appeared to be the ordinary, natural organization of sex, the family and intimacy was in fact a historical phenomenon, a trend that had arisen in the recent past and that might before too long pass way. If the corporate gay and lesbian rights movement allowed rights and access for a privileged few, what was the price for this place at the table? Who else might be left waiting outside? Often, the ticket price has been a disavowal of others who are suffering, of sex radicals and of the poor. Any acceptance of the "good" gays, monogamous couples who drape themselves in the moral flag of sexual propriety, came as a result of redrawing the line of judgment. The effect was to continue the social control of others' bodies and sexual activity (Warner 1999).

On the other hand, the alternative has not exactly been an anarchist utopia of sexual autonomy, a space in which sex and romance can be freely re-imagined, engaged purely as matters of choice. At times, it is true, it seems as though this is a faerie ideal: follow one's bliss, treat sexual desires as the yearnings of the heart, celebrate one's body and one's sexuality. As we have seen, gatherings owe much to the creation of spaces of seeming sexual autonomy, counterpublic spaces in which the rules of sexual and romantic ethics differ from

those of the hegemonic nuclear family. Yet the promised gratification may not be delivered, and indeed its delivery correlates all-too-closely with the hegemonic organization of desire. Under prevailing conditions of neoliberalism, “hooking up” has become the normative mode of sexual engagement for college students and young adult heterosexuals as well as homosexuals (Kalish and Kimmel 2011). There is now a market in intimacy in which the chance of a desirable mate depends on a sexual competition that is not so much a matter of a freedom to have sex as it is a freedom *from* any guarantee of long-term care and intimacy. If it is true that sexuality grips us from within and without, if eros is indeed fundamental to being, then they lie beyond mere choice. Whether we act or not, we are compelled. The freedom to express ourselves sexually is then the freedom to abandon ourselves to compulsion, and this in turn can breed dissatisfaction. The autonomy of the gathering can easily become the desperation of the hunt for the perfect mate. Success in the game depends on knowing when to break the rules of traditional courtship and when to follow them. Youth, wealth and beauty count at faerie gatherings. Youth, wealth and beauty like to have fun. The apparent freedom of sexual neoliberalism may be in actuality the colonization of intimacy by logics of war and market.

Responding to such a shift in sexual cultures, several recent theorists consider the figure of the stranger and the situation of estrangement. What is it when the intimacy of the conjugal couple is foreclosed? What kinds of families do we make of friends, when those friends are unappealing or off-limit as lovers? Perhaps shared estrangement is a deeper component of intimate connection than we have hitherto perceived (Roach 2012). Perhaps the emergence of intimacy with strangers has come to serve as more solid evidence of our own worth as individuals than the tightly-enmeshed mutual dependencies of traditional forms.

It remains to be seen when this new chapter in sexual ethics amounts to a beneficial adaptation. There is no question, however, where our journey together must lead in time: to sickness, old age and death, to infirmity and dissolution, to the decay of all capacities and the fraying of ends. Perhaps, for men (and beings of all genders) whose intimate lives revolve around a seemingly endless series of hookups, radical faerie sociality can offer a degree of consistency. When one sees the same people year after year, when past flings are not avoided but treated as extensions of oneself, as members of a common brotherhood, one creates ties that, in time, come to be as consequential and as materially and existentially relevant as any others. I have argued that the radical faeries are a kind of extended family, that they constitute an emerging cultural formation with its own strongly-felt identities, mythologies, practices, rites of passage and unspoken rules. The real test of whether the faeries are indeed gathering kin, however, is whether they manage to remain involved in each others' lives outside the space of celebration. Do radical faeries care for each other even when it is inconvenient to do so? Do they address not just each others' sexual and spiritual needs but also their economic and material needs?

This dissertation set out to explore a problem and wound up by posing more problems. Along the way, we have had occasion to investigate a range of ethics in (re)formation amongst some radical faeries. While the first few chapters remain overly abstract, focusing primarily on an anthropological argument for a processual ontology of kinship, the last few chapters provide a series of examples through which we can explore the question of the production of kin(ds), of identity and diversity, of sameness and difference. Why is it that, if radical faeries are so radical and so liberated, so many of them come to seem so much the

same? What practices and environments conduce to this kind of sameness? How do we recognize our kin, and in doing so, make kinship ties anew? How do we recognize others and make way for their difference, not collapsing them into the same? How do we engage the time of monsters, when it seems as though no communication is possible, or address the lack of neutral mediation between us? Rather than start from a presumed opposition between friends and family, I have asked what conditions give rise to both formulations, and shown that common needs and experiences drive kinmaking activities whether “fictive” or not.

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