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Humility, Trauma, and Solidarity: The Rhetoric of Sensitivity

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Humility, Trauma, and Solidarity: The Rhetoric of Sensitivity

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Dedication

To myself — *elle aura obligé*,

and for my femme, for the eddies and torrents.

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Humility, Trauma, and Solidarity: The Rhetoric of Sensitivity

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Humility, Trauma, and Solidarity: The Rhetoric of Sensitivity enters a conversation in rhetorical studies about the agency, effectivity, and conditions of possibility for the rhetorical subject. This project is an exploration in several registers of the preoriginary affectability that Diane Davis has called "rhetoricity." Rhetoricity exposes existents to affection from outside in a structure of addressivity that is fundamentally rhetorical. Prior to individuation as a subject, rhetoricity implies that beings are differentiated first through response to an address or call. This extra-symbolic affection brings one into being as the subject of a rhetorical relation. This project aims to inscribe the valences of rhetoricity: its traumatic force, and even violence, but also its generation of the possibility for becoming otherwise. These valences are charted through chapters on reading and addiction, sensitivity, and identification in hypertext video games.

In "Addiction, Humility, and Rhetoricity," I explore the uncontrollable relationality of addiction through a reading of David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*. I argue that an addictive habit, even reading habits, indicate the radical affectability of the subject. Rhetorical exposedness is a route of access to one's interiority that cannot be totally blocked off. The next chapter examines the public controversy over the use of trigger warnings in college classes. "Sensitive Students" argues that students' experiences

of trauma mark an exposition to affection that makes teaching possible. In the final chapter, "Twisted Together: Twine Games and Solidarity," I argue that a set of hypertext video games made by transgender women are contesting the dominant values of gamer culture. By confronting players with an alterity internal to identification, these games erode the centrality of identification to rhetoric and forward solidarity as a shared relation to difference instead.

This project traces the ways that gender marks and even constitutes the rhetorical structure of address. Sensitivity, receptivity, and exposedness are sites of gendering marks that persist and reverberate into the very formation of the rhetorical subject. This project opens a way for rhetoricians to frame exposedness as a rhetorical moment of ethicity: as being outside oneself, being beside oneself, and being for others.

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I could not possibly speak of the Other, make of the Other a theme, pronounce the Other as object, in the accusative. I can only, I must only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category, a case of speech, but, rather the bursting forth, the very raising up of speech.

— Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*

[T]o address you in writing or speech... is already to touch the limit; and to be addressed, to 'receive' an address, is first of all to be exposed to that exposedness.

— Diane Davis, *Inessential Solidarity*

Introduction: Rhetoricity, Sensitivity, and Solidarity

Exposition... is the condition of that whose essence or destination consists in being presented; given over, offered to the outside, to others, and even to the self.

— Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*

OVERVIEW

In recent years, rhetoricians have worked to expand the scope described by "rhetoric" from individualist or even agentive speech and writing to include those forces and effects that exceed symbolic meaning alone. Rhetoricians have taken this post-human turn in several different directions: toward the sensory (Hawhee, "Rhetoric's Sensorium"), such as visual or sonic rhetoric (Gunn); toward the non-human, from animals to object-oriented rhetorics (Kennedy, "A Hoot in the Dark"; Brown, "The Machine"); to the extra-human, addressing deities or the dead (Mailloux; Ballif); and also away from the human, to a rhetoric whose priority calls into question the very definition and ground of "the human" (Davis, *Inessential Solidarity*). In my view, what has come to be called "post-humanism" includes many different and disparate attempts to explore what can be done with and by rhetorical theory after the deconstruction of the humanist subject.

This project, *Humility, Trauma, and Solidarity: The Rhetoric of Sensitivity*, enters a conversation in rhetorical studies about the openness, or the conditions of possibility for, the rhetorical subject. Diane Davis's 2010 *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and*

Foreigner Relations challenged the field to "push beyond the (merely) epistemological concerns that have for so long circumscribed our theories of persuasion" and begin working "toward the examination of a 'nearly existential' affectability, persuadability, [and] responsivity" (166). *Inessential Solidarity* lays out what Davis calls a "rhetoric of responsibility" that positions rhetoric as "first philosophy" (14). Davis draws heavily on the ethical theory of Emmanuel Levinas, which positioned ethics prior to ontology and epistemology, "[i]n contradistinction to the entire history of philosophy" (170 n11). Carrying out Levinasian lines of thinking to their logical limits, Davis argues that a preoriginary affectability exposes existents to affection from outside, an exposedness Davis calls *rhetoricity*. Frequently figured in the philosophical tradition as a call, this affection obligates the "one" whom it affects, although no "one" is yet properly there to hear it. The subject responds, and in fact *is a response* to this calling. It is this "call-and-response structure" that makes what Levinas calls "ethics" first of all rhetorical. Davis contends that a "responsibility to respond, a preoriginary *rhetorical* imperative, is the condition for any conscious subject rather than the other way around" (106).

Humility, Trauma, and Solidarity: The Rhetoric of Sensitivity is an exploration of rhetoricity in several registers. Rhetoricity exposes existents in a relation of addressivity, prior to individuation as a subject. Examining rhetoricity demands, as Davis argues, scholarship that "reconsider[s] both the role and the scope of 'affect' in the language relation, which would in turn require us to reconsider what this 'language relation' involves and who or what might be engaged in it" (166). *The Rhetoric of Sensitivity* departs from this imperative, or call. Its aim is to inscribe the valences of rhetoricity: its traumatic force, and even violence, but also its generation of the possibility for becoming otherwise. These valences are charted through chapters on reading and addiction, sensitivity or feeling too much, and identification in hypertext video games.

The Rhetoric of Sensitivity takes a feminist approach to post-human rhetorical theory, tracing the ways that gender marks, even constitutes the rhetorical structure of address. Gender leaves its marks everywhere; inscribes itself on all kinds of texts, not only the body of the human. *The Rhetoric of Sensitivity* takes up sensitivity, receptivity, and exposedness as sites of these gendering marks that persist and reverberate into the very formation of the ethical and rhetorical subject. Gender enters this mix as a trope, which is *not* to say a metaphor: rather gender is a *turn*, a styling. Tracing this trope calls for a refiguring of the rhetorical structure of address, a rephrasing in gendered terms, in order to expose both the violence and the possibilities gender holds for rhetorical theory. Feminist rhetorical theory must read gender's marks without simply reinscribing them. In this project, I argue that rhetorical exposedness, receptivity, and sensitivity are gendered figures for the ethical position in the structure of address; exposedness is the condition of possibility for receiving an ethical call, and so for coming into being as a rhetorical subject. *The Rhetoric of Sensitivity* argues that this structure of address depends upon an exposedness or sensitivity to affection from outside oneself. Like a telephone wire, for the call to come in at all, the line has to be open.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the review of literature that follows, I aim to detail the key texts that have shaped my thinking about rhetoric, ethics, and gender, and about the centrality of exposedness for each of these domains. The philosophers and rhetoricians, including Emmanuel Levinas, Diane Davis, Erin Rand, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Avital Ronell share what I think Davis helps us see as a rhetorician's concern for address, response-ability, and the call. The queer theorists, including Jack Halberstam, Eve Sedgwick, José Muñoz, and Ann Cvetkovich demonstrate how to center gender as a category of analysis: wary of reifying the violence of prevailing norms while nevertheless engaging in contest over what gender itself signifies. Each of these writers and thinkers, and perhaps Jacques Derrida most of all, cross the disciplinary boundaries I've just carved out for them, demonstrating that even work situated in a single field is often fed by many streams. I hope that my approach brings these authors into conversation with one another in a way that demonstrates the importance of queer feminism for rhetorical theory, on the one hand, as well as the importance of a rhetorical orientation to queer theory on the other.

Rhetorical Ethics

Davis's rhetoric of responsibility can itself be read as a response, in part, to a calling in the theory of ethics articulated by Emmanuel Levinas. In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas articulates a theory of ethics that radically departs from the Western tradition in which an individual agent exercises his will and chooses between ethical alternatives. Levinas argues instead that the being of an existent is hounded, driven into itself by an exposure to alterity. Being has no spontaneous or autonomous control over this exposure; rather, a singular being touches other singularities in an unmediated relation that Levinas calls proximity. In proximity, a singular being is affected by alterity at zero distance. Levinas is not shy about calling this proximity a persecution. An existent is absolutely passive; one suffers the affection of the other as "an undergoing, or a Passion" ("Substitution" 82). It is this passion that puts one on assignment as an "I," a subject responsible for the other, "backed up against the self, to the point of being substituted for all that drives you into this non-Place" (90). Before any freedom, one is put on assignment, made responsible for the other by an irremissible passion. Chapter 4 of *Otherwise Than Being*, an essay Levinas developed/returned to over decades, is named for this movement: "Substitution." I quote here from the 1968 essay version.

In "Substitution," Levinas argues that being is confined in itself, driven into itself though a movement of withdrawal, "an exile *in itself*," over which being has no autonomous or spontaneous control (85). The singularity of one's being does not come from any kind of individualism or sovereignty. For Levinas, one's singularity is the result of a relation to other singular beings, a touching through which one's own limit emerges, an unmediated affection by an/other that Levinas calls *proximity.* Proximity in Levinas's vocabulary should not be understood as the happy (appropriative) discovery of difference we might expect from an Enlightenment subject. Proximity in Levinas is an exposure from which one cannot be shielded and cannot shrink back. We can't really say that one "experiences" proximity, since it affects a singularity at zero-distance, without mediation, in short, without the distance or capacity to understand, articulate, or master as we do "experiences." Rather, one suffers the non-experience or the trauma of proximity, says Levinas, as "an undergoing, or a Passion" (82).[1]

In fact, Levinas goes so far as to call this affection of singular being by another a "persecution" in which "subjectivity is thrown back on itself—in itself" (88) and one's selfhood obtains from the "impossibility of slipping away" (87, 89). Ethical subjectivity for Levinas is given to a singular being as a result of this persecuting affection by an originless, "an-archic" exterior—by an other (82). Before one can take up a subjectivity, become a subject or an "I" in language, one is first already in the accusative, the direct object of the other's affection. Levinas argues that one's being is never one's *own* being. To be an "I," he maintains, is to be "an original non-quiddity—no one—clothed as a being by a pure borrowing that masks its nameless singularity by bestowing it with a role" (85). Out of undifferentiated being, one is assigned a role. One's subjectivity is given, issued in the midst of one's total inaction, what Levinas calls one's radical passivity. One's unlimited susceptibility to affection by the other entails, argues Levinas, an "anarchic passivity" in which "the self [is] called to being" but yet "is not there to hear the call which it obeys" (89).

He chooses the word "an-archic" to indicate that his description of ethical subjectivity is not an account of its emergence from primary origins, but rather of its preoriginary conditions of possibility. Jacques Derrida called Levinas's work "an ethics of ethics" because it aims to account for the possibility of any ethical decision, any occurrence at all in which the self allows the other to come first, "even," argues Levinas, "the simple 'after you sir'" ("Violence and Metaphysics 111; "Substitution" 91). Even this banal act of self-sacrifice, of according priority to the other at one's own expense, would not be possible unless it were the very structure of subjectivity as such. So the sense Levinas gives to "anarchy" comes precisely from the originlessness of his ethics: from the being of proximity, exposure, and passivity instead of sovereignty, self-possession, and *arche* (80).

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[1] In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes that encounter with the Other is "a traumatism of astonishment" (71), and Davis, citing this passage, describes it as "a brush with inassimilable exteriority that reveals an irreparable structure of exposure—but without offering anything one could call *knowledge* and without closing the impassible distance between 'us'" (52).

Levinas's ethical subject does not have the freedom to make a choice, to decide without coercion between the self and the demand of the other. One is already responsible. Levinas writes, "To be a self is to be responsible before having done anything. It is in this sense to substitute oneself for others" (94). Before having done anything: before any action, any power, any freedom of choice. Levinas argues that this (non)condition of extreme passivity makes the ethical subject first of all a hostage: "The word 'I' means to be answerable for everything and everyone" (90). "I" am responsible, not by my free election, but by my irremissible exposure as a being. Subjectivity is assigned to me so that I may answer a call I have not properly heard, the call to being. Let me underline that for Levinas, the responsibility to the other is only ever mine: there is no ethical principle or injunction *for me to enforce*. Only "[t]he Other (*Autrui*) is the end," writes Levinas, "and me, I am a hostage" (94).

So Levinasian ethics—the ethics of ethics—are not a set of prescriptions about how you should live, or what is to be done. They are a description of the radical passivity which underwrites ethical subjectivity as such. "Substitution" is thus not a self-sacrificing act of a heroic "I"; it is not an act at all (91). It is a passivity and a passion, an unevadable responsibility, that conditions all other sacrifice, all "pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity in the world—even the little there is" (91).

Davis argues that the exposedness to affection from outside described by Levinas as proximity is a rhetorical quality that is shared by all existents, or beings. Davis demonstrates that the ability to respond, one's response-ability or responsibility for the other, is given to the ethical subject by their exposure *in language*. That is, Levinas's structure of response is first of all a structure of address, in which a call is put out, in some sense received, and without exception responded to. (For Davis, even a non-response constitutes a response, the way you might ignore a talkative stranger on the bus: without the affection of the stranger's address, there would be nothing for you to willfully ignore). In fact, the imperative Levinas locates, the demand that "I" respond to the influence or affection of the other, is itself a *rhetorical* imperative. This rhetorical quality at the heart of being—Davis calls it *rhetoricity*—is critical for our beginning to understand the import of Levinas's privileging of the radical passivity of the subject over and against the action hero of ethics given by philosophy's western canon.

If the subject of ethics were active, in charge, making his own decisions as autonomously as Kant's purely rational being, *then he could not be exposed to the influence of the other*. (The masculine pronoun here is no grammatical accident. The privileges of subjectivity here are the privileges of the masculine.) In a Heideggerian register, there is no Being-for-itself that is not first a being-for-the-other. In Davis's rhetorical register, radical passivity as Levinas explains it points to an irrepressible rhetoricity that obtains between beings, even defining their singularity as beings. So it is rhetoric—at its core, addressed language—that is thus the fundamental relation through which ethical responsibility is both formed (or better, given) and then taken up.

Levinas's Gender Trouble

I want to reflect for a moment on the disparate potential readings of gender one may draw from Levinas's work. In a footnote, Davis calls out "the potentially androcentric presumption" Levinas makes in figuring alterity as "the feminine" in his early work *Existence and Existents*. She remarks that "the enormity of Levinas's gender trouble begins right there" (184 n18). Citing the feminist criticism of Levinas by "Luce Irigaray, Tiny Chanter, Jacques Derrida, and many, many others," Davis takes note of the way Levinas complicates this figure in his more mature work (185 n18).

Derrida's criticism of the work of gender in Levinas begins in his "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" first published in French in 1964. In the footnote that closes the essay, Derrida writes in part that Levinas's "*Totality and Infinity* pushes the respect for dissymmetry so far that it seems to us impossible, essentially impossible, that it could have been written by a woman. Its philosophical subject is man (*vir*)" (320 n92). Implied by this remark is a feminist criticism of a bias toward virility that for Derrida redounds not to Levinas as an individual but to the language of metaphysics itself. "[P]erhaps metaphysical desire is essentially virile," writes Derrida, "even in what is called woman" (320 n92). I think it is possible to read Derrida's criticism as implicating metaphysics with/in the operation of a gendering machine, something that produces and opposes virility and/to femininity, and that privileges presence *as* virility. If so, Derrida's critique may open the question of the priority of gender (which is also the privilege of presence, of dissymmetry, and so perhaps is priority itself) as well as the question of how Levinas's work ultimately challenges or topples the philosophical subject identified in this note.

Derrida returns to this note, citing it in his 1980 "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am" (40). Derrida again prods Levinas on the question of the feminine, arguing at once that Levinas's work "has always rendered secondary, derivative, and subordinate" not femininity itself but rather "alterity as sexual difference" as opposed to the "alterity of a sexually non-marked wholly other"—that's on the one hand, but on the other hand Derrida argues that this one "who is *not yet marked* is *already* found to be marked by masculinity" (40).[2] Drawing on this essay, Davis seems to conclude with Derrida that "the language of E. L. demonstrates a consistent and disappointing allergy to the *elle*"—although, she continues: "it is not necessary to conclude that Levinasian ethics demonstrates that same allergy" (144).

And yet, something of the gendering of this Levinasian radical passivity persists, more than an accident of the theorist's bias. To open a feminist line of inquiry on rhetorical ethics in pursuit of an analysis of gender, we must first admit that although Levinas's ethical subject looks very different from the subject of supreme mastery and virility that his theory challenges, Levinas too is implicated in a certain privileging of the masculine: "Even the simple 'after you sir.'"

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[2] I've made a Twine game out of the closing passage of Derrida's essay, playable online at http://kendallgerdes.com/twine/atvm.html. Each time Levinas's initials appear in sequence in Derrida's text, a hyperlink takes players to one of Derrida's citations in this work of Levinas.

Femininity, Alterity, and Queer Passivity

For further warrant in that investigation, I turn to Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam's queer approach asks what happens to feminism where the category of "woman" is no longer stable or essential—a question all feminists should have arrived at by now. Halberstam draws on an archive of postcolonial feminist literature and performance art ranging from Jamaica Kincaid to Saidiya Hartman to Kara Walker and Yoko Ono, arguing that these artists provide "an ongoing commentary on fragmentariness, submission, and sacrifice" as excessive and politicized forms of femininity (139). Halberstam points us toward another iteration of "radical passivity" that he argues "allows for the inhabiting of femininity with a difference" (144).

Halberstam argues that the "radical passivity" of queer femininity is a site of "a critique of the organizing logic of agency and subjectivity itself" (131). In responding to the call for an intellectualism that "can learn how not to know the other," and "how not to sacrifice the other on behalf of [my] own sovereignty" (128), Halberstam proposes radical passivity as the basis for a "shadow feminism." Shadow feminism "offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing, and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project" (124). Instead of pursuing equality or inclusion, shadow feminism side-steps the ensnaring humanism of liberal feminisms and "unravel[s] their logics from within" (124). A shadow feminism is one that infiltrates the masculinist version of subjectivity and throws it into crisis.

Through Levinas, we might read shadow feminism as a disruptive encounter with alterity as such—figured as the feminine—that deactivates the logic of agentive power and destabilizes the subject. Such an encounter in Levinas's vocabulary is an encounter with "the face." It returns me to the preoriginary scene of my radical passivity, my utter vulnerability to the other's affection, and my persecutory responsibility *to respond*. It shuts off my interpreting machine and so gives me back over to the non-experience of proximity, exposure, and substitution. Though articulated at another level of experience than Levinasian ethics, Halberstam argues that shadow feminism may also lead us away from the masculinism of humanist subjectivity, and even away from being, so defined, at all. Halberstam asks, "Can we think about this refusal of self as an antiliberal act, a revolutionary statement of pure opposition that does not rely upon the liberal gesture of defiance but accesses another lexicon of power and speaks another language of refusal?" (139). I think Levinas gives us an ethics that says *yes*—although our passivity is unequally distributed, it is ultimately, inescapably shared. There is no power that can eradicate my exposure in absolute passivity, and therefore, no power that can free me from my responsibility to respond.[3]

Halberstam follows the traces of gender on radical passivity by exploring the self-destructive, even masochistic valences of shadow feminist performance art. He rejects a comparison of Yoko Ono's 1964 "Cut Piece," in which the artist allows the audience to use scissors to remove all of her clothing, to male performance artist Chris Burden. About this comparison Halberstam argues: "Male masochism certainly stakes out a territory very different from female performances of unraveling. While the male masochist inhabits a kind of heroic antiheroism by refusing social privilege and offering himself up Christ-like as a martyr for the cause, the female masochist's performance is far more complex and offers a critique of the very ground of the human" (139). Although Halberstam draws the contrast here in terms of male and female, significantly the analysis hinges on the relative position of a performance artist to social privilege. Deliberately ceding the privileges of masculinity (through submission to masochism) produces a "heroic antiheroism," at least at one level reinscribing the privileged masculinity in heroism. If, however, one does not have access to those privileges to cede, then submission, pleasuring in pain, self-sacrifice and self-destruction all take on murkier (and perhaps more frustrating) significations that Halberstam argues "critique…the very ground of the human." The critique stems from the female (or feminine) artist's refusal to want that which she is not really offered anyway: power, self-possession, even self-preservation. However far the path of Halberstam's argument may lay from the path of Levinas's, their criticism comes to this shared point: the woman (or the self) is not first of all for-itself, not active or initiating, not free. She is first of all exposed, persecuted, responsible for the other before having done anything.

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[3] Death, perhaps, which Derrida has called death "a certain experience for the survivor of the 'without-response.'" In remarks delivered at the funeral of Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida holds, "But even this nothingness presents itself as a 'sort of impossibility' or, more precisely, and interdiction. The face of the Other forbids me from killing; it says to me 'you shall not kill,' even if this possibility remains presupposed by the interdiction that makes it possible" ("Adieu" 5).

But my statement of this central claim conceals slippages: what are the different implications of describing a self, a woman, a female, a femininity? Perhaps the most obvious question raised is whether Levinas's self (or same) could really receive a feminine gender, even in the form of a pronoun (although Davis and Derrida seem to leave Levinasian ethics a small space for this possibility, even where Levinas won't, [Davis 144]). But this slippery question opens onto others: how is radical passivity effected (and affected) by its alignment with the feminine? How does its critique of the ground of the human change, between its appearance in Levinas as unmarked by gender, and its appearance in Halberstam as marked especially by femininity? And perhaps most importantly for rhetoricians, what would it mean if a foothold for feminist critique was already lodged inside the rhetorical structure of ethics as such? That is, if gender (namely, femininity) already marked the very rhetoricity of ethics, and of subjectivity as such? The exploration of these questions requires a disciplinarily promiscuous rhetoric; a *shadow rhetoric* that slips into the queer heart of ethics and exposes the traces of gender that it finds there, even when gender isn't the only or most explicit vector for analysis.

Still: It would do quite a bit of violence to simply align passivity and femininity and treat Levinas's work as if it were somehow woman-centered. In *Loser Sons: Politics and Authority*, Avital Ronell writes: "I am not insane: It would be fairly outrageous to say Levinas has run down patriarchy" (34). "[B]ut," she continues, "the points he makes are differently scored and may assert the deliberations of another exposition of patriarchy" (34). I wholeheartedly agree: another exposition still is needed. Ronell contends that Levinas, "[b]eing in some essential ways flattened out and dented by the free run of patriarchy," has "had to let go of the presumptions, to some degree ensnaring, of humanism" (34). This is a carefully measured, and mixed, assessment of Levinas's gender trouble, one that should be kept in mind when we interrogate the association of femininity with alterity and with passivity.

Queer Rhetoric and Feeling Too Much

I hope to situate this project along these lines as an exposition of those masculinist and humanist privileges that have been insinuated into our understanding of, and philosophizing about, "the" rhetorical subject. This project is, I hope, a work of queer feminist criticism, opening the question of gender even when gender as such isn't the only or most explicit vector of analysis. A place for this work in rhetorical studies has just begun to be made. In Erin Rand's 2014 book *Reclaiming Queer: Activist and Academic Rhetorics of Resistance*, Rand opens a conversation about the limits of rhetorical agency through her inquiry into the relationship between queer activism and academic queer theory. Rand's final chapter, "Risking Resistance," forwards queerness as the condition of possibility for (as well as the excessive remainder of) any exercise of rhetorical agency. Agency arises through "a founding exclusion" of queerness, Rand writes, but the trace of that exclusion therefore marks agency, leaving open a gap for resignification again. Queerness, here, is a wellspring of rhetorical invention, or as I argued in my review of *Reclaiming Queer*, "a utopian impulse whose deferral always inaugurates something (else): something other than only those effects an agent intended" (Gerdes 163). Resignifying *queer* as "the resource by which all agency is actualized," Rand positions *queer* as a rhetorical term: not a description of motives or an effect of agency's exercise, but as precisely the excess that makes this agency possible (22).

Rand's view comports with the view of what queerness is and can do—and what queer scholarship is and can do—advanced by José Esteban Muñoz in his influential book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. For Muñoz, queerness is "a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (1). That is, queerness is a way of feeling. Futurity is a crucial part of Muñoz's view of queerness, and he explicitly rejects the antisocial (or antirelational) turn in queer theory (widely associated with Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, which argues that futurity always entails a hetero-reproductive imperative). Instead, Muñoz calls for queer worldmaking in the tradition of Eve Sedgwick's reparative reading. Sedgwick's bellwether essay on "Paranoid and Reparative Reading" argues that queer people and all those who are exposed to "exemplary and spectacular, pointedly addressed" violence cannot end this violence by simply uncovering its presence—such violence is not even well-hidden (*Touching Feeling* 140).[4] Against the constraints of such violence, Muñoz writes:

> We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream

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[4] In the run up to the 2016 presidential election in the United States, less than a year after the Supreme Court's decision recognizing gay marriage in all 50 states (*Obergefell v. Hodges,* 2015), a campaign of conservative backlash began targeting transgender people through state legislatures (HB 2 in North Carolina, and HB 1523 in Mississippi, both of which became law; HB 2412 in Tennessee, which was tabled). Such laws bring the violence of essentialist gender binarism into fresh relief. The stakes of what masculinity and femininity are made to mean are still high, over and against the portrait of tolerance marriage may have seemed to some to provide. Gender is not just an abstract academic subject; it is ultimately about livability, solidarity, and survival.

> and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. (1)

Queerness, then, is not simply an undisciplined excess of feeling, but rather the something else deferred or left undone by the disciplining force of norms. Muñoz: "Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (1).

This kind of feeling is not always easy to bear. If we were to frame it in Levinasian terms, we'd find ourselves in the register of persecution, perhaps resonating with what Sedgwick called "pointedly addressed" violence. Queer people have cultural histories of negotiating and surviving such violence, and I want to briefly mark one specific such history as charted by Ann Cvetkovich in an essay entitled "Untouchability and Vulnerability: Stone Butchness as Emotional Style."[5] Cvetkovich argues that "stone style" can be read as a style of feeling that encompasses the emotional as well as the sexual. Contextualizing the sexual "untouchability" of stone butches in the historical crucible of spectacular public and police violence against butches, Cvetkovich argues that stone style is a resistance to the traumatic violation of "being made to feel" (162). But against the temptation to interpret this resistance as a macho rejection of the exposedness to feeling, or affectability, that underpins such violation, Cvetkovich contends that stone style is marked by "a performance of interiority in which the display of feeling can take the form of not showing it" (159). For the stone butch, feeling too much may be negotiated by a refusal to show feeling at all. Stone style, I think, calls into question the normative interpretation of gender that would align masculinity with stoicism, dignity, emotionlessness, and impenetrability while saddling femininity with privacy, care, receptivity, and bearing the burdens of others. At the heart of the knot of gendered norms and their revisions that is stone style, an affectability or exposure to affection from outside still obtains, and even one defined by their untouchability first of all opens to a profound and preoriginary affection, giving that one the gender assignment of responding to their queer excessive feeling.

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[5] Cvetkovich revised and extended much of this essay for a chapter on "Trauma and Touch" in her book *An Archive of Feelings*.

Exposedness is at the heart of this project. In the essay "Shattered Love," collected in Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy writes, "The heart exposes, and it is exposed" (89). The essay positions "the heart" as something like the essence of a subject, but also something that undoes the quality of being in-itself that would hold a subject as such together. The heart exposes because it is the site of a love that makes the heart not broken, but a break: "The heart is not an organ, and neither is it a faculty. It is: that *I* is broken and traversed by the other where its presence is most intimate and its life most open" (99). The subject is, Nancy argues, broken into by this touch, "and he [the subject] *is* from then on, for the time of love, opened by this slice, broken or fractured, even if only slightly" (96). "From then on," writes Nancy, "*I* is *constituted broken*" (96), and the subject is organized not around a core, but around what Nancy calls shatters. Nancy argues that this relation of touching at the limit that both joins and separates existents gives each being the site of its finitude. It is, for Nancy, an unmediated relation. For Levinas, though, "my" subjectivity is already given over to the other before "I" can in any sense be said to be(come) a subject. The immediacy of this relation without relation (since there no distance between "us" yet) is in Levinasian terms a proximity, a passion of being so severe, a persecution for the other so intense, that "my" ipseity comes out of a substitution. Maybe Nancy would permit me to say, my heart is already broken into, and given away.[6] An undeniable exposure to exteriority is already installed even at the heart, and at the heart as figure for irreducible essence. Nancy: "Love is at the heart of being" (88). So an exposition of this exposure opens the heart of my project.

METHODOLOGY

This project is one of a growing number of responses to a call Diane Davis has issued in *Inessential Solidarity* "to think the limits of reason... by tracking the implications... of a radically generalized rhetoricity" (36). Rhetoricity "precedes and exceeds symbolic intervention," Davis argues, and so a path lies open for rhetorical scholarship to go beyond the explication of symbolic meaning or exchange. Davis writes that the task of *Inessential Solidarity* is "to *expose* a solidarity that precedes symbolicity" (15, emphasis mine). In the passage I have selected as the epigraph for this dissertation, Davis explains that "to address you in writing or speech... is already to touch the limit" where, according to Nancy, "meaning [*sens*] spills out of itself" (16). Davis continues, reversing the polarity, "to be addressed, to 'receive' an address, is first of all to be exposed to that exposedness" (16).

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[6] Nancy in fact underwent a kind of substitution, receiving a heart transplant in the early 1990s (see his "L'Intrus").

My task here will have been to stay with that reversal, to offer my own address and exposition of the "inappropriable exposure" that is one's receptivity to address.[7] Exposure both conditions and exceeds the rhetorical acts around which the following chapters are organized: reading, feeling, and identifying. Davis calls this exposure "inappropriable" in part because it "insists and resists" the pose of scholarly mastery that would press it into the service of meaning. To write or speak of this exposure is necessarily to inscribe meaning, but following Davis, meaning spills out of itself and exposes the preoriginary relationality that she calls "inessential solidarity" (16); my task is to expose the exposedness that makes address possible.

I am tempted to call this method "deconstruction," but against the tendency to mistake deconstruction for a codified and simply replicable set of practices, I offer another name for what is happening here: *dehiscence*, a kind of rupturing. Its philosophical sense implies aporia, uncertainty, or inconclusiveness. And it has two biological senses: one in which a mature plant structure spontaneously splits open, and one in which a previously closed wound reopens. These senses shade my orientation to exposure; dehiscence is the work of opening something that is ready to bear fruit, or else, has been sewn shut in a way that will not hold; it isn't immediately clear which case one is working with, or what the yield will ultimately be.

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[7] Once we begin to write or speak of initiation and reception, I hold, we have already begun to write or speak of the operation of gender. A gendering machine produces masculinity and femininity, and it opposes one to the other through a binary and mutually exclusive logic. I track the gendering of addressivity like a trope, through its traces.

Exposure, then, is some kind of rupturing open; it is also a photography term for the amount of light falling on film or on a digital sensor. Different exposures of a single subject take in different amounts of light over time, creating different images. The different subjects of the chapters that follow are also different exposure of a single subject: the very exposedness that underpins address itself. It may be a bit exhausting to pursue a line of thinking to the place where it dead ends,[8] but from this point one may back up and retrace one's steps, or else take a hard turn in another direction, approaching again from another angle.

One way of describing the subjects in the chapters that follow is: addiction, trauma, escape. Or: reading too much, feeling too much, identifying too much. The excessiveness—too much—installs a queerness in this work. And, the other way around: it is queerness that has trained me to read excess and to read excessively, to feel too much for too muchness, to overidentify with the unidentifiable. To feel, to read, to identify are all rhetorical acts in which one reaches outside oneself in response to what has reached you inside. Each presupposes a prior affectability, or in place of the agentive language of "ability," a prior exposure to affection. And through each chapter or exposition, I hope to assign a slightly different meaning to exposedness: it appears alongside reading as addiction; alongside trauma as sensitivity; alongside identification as solidarity.[9]

Part of what I want to demonstrate is that this method can give us insight, but it does not in and of itself solve problems, is not available for direct translation into a practice or a pedagogy or an answer to the question, "What is to be done?" If this sounds like a concession to critics of post-structuralism, post-modernism, or post-humanism, it is because the failure of theory to meet their demand for politics is construed by these critics as a shortcoming and a fault, even a reason to reject the method. But as both Levinas and Davis are at pains to underline for us in their theorizing, ethics is anarchic. It does not guarantee a politics. That is to say: politics cannot be derived from ethics through principle. This anarchy is what gives rise to undecidability, that crucible through which we must put our thinking (or better, through which thinking must put us) before any decision takes place. My hope is that this exposition will change what we are (or first of all, I am) capable of thinking, feeling, and becoming.

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[8] Exposure is also a way of dying, a being unshelteredness against potentially intolerable extremes (of heat or cold, starvation, or dehydration).

[9] Mine is a selected trinity; other exposures are possible.

TRAJECTORY OF THE TEXT

In the chapters that follow, the rhetorical relation that exposes us in language appears alongside addiction, trauma, and video games as objects of study that help to make something about this exposedness show up, or become available for reading. Through each runs a thread that ties receptivity to relationality.

In "Addiction, Humility, and Rhetoricity," I explore the uncontrollable relationality of addiction through a reading of David Foster Wallace's 1996 novel, *Infinite Jest*. I argue that an addictive habit, and even one's reading habits, indicate the radical affectability of the subject. To be a rhetorical subject is to be exposed in language, open to affection from outside oneself. This exposure means that no rhetorical subject can be truly and impenetrably closed, but is always exposed to address, and under the influence of the *pharmakon* that is language. This rhetorical exposedness is like an open wound, a route of access to one's interiority that cannot be totally blocked off.

The next chapter, "Sensitive Students," examines the public controversy over the use of trigger warnings in college classes. When student activists at a few universities advocated for the use of trigger warnings, a backlash of opinion pieces shouted down the legitimate concern that such warnings were designed to address. I zero in on the response of Jack Halberstam, queer theorist and public intellectual, who panned students for seeking protection from the university as a neoliberal institution. "Sensitive Students" argues that the experiences of trauma to which trigger warnings respond indicate the exposedness to affection from the outside that Halberstam and others claim is threatened by trigger warnings. I counter that this exposedness, rather than needing to be defended from student activists or feminists or both, is the condition of possibility for both the relationality and individuation that make teaching possible.

In "Twisted Together: Twine Games and Solidarity," I turn to a set of video games made with Twine, an open-source text-based tool recently hailed by *The New York Times Magazine* as the "video game technology for all" (Hudson). Twine's features as a game design platform have made it a popular choice for game designers and authors to contest the dominant values of gamer culture. The success of a Twine game called *Depression Quest*, for example, touched off a campaign of gendered intimidation and violence known as #GamerGate because of the challenges *Depression Quest* presented to the highly policed definition of a video game. The permutations in what counts as a video game that Twine has made possible make visible the violence of identification and confront players instead with an alterity internal to identity, the shared relation to difference that is solidarity.

In each of these chapters, rhetorical exposedness is figured a bit differently: first as humility, then as sensitivity, and finally as solidarity. Each one of these figures shows some different quality or consequence of rhetorical exposedness. It is my aim that this project intervenes in the debate in rhetorical studies over agency and effectivity by arguing for the priority of rhetoric to ethics. *The Rhetoric of Sensitivity* opens a way for rhetoricians to frame exposedness as a rhetorical moment of ethicity, being outside oneself, being beside oneself, and being for others. This project concludes with a reflection on the difficulty of doing posthuman feminist critique, and closes by sounding a call for rhetoricians to consider themselves crucial to the future of feminism, exponents of gender as a condition of possibility for the rhetorical structure of address itself.

Chapter 1: Addiction, Humility, and Rhetoricity[10]

Offering a discreet if spectacular way out, an atopical place of exit, drugs forced *decision* upon the subject.

— Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars*

What looks like the cage's exit is actually the bars of the cage....The entrance says *EXIT*. There isn't an exit.

— David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

The figure of the addict is contradictory. An addict is someone whose choices have both impaired and exceeded their own control. So deeply under the influence of whatever substance happens to be the object of their addiction, they can no longer accept influence from anyone else, any other person, or part of the world. The addict is someone so mastered by something exterior to them that they are enclosed with it in their own interiority. Addiction is a figure, then, for possible blockages along this route of connection between interior and exterior, between subject and world.

This chapter takes the figure of addiction for a way of exploring the connection, exposedness, or sensitivity that rhetorician Diane Davis has called "rhetoricity." In her book *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations*, Davis describes rhetoricity as "an affectability or persuadability" that "precedes and exceeds symbolic intervention," and that "is at work prior to and in excess of any shared meaning" (19, 26). Rhetoricity is a condition of possibility for rhetoric, or what we might call rhetorical praxis; before persuasion or affection can take place, a prior rhetoricity must obtain: whoever is touched or moved must first of all be able to be touched or moved. Rhetoricity is an ability to be under an outside influence. It is the possibility of the outside reaching inside.

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[10] A version of this chapter has been published as "Habit-Forming: Humility and the Rhetoric of Drugs" in *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 48.3 (Fall 2015): 338-359.

Against the figure of the addict as closed off, this chapter positions reading as a kind of drug habit: an intoxication with alterity, a welcoming within of foreign bodies, of influence from outside. Like an addiction, reading is a habit with an insatiable demand for more. The ethical problem such habits pose is not how to accomplish a better persuasion, a more moral identification; it is how to make a disconnection, how to institute an ethical distance between the subject and the substance, to put some critical friction into the relation between you and what you consume. Following a view of reading articulated by Avital Ronell, I argue that a reading habit is a way of encountering difference and opening to exteriority: reading is a mode of engagement with alterity.

In the introduction to *Reading Ronell*, a collection of essays devoted to Ronell's work, Diane Davis writes that, "after [Ronell], there can be no past tense to understanding and so no end to reading: after her, that is, one can never *have read* anything" (3). Never having read, never getting to be done with reading is a problem that has also been provoked by a writer not frequently put into conversation with Ronell: David Foster

Wallace.[11] Wallace's prolix writing style daunts readers, and his novels, especially his 1996 opus *Infinite Jest* (or *IJ*), have sometimes been used to figure all the books one didn't read or can't finish.[12] Ronell and Wallace both have written about habits, drugs, and literature, but the connection this chapter traces between them is the thread of humility. I can't begin to tell you how humbling this project has been, because to do so would make me sound proud of my humility. I can only say that I am responding to a call, one that I thought I heard in *Infinite Jest*. I can never be sure that *IJ* was (or wasn't) addressed to me. But then the call of humility would come to me, if it does, obliquely.[13] Maybe it was meant for someone else, or maybe I am hearing things. But enough of this imitative yarn—who am I trying to be, anyway?[14]—let me explicate this influence I am under.

Ronell's texts, frequently occupied with the positing power of language (and with the passivity of humans in the face of this power), are themselves crafted with a playful inventiveness, a performative decentering of her authority as philosopher. Wallace's writing, too, experiments with the limits of fiction, throwing the engines of language into over-drive with a style sometimes described as "maximalism." Ronell's writing is imbricated with a kind of humility not described in scholarship that treats humility as either a moral characteristic or else a deceptive or "merely rhetorical" pose. Ronell's work sounds the call for a profound humility, one she describes as the only possible ethical position in her book *Stupidity*: "I am stupid before the other" (60). Wallace's work stages this ethical position as a habit, but forming a habit is not (contra Aristotle) simply the result of repeated practice. Habit, especially in *Infinite Jest*, verges into addiction.

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[11] A recent edited collection on focuses on three of Wallace's massive novels and is entitled *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing"* (Boswell).

[12] Eve Sedgwick writes of the relation one nevertheless bears to such books that they "can therefore have a presence, or exert a pressure in our lives and thinking, that may have much or little to do with what's actually inside them"—an awesome power for an unread book ("Melanie Klein" 625).

[13] Responding to the call of humility has brought this writing into being, not as response to a "Hey, you" so much as to an "And Lo" (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 184), an audible order to "Look!"—a kind of reverse or aslant interpellation. If humility hails me, it is not to turn around but rather to *stand aside*.

[14] David Foster Wallace or Avital Ronell?

In her 1992 *Crack Wars: Addiction Literature Mania*, Ronell hotwires habit and addiction to literature, noting "the pharmacodependency with which literature has always been secretly associated" (11). Following Jacques Derrida's "Rhetoric of Drugs," Ronell develops a "narcoanalysis," an account of the exposure to exteriority named by "drugs," which is also an exposition of the subject's nonability to defend or even clearly define oneself against this affection or outside. Ronell maps this Being-on-drugs onto literature through a reading of *Madame Bovary*, describing what we might call a reading habit: solipsistic but risking contamination, foreign but taken inside and internalized, libidinal and possibly uncontrollable, literature plays out as a fatal drug. It kills by addicting: influence becomes addiction when a logic of self-replication attempts to close the channel of exposure through which the drug entered. Following *Crack Wars*, this chapter performs another narcoanalysis through a reading of Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. This reading focuses on the possibility that rhetoricity presents of thwarting the totalizing logic that structures addiction and of deforming it into a habit of humility.

Scholars interested in Wallace have widely interpreted his views on humility through the lens of a 2005 commencement speech, later published as *This is Water*. In a frequently cited passage, Wallace convokes the subject of humility as a humanistic individual, at risk of remaining self-absorbed and self-imprisoned, "a slave to your head and to your natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone" (60). I don't contest that Wallace's speeches, interviews, and criticism seem preoccupied with this kind of subject, which configures humility as an escape route from the devastating trap of solipsism. But this kind of self-enclosed subject is precisely not the kind that Wallace's literary fiction both exposes and cultivates. *Infinite Jest*'s treatment of humility and its subjects more closely resembles Ronell's *Crack Wars* than Wallace's *This is Water* insofar as humility emerges at the point where the self-replicating logic of addiction fails to foreclose.

Enough literary scholarship on Wallace has been produced in the years since his death in 2008 to fill four edited collections and establish an annual Wallace conference (Hering; Cohen and Konstantinou; Boswell and Burn; Boswell). But this article cannot follow the precedent of literary criticism that treats *Infinite Jest* as an object to be understood. Rather, the object of a narcoanalysis "resists the revelation of its truth to the point of retaining the status of absolute otherness" (Ronell, *Crack Wars* 49). *Infinite Jest* resists a hermeneutic interpretation, and so the yields of this reading will have been other than a more complete understanding.[15] In this article *Infinite Jest* plays the role of an informant. Literature "in the widest sense," Ronell argues, "has a tradition of uncovering abiding structures of crime and ethicity with crucial integrity" (11).[16] But, Ronell cautions, such informants are "nobody's fools" (11). If the text will "talk," I hazard, it will not be to the authorities, not to parties interested in mastering the text by enforcing the stability of its meaning. *Infinite Jest* rather appears here as a supplier of the rhetorical substance Ronell calls "tropium," that is, a relationship of citation by which one text intoxicates another. *IJ* intoxicates this chapter; it introduces, through tropium, an "outside already inside" (29).

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[15] After Wallace's death by suicide in September 2008, the insinuation that chemistry (neurological, pharmacological) could be used determinatively in interpreting his writing circulated, in my opinion ignobly. Against this particular violence of understanding stands the gift of Karen Green's 2013 memoir *Bough Down*. Green, who was married to Wallace, inscribes grief as a nonexperience, inappropriable to meaning. Humility, I think, calls for an analysis that proceeds according to this latter spirit.

[16] As a work of fiction, some might prefer *Infinite Jest* stay confined to the realm of nonserious language. See Austin, but especially Searle. But as Derrida argues in *Limited Inc*, no "*simple* logic" separates serious

Infinite Jest doesn't come with a warning label, yet many have suggested that reading *IJ* may be habit-forming (Cioffi). *IJ* is a novel about many different kinds of addiction, and at the same time it has the power to make its readers feel addicted to the book itself. It's not clear, when one reaches the end of the novel, exactly what has even happened. And/but to concentrate on *IJ*'s meaning in search of a reconciliation, redemption, or reassembly of its fragmentary pieces into narrative whole is to close off the possibility of practicing reading otherwise. To keep reading requires a habit of reading through unreconciled contradiction, without the telos of redemption, by playing with all the available arrangements of the story's shatters. A habit of reading otherwise, I propose, results from the force of humility. Humility invites and demands that one alter one's disposition toward texts, producing by the force of habit a willingness to not know and not understand, but not to stop reading either.

IJ is a demanding read—mentally, emotionally, even physically. At 1,079 pages, including 388 "notes and errata," some of which go on for pages and some of which

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from nonserious, or fiction from nonfiction (75). The habit-forming qualities of *Infinite Jest* challenge such binary categories, although they are not simply collapsed into each other either.

themselves have notes (983), *IJ* in print has a heft of nearly two pounds. Acolytes hold *IJ* up as a virtuosic tour de force on what it means to be human, while its critics describe it as a showy, pretentious exercise in involuted postmodern literature.[17] Both camps have agreed on the difficulty of simply getting through the novel, cover to cover. *IJ* epitomizes the obstinacy of long and challenging texts. At the same time, its intellectual profile and erudite reputation may tempt a reader to desire the mastery of having read it, the way a tall mountain might excite a certain desire to have climbed it. Still, many readers (I number among them) find themselves finishing the body of text (on page 981) only to turn back to page 1 and start again. It seems as if even the basic facts of the plot have escaped you. But still the feeling persists that truth and meaning have got to *be there*, in the text, in between the suggestive juxtapositions and subtle (and then conspicuous) riffs. If only you could read it again.

Although volumes have been devoted to tracking the threads of *IJ*'s story, no single theory (no account of *what happens*) with enough explanatory power to establish a clear consensus has emerged in the twenty years since *IJ*'s publication.[18] The text fails to reveal a coherent narrative. *IJ's* failure to cohere is a performative failure, productive of an intense and prolonged practice of reading that exceeds not only the novel's fragmentation but even one's own desires and frustrations. Ronell makes the case in *Stupidity* that the failure to fully know "cannot be understood in terms of absence, default, or deficiency," because what's missing cannot simply "be filled, completed, or known by being brought out of its state of absence into unconcealedness" (101). The incompletion or interruption of meaning produces an interference with cognition that "itself calls for a reading" (101). *IJ* thereby renders the question of meaning indeterminable, and so it systematically exploits and disorients my reading habits. *IJ* both excites and thwarts the desire for addictive closure, and in so doing, it exposes the radical passivity of reading as well as the humility that conditions the possibility of response.

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[17] For complaining reviews, see Peck and Kakutani. For devoted readers, fans, and scholars, see Burn, Carlisle, and Cohen and Konstantinou.

[18] Listserv Wallace-l (https://waste.org/mailman/listinfo/wallace-l) has hosted many of these debates and conversations; Greg Carlisle's volume *Elegant Complexity* is devoted to tracking the themes, images, and events of *Infinite Jest*.

Infinite Jest, I maintain, is not only about recovering from addiction through humility, but it also produces that humility in some of its readers by making us feel ourselves to be addicted to a certain kind of reading: a reading aimed at finding closure, certainty, and resolution. But in frustrating the desires for closure, certainty, resolution, etc., *IJ* denies readers the satisfaction of completing the fix. It is precisely this denial that prompts readers to reread, repeating the structure of addiction—but also destructuring it, by installing habits of reading that pleasure in the failure to close, the uncertainty, the impossibility of resolution—habits that I treat as humility.

I begin by offering some context for my readers who are not yet readers of *Infinite Jest*. It would take pages to offer a thorough plot summary (and anyway, you always leave out of a summary that which you failed to understand), but I offer my own highly selective summary as a first hit of *IJ*'s tropium—and the first fix is always free. I focus on a single problem of *IJ*'s plot in order to demonstrate the text's resistance to interpretation. I connect this resistance to Ronell's work on reading in *Stupidity*. In the next section, I argue that the "reading habits" *IJ* develops in its readers constitute a kind of addiction to reading. I articulate the mutual constitution of addiction and humility through the figure of "habit." In the final section, I argue that habit joins humility to addiction through a parasitic logic whereby humility defers the final closure of addiction and so exposes the rhetoricity of the subject addicted to tropium.

ENTER THE TROPIUM DEN

Allow me to prepare the dose. *Infinite Jest* revolves around a film, also called "Infinite Jest," reputedly so pleasurable and engaging to view that all other bodily activity stops and viewers watch it on a loop until they die.[19] The film's auteur, James Incandenza, dies under somewhat mysterious circumstances before the action of the novel begins (it appears that Jim killed himself by microwaving his own head, or perhaps he was actually murdered). While alive, Incandenza made genius-level contributions to several fields, spanning advanced optics and lenses, waste-driven energy production, and the pedagogy of junior competitive tennis. Incandenza's penultimate endeavor was the founding of Enfield Tennis Academy (or ETA) in Boston MA, followed by his final career in filmmaking. "Infinite Jest" is the last listed title in Incandenza's filmography (which occupies eight and a half pages in the novel's endnotes [985-993 n24]).

After Jim Incandenza's death, his wife Avril, a militant grammarian whose radical past includes shadowy ties to a group of Quebecois separatists, took over direction of ETA. Avril and Jim raised three sons, each of whom has resided at ETA. Orin, the oldest son, is a serial seductionist who punts for the Arizona Cardinals. Mario, the middle son, was born with several physical disabilities and does not play tennis, but he is a part of the ETA community and he enjoys making films of his own. The youngest son, Hal, is a top-rated junior competitive tennis player and all-around prodigy whose calamitous admissions interview with three University of Arizona deans opens the novel.

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[19] By convention in Wallace scholarship, *Infinite Jest* the novel is italicized and "Infinite Jest" the film appears in quotation marks.

ETA sits atop a hill at the foot of which is located the Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House (1026 n143; Wallace's endnote marks the redundancy: "*Sic.*"), a setting that juxtaposes the privilege and prestige of the academy with the humiliation and abasement of addiction. Don Gately, to whom Jim Incandenza (perhaps) ultimately appears as a wraith, is a recovering addict who joins Alcoholics Anonymous and stays on as staff at the halfway house after accidentally killing a Quebecois separatist in a botched robbery (the man, who was home sick with a sinus infection, could not breathe through his stuffy nose after Gately gagged him, and he suffocated). Finally but not totally, permit me to note that the Quebecois bear a deep grievance against the United States over a policy called Reconfiguration, whereby Canada was forced to absorb a chunk of land abutting Quebec that the United States ruined by launching its toxic waste there with giant catapults and unwittingly creating an alternating cycle of severe desolation and extreme verdant profusion (known as "annular fusion"). A fearsome group of wheelchair-bound Quebecois assassins are seeking to obtain the master copy of "Infinite Jest," make duplicates, and disseminate them in an act of terrorism that would bring the American-dominated Organization of North American Nations (known for the first 150 pages of the book only by its acronym, ONAN [36, 151]) to its knees.

As much as any of the novel's many mysteries can be said to be central, a central mystery is the question of who is sending out copies of the fatal "Infinite Jest." Readers might hope to rule out Jim Incandenza, who is dead, unless his (re)appearance as a wraith to addict Don Gately reveals some residual measure of agency in the world, which could explain the odd behavior of objects (appearing, moving, levitating) around ETA. One might suspect Incandenza's son Orin, who phones his brother Hal with suspicious questions about Quebecois separatism. Or one might indict the vicious Wheelchair Assassins, whose outposts in the American Southwest could, along with the postmark on one of the "Infinite Jest" copies, evidence their guilt. Although many of *IJ*'s readers have turned their own theories into treatises on this question, no single answer can be forwarded without excluding alternative evidence and possibilities. The question of who is sending out copies of "Infinite Jest" is undecidable. Not indeterminate, not simply unclear for lack of evidence, but structurally dependent on that lack.

The logic that renders Jim, Orin, the Wheelchair Assassins, and even the wraith discrete subjects is interrupted and thwarted by persistent streams of connection. Jim, the film's auteur, invented the cycle of waste-fuel annularity that destroyed Quebec and inspired the Wheelchair Assassins. The film's only actress, Joelle van Dyne, is a film school dropout and Orin's one-time girlfriend, known before a facially destructive acid incident (that may not have happened) as the PGOAT, or the Prettiest Girl of All Time (290). Throughout the novel's action, Joelle wears a veil, but it's never made clear whether the veil's purpose is to hide disturbing facial scars or a literally overwhelming beauty that "Infinite Jest" may have captured on film. The web of connections gets denser and denser through minor characters, shared locations, and repeated themes that don't reveal so much as they leave unconcealed the relations of intersection and force that encircle *IJ*'s multitude of people and events. Joelle, an addict herself, meets and befriends Don Gately after moving into the halfway house; Gately, sometime after his encounter with the wraith, (possibly) meets Hal Incandenza in a Quebecois cemetery in order to dig up Hal's father's head, which head may contain the only duplicatable copy of Jim's "Infinite Jest." Hooked yet?

Avital Ronell closes "The Rhetoric of Testing" in *Stupidity* with this claim: "If there must be an imperative to understand, this is because understanding does not come but remains lost to us" (161). The imperative to understand *IJ*, to grasp its plot and resolve its mysteries, intensifies because understanding does not come. But the failure to understand is not the end of reading, especially when it comes to *IJ*; it's the beginning: "Reading involves the undoing of interpretive figures, to the extent that it questions whether any synthesis, any single meaning, can close off a text and adequately account for its constitution" (Ronell, *Stupidity* 104). Interpretation, as opposed here to reading, aims to reconcile the "constantly divergent" logic of a text's narratives, which in *IJ* spiral out like the cycles of annular fusion (104). The figural logic doesn't close; it opens infinitely in on itself like a fractal. In fact, in a 1996 interview Wallace compared the planned structure of *IJ* to a Sierpinski gasket, a fractal he described as "basically like a pyramid on acid" (Wallace, Interview).

Ronell's distinction between reading and interpretation lends itself well to an exposition of humility and the rhetoric of drugs. Interpretation, like addiction, promises the subject who engages it an anaesthetizing feeling of mastery over "interference and the contingencies of textual disturbance" (Ronell, *Stupidity* 103). But this feeling comes at the cost of a missed encounter with "the stammers and stalls that reading . . . necessarily confronts" (103). Rather than deaden or drown out the "crucial dumbfoundedness" and "essential self-ignorance" of a text, Ronell argues, "reading enters the zone of nonunderstanding and tries at some level to manage the distress that the text releases" (103). Reading's management style is not a repressive one, Ronell contends, but rather "open" and "exposed" (103). The mark that distinguishes this Ronellian reading from addiction-interpretation is humility: openness, exposure, and vulnerability to the text's divergence, disruption, and destabilization.

If readers of *IJ* could be certain who was sending out copies of "Infinite Jest," or even of what exactly was *in* the film (all accounts of which in the novel are given secondhand and often under duress), the possibility of reading with humility would be foreclosed. Consider that no one in the novel who has viewed the film (with the possible exception maybe somehow of Hal) has been able to give up their addiction to watching the film. Is the film so satisfying to watch that watching it once immediately arouses a compulsive desire to watch it again? Or does the possibility of addiction actually depend on the impossibility of such utter satisfaction? "Infinite Jest" and *IJ* both solicit, provoke, and aggravate this desire for completion and totality. But *IJ* refuses ultimately to slake it.

Reading *IJ* is not a proving ground for one's intellectual prowess. One is denied the requisite pieces to assemble a complete picture of *IJ*'s puzzles. Reading *IJ* can leave you feeling stupid. Ronell reminds us that "no matter how witty or presumably witless one may be, . . . the battle of wits is a losing one, able to boast only provisional and recognizably pyrrhic victories" (*Stupidity* 100). No matter how much one may "hope to sharpen one's wits on subjective mastery," one will always be outwitted by "the brazen betrayals of linguistic positing" (100). A habitual humility is required to sustain this Ronellian reading. In order to clear a space for the practice of reading, one must become stupid. Reading is a practice: a reiterated effort to direct one's attention beyond the desire for a fix of interpretation. On the one hand, this reading won't make you smart: "One can only be dulled by repeated blows to the reading ego," Ronell warns (100). On the other, reading will make you *smart*, because absorbing those blows will sting: "Language smarts," Ronell tells us (100).

READING HABITS

Habit is a crucial concept for making one's way through *IJ*. I want to develop this concept as a connection between addiction and humility. I begin with reference to Eve Sedgwick's "Epidemics of the Will," in which Sedgwick argues for thinking addiction in terms of habit rather than identity.[20] Sedgwick uses the phrase "addiction attribution" to describe the expansion of addiction pathology to the point of nonexclusion: one can be addicted to anything, from alcohol and narcotics to coffee, exercise, junior competitive tennis, even AA meetings. Sedgwick argues that addiction poses a problem for the autonomous subject by presenting a tension between free will and this will's impairment. On the one hand, the addict is figured as free to choose sobriety; on the other, this choice is always "insufficiently pure," since the addict's will is compromised by the compulsion to use the addicting substance, whatever that substance may be (132).

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[20] In a *JAC* article analyzing the percolation of Alcoholics Anonymous rhetoric throughout American culture, Karen Kopelson criticizes the simultaneous identitarianism and individualism of AA slogans. Although I am not interested here in defending AA (nor in conflating it with the AA of *IJ*), refiguring both humility and addiction in terms of habit could potentially offer another reading of AA that responds to the risk of neutralizing or replacing politics with therapy culture.

This contradiction in what Sedgwick calls "the propaganda of free will" has the effect of keeping free will at the center of subjectivity even as it undermines the confidence one can have in the independence of the subject's voluntarity (133). Not unlike an addiction, demand for the substance "free will" is excited even as its returns are continually diminished. The alternative Sedgwick proposes to this "epidemic of the will" is habit, an understanding of "repeated action" that invokes many valences, from "the bodily habitus" to "the appareling habit" to "sheltering habitations" (138). Sedgwick (reading Proust) calls habit "a banal but precious opiate" (139), figuring habit itself as a drug that shapes perception or that, we might say, puts one in an altered state. I want to push the language of habit even further, to the point of breaking the binary Sedgwick identifies between voluntarity/compulsion: for both terms of the binary, a habit is being formed. The force of habit demonstrates the terms' mutual constitution.

Can one be addicted to reading? *Infinite Jest* provokes this question by calling its readers' attention to the ordinary behaviors we might call "reading habits." *IJ* also fleshes out the valences of this term, requiring that readers build new, unusual, or even bizarre habits to sustain their practice of reading. Literary critic Frank Cioffi argues that *IJ* both obsesses and alienates readers, making them feel like addicts. He suggests this "disturbing" experience is due in part to the dis- or reorganization of the ordinary actions one takes in order to read. Some of the actions *IJ* requires readers to adopt may alter one's physical reading habits; for example, some readers use multiple bookmarks to aid in flipping between locations hundreds of pages apart. Carrying or holding the nearly two-pound text presents its own challenges; one rarely forgets the physicality of the book. One reader found it convenient to cut the book's spine and take a few pages with him wherever he went. This habit then bore another, that of saving the book's flaking paper, string, and glue.[21] Such ritual (and even secretive) reading habits have the effect of making a reader feel like an addict rather than an outsider. Readers are invited—or better, provoked—"to Identify" (in the language of *IJ*) rather than to think themselves exempt from the novel's many addictions.[22]

The feeling of being addicted to a two-pound novel is not easily accounted for, and I want to tarry with the account Cioffi gives in his article "'An Anguish Become Thing': Narrative as Performance in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*" because his essay is full of both insightful observations and near misses of explanation. Cioffi argues that *IJ* recruits its readers into the performance of the text, partly through its challenging and interesting prose and partly through its graphically violent or otherwise detailed emotional experiences; readers of *IJ* develop a divided consciousness, in a sense "performing" the text by staging their own experience of genuine emotional reaction. This claim implies that readers are also in a sense watching themselves perform. The reader is at once performer and passive spectator, not necessarily able to stop reading or recalling the "disturbing" scenes and feelings the text evokes (163). While Cioffi's argument resonates with my own feelings and experience of reading *Infinite Jest*, a fairly conservative figure of addiction dominates the analysis, occluding the possibility of reading with humility. I aim to recover this possibility, reading through and against Cioffi's formulation of addiction.

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[21] See the blog *Reading Infinite Jest* (http://readinginfinitejest.blogspot.com). Posts from January 2009 document the blogger's reading habits in sensuous and occasionally creepy detail. Note that maintaining a blog about one's reading habits then becomes one such habit. Dismembering *IJ* page by page (as well as collecting the book's physical debris) is a habit I too adopted, out of interest in altering my own reading habits—or perhaps instead this reading habit adopted me.

[22] On Identifying in *IJ*, see Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 345; see also Fitzpatrick 199.

If there is something special about *IJ*, it would have something to do with both its excesses and its reflexivity.[23] That is, Cioffi argues that the devices that distinguish *IJ* from novels in general (endnotes, the annotated scholarly filmography of a main character, abstruse medical and chemical jargon, lengthy sentences with tortured but grammatically correct syntax, and so on) may seem to be only "differences in degree" from other texts, but in *IJ* they become "differences in kind, and their sheer excess renders them more than just devices" (169). Cioffi hopes that calling the reading of this book a performance will account for its excesses and explain how this reading disturbs. But due at least partly to its excessive length, reading *IJ* is not an instance, not a single ephemeral act, but a habit, a repeated action that alters bodily habitus (dragging the thing around or slicing it down to size). As frustrating as the excessive use of "devices" like jargon or endnotes can be, each one installs delays in the unfurling of *IJ*'s narratives that can make a reader aggressive about reading on. Reading *IJ* is habit-forming.

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[23] I realize my hedging here may not be enough to offset the cult sensibility that frequently attends writing about Wallace's writing. *Infinite Jest* is special to me, a bias that ought to deepen rather than derail the inquiry into how one falls in love with language. What may be perceived as a "fanboy ethos" remarks a specific intoxication with *Infinite Jest* that could lead us to explore what about Wallace's writing seems to make *writing itself* so contagious. Fans, after all, share with addicts such characteristics as high-intensity enthusiasm, devotion, and even obsession.

Perhaps one can imagine or even list other texts that exploit similar excesses in order to break open the genre of the novel and expose its guts, and *IJ* on this count may not be in a class by itself. Instead of asking "Can one be addicted to reading?" I could ask "Can one not be addicted?" Perhaps I could argue that the object of one's reading habits is endlessly substitutable: this chapter, that novel, those essays on rhetorical theory. In this sense all reading constitutes addiction, and any reading could be the dose that hooks you. But *IJ* does seem to sport a unique reflexivity when it comes to its readers' habits. Readers flip to the endnotes and back, producing a tennis-like volley of pages that tell a story about junior competitive tennis. If a tennis racquet weighs between ten and twelve ounces, readers of the two-pound *IJ* might as well be holding a racquet in each hand. But even more than tennis, *IJ*'s stories are about addiction.

Readers of *IJ* must confront what Cioffi refers to as "the world of the addict, the complex rationalizations, the myriad humiliations, the refusal to see the future, the loss of physical/psychological integrity, the overpowering force of continual need" (170). Meanwhile, readers are forced to craft their own rationalizations for reading on (or giving up); face their own humiliation as they vainly search for definitions of a word that may not even be in the dictionary; live with their own refusal to acknowledge that even after hundreds of pages are turned, the storyline is not getting any clearer; cope with their own lost psychological integrity when everything they see turns their thoughts to *Infinite Jest*; and yield to the force of their own habitual need. You go back to the first page, looking for a fix, for answers you must have missed. You go back, feeling like an addict.

Crucially, you don't go back alone. *IJ*'s reading habits establish a field of relationships between and among readers of *IJ*.[24] *IJ* is decidedly *not* a drama staged within the private theater of one reader's consciousness—and it couldn't be—nor could one reader's consciousness ever be simply private. The similarities between my experience of reading and Cioffi's, or mine and the reader who cut up his book, are striking. These reading habits echo each other. They may be personal, but they are not private. They establish a kind of relation between readers like the relation between people who grew up in the same town but never knew each other there (a relation which itself forms the basis for much of *IJ*'s subtler collisions and near misses of plot). Cioffi argues that a reader's "performance" of the novel is both violative and addicting (177). Cioffi doesn't write about a community of readers; he's trying to make the case that a performance of one, even if only performed for that same one, is still a performance. The problem is that to be both your own performer and your own audience is to double yourself, to address yourself, and to be confronted with your own internal alterity—and not self-identity.

A reader is *not* alone with the book inside her own head. Exactly what makes *IJ* disturbing is the way its intoxicating influence transgresses what the reader had supposed to be the boundaries of her own consciousness, the way it obsesses what she thinks about when her mind wanders, or of what she is reminded in her life "outside" of the book. Writing about Joelle van Dyne once made me "decide" to buy sixty-four ounces of unfiltered apple juice, which "decision" was only part voluntary, the better part compulsive, as if I were flashing back to not only my own but *Joelle's* tropium trip (cf. Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 228). One's reading habits for *IJ* don't stay confined to books.

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[24] Kathleen Fitzpatrick's essay "*Infinite Summer*: Reading, Empathy, and the Social Network" analyzes in part the affective community that emerged among Wallace's readers through the 2009 Infinite Summer project (http://infinitesummer.org), an online reading group organized around weekly reading and daily blogging. Infinite Summer is one of several sites where Wallace readers find each other online, along with the Wallace-l listserv and Nick Maniatis's website, the Howling Fantods (http://thehowlingfantods.com/dfw).

In the margins of *Crack Wars* (literally—Ronell annotates her own text), Ronell echoes Derrida's "Rhetoric of Drugs," inscribing "What do we hold against the addict?" (102-103). Cioffi recirculates a commonplace answer: the problem with addiction—the reason why or the way in which it is so destructive—has to do with the isolation of the addict from social interaction (171). Cioffi suggests that the reading habit one develops for *IJ* is even akin to watching the fatal "Infinite Jest"—an absorption by which one "render[s] oneself numb to the external world"—and he lists some synonyms for being under the influence: "high," "buzzed," "stoned," and "whacked" (171). But recall that *IJ*'s key mysteries revolve around the networks of manufacture and distribution of the novel's most addictive drug. Addiction requires the support of these (tropium) cartels; addicts must develop an intimate knowledge of their routes of access and cultivate these routes in order to sustain their addiction. As the addict needs the cartel, so reading always trips on other writing: reading Ronell is also reading Derrida, for example, and reading *IJ* isn't just ingesting *Infinite Jest* but also all the texts that *IJ* is on, and so on. Even addiction opens rather than isolates.

In *Crack Wars*, responding to Martin Heidegger, Ronell argues for thinking Being-on-drugs as a prior opening of the subject of Being to affection from the outside. Being-on-drugs exposes the route of access through which any drug enters the subject's interiority; in fact, this route of access in part defines the distinction between interior and exterior. The foreign body finds passage to the inside through smoking, shooting, dropping—and reading. Reading addiction gives us to think the excessive sociality of the addict's exposure to text, to reading, and to addiction as such. Prior to any voluntary choice to expose oneself to affection, one is affected by an outside already inside. In this sense, one's reading habits expose a radical rhetoricity in reading, one that is also the condition of possibility for any addiction—even any altered state—in the first place. If the subject could be simply closed, independent, and autonomous, readers of *IJ* would never experience the identificatory feeling of addiction.

The Burkean commonplace that "identification is compensatory to division" (Burke 22) is reversed since, as Diane Davis has argued, "identification precedes not only any sense of identity but also, and *therefore*, any sense of divisiveness" (*Inessential Solidarity* 25). When the wraith finally appears to a nearly incapacitated Don Gately in the last (several hundred) pages of *IJ*, Gately (as well as readers) are no more or less sure of the wraith's actual presence or reality than of the doctors, friends, prosecutor, or AA sponsor who (maybe) visit Gately. Gately's internal monologue fills with "invasive-wraith ghostwords," words Gately doesn't actually know, like *"SINISTRAL"* and *"ANNULATE"* and *"LEVIRATEMARRIAGE"* (922). These words break into Gately's mind with the "ghastly intrusive force" of wraith-induced suggestion (832). Gately, whose injured body offers no boundary or defense against the wraith's intrusion, wonders whether the wraith is part of Gately's Higher Power or is maybe part of the Disease, of addiction, here to make the case that Gately should accept the narcotic he's heretofore refused for the sake of his sobriety. Instead of asking how James Incandenza, a dead person with whom Don Gately has no conscious or narrated social tie, gains (as the wraith) a profound suggestive influence over Gately, Davis and Ronell put us on the assignment of thinking the uncontrollable relationality that their exchange lays open. Perhaps it doesn't have to be *Infinite Jest* that exposes this rhetorical opening, this startlingly unguarded inroad to one's psyche that has actually always constituted one's (readerly) life. But it helps.

INHABITING HUMILITY

I have argued that reading Ronell across Wallace's *Infinite Jest* can show us a view of humility we might otherwise miss: a humility that is habitual, that at once fixes for the totalizing force of addiction, but yet is answerable to the ethics of stupidity. Ronell's view of an ethical reading practice cultivates humility about one's mastery of text and the authority of interpretation. *Infinite Jest* cultivates an addictive reading habit, exciting the very desire for mastery that reading itself trips up and exposes. In this final section, I argue that humility and addiction are not simply opposites but are joined by habit and by the logic of parasitism. But humility also alters even addictive habits. Humility, I argue, constitutes a deferral of addiction's totalizing force, and in that deferral constitutes an opening onto the rhetoricity of the addict.

Ronell argues in *Crack Wars* that Being-on-drugs names the mode of an uncontrollable relationality. Why does the wraith only appear to Gately in his hospital room, at this crisis of addiction and recovery? Because, Ronell tells us, "Being-on-drugs indicates that a structure is already in place, prior to the production of that materiality we call drugs" (*Crack Wars* 33). Since "anything can serve the function of a drug," any substance can fit into the structure of Being-on-drugs (53). This infinite substitutability is the cause of the crisis of compulsion and voluntarity described by Sedgwick. The domain of an independent autonomous subject that voluntarity is supposed to circumscribe is left open. In *Inessential Solidarity*, Diane Davis calls this openness to affection from outside "rhetoricity" (3). Davis argues that rhetoricity is an ability to be affected, or influenced, that both comes before and extends beyond the subject's engagement in signification. Rhetoricity is the uncontrollable relationality that defines Being-on-drugs.

Ronell refers repeatedly to "the promise of exteriority" that drugs extend: a fantasy of ecstasy or ek-stasis in which the addict's absorption in his substance is so total that he is taken outside himself (*Crack Wars* 50, 60, 61, 157). But there is already a fold in the logic that presumes a clean divide between the subject's interiority and exteriority. The outside is already inside. In *Breaking Up [at] Totality*, Diane Davis takes up *Crack Wars* in her argument that laughter marks a kind of intoxication of language. Davis notes that there's no simple alternative between this intoxication and a drug-free sobriety: "We have assumed an either/or structure and, therefore, the capacity to make an easy and clear distinction between the two" (73). Davis's argument echoes Derrida in "The Rhetoric of Drugs," where he argues that a "bad *pharmakon* can always parasitize the good *pharmakon*, bad repetition can always parasitize good repetition" (234). But addiction can't play the bad *pharmakon* if the good *pharmakon* is Being-on-drugs, because they parasitize one another. "Like any good parasite," Derrida continues, "it is at once inside and outside—the outside *feeding* on the inside" (234). Language itself is such a *pharmakon*, such a parasite, argues Davis: "Language: an outside inside" (74). Language itself is a drug.

On this point, Davis, Ronell, and Derrida all agree, and *Infinite Jest* confirms the claim experientially: language is a drug. Can one be addicted to language? Davis and Ronell provoke us to ask whether one can Be any other way. Being, to be what it is, already trips on tropium. According to Ronell, Being-on-drugs requires a remodeling of Heideggerian Dasein (*Crack Wars* 34). In an essay that sorts through Heidegger's distinctions between willing, wishing, urge, and addiction, David Clark argues that "there is no metalanguage *on* addiction that is not itself already fundamentally 'addicted'" (9). Remarking on the habit of metaphorizing with drug paraphernalia, a habit demonstrated in his own writing (and indeed, in Ronell's writing, and David Foster Wallace's, and mine), Clark notes that "philosophical narratives about addiction have a habit of becoming evocatively pharmaceutical, that is, of getting caught up in everything that modernity associates with habituation and drugs" (10). These texts betray an intoxication with tropes that undermines their purity as philosophical texts, exposes them as already exposed, marks them as already rhetorical. Clark concludes that the "figures of addiction are complexly symptomatic of an 'addiction' to figures" (26). I'd drop the scare quotes. Language itself is addicting and addicted.

Ronell and Wallace tend to agree in their characterizations of addiction as a totalizing and destructive habit. Both make use of crack cocaine as the synecdoche for the addictive logic of chasing the dragon: after the first high, an addict needs to use more and more of a substance to reach an ever-diminishing high. Addiction "disappoints the pleasure a drug might be expected to arouse," Ronell writes, but this disappointment only aggravates the addict's demand and dependence (25). Ronell calls crack a "pure instance of 'Being-on-drugs'" because "it is only about producing a need for itself " (25). Even the pleasure of the drug's use is siphoned off and replaced by addiction's self-replicating need for more of itself.

In *Infinite Jest*, Joelle van Dyne's crack cocaine addiction becomes so all-consuming that she attempts to kill herself with a lethal overdose at a grad school friend's party. The account of Joelle's suicide plan spans twenty-one pages, interspersed with other stories' vignettes (219-240). Her elimination by addiction seems almost a foregone conclusion: "It was when her hands started to tremble during this part of the cooking procedure that she'd first known she liked this more than anyone can like anything and still live" (236). Now all that's left of the pleasure of her addiction is a blinding, persistent need. *IJ* articulates Joelle's predicament in this grim reflection: "What looks like the cage's exit is actually the bars of the cage. . . . The entrance says *EXIT*. There isn't an exit. The ultimate annular fusion: that of exhibit and its cage. . . . It is the cage that has entered *her*, somehow. . . . She's lost the ability to lie to herself about being able to quit, or even about enjoying it, still. It no longer delimits and fills the hole. It no longer delimits the hole" (222). Joelle can no longer make any distinction, to return to Sedgwick's language, between her own voluntarity and the addiction's compulsion. Addiction itself has eclipsed all the pleasure and desire that once fueled it. As in *Crack Wars*, addiction appears in *IJ* as a totalizing apparatus of control, one that can and will kill you. The question the remainder of this article explores is how humility makes use of an irrepressible rhetoricity to turn an addictive habit toward a reading habit.

Through habit, humility parasitizes the structure of addiction. Humility defers the totality of addiction, substituting out the temporality of addiction for a temporality of waiting and prolonging. In Joelle's experience of "ultimate annular fusion," addiction has nearly entirely foreclosed on her—nearly, but not quite. The failure of her suicide attempt reads as the failure of addiction. Her substance offers a false promise of exteriority that, at its apogee, involutes on itself: the addiction is actually so thoroughly interiorizing that she is almost totally sealed off from anything exterior to the addiction. Joelle herself may not be able to delimit any part of herself not fully claimed by her drug habit, but there persists a kernel of alterity that resists the self-replication of addiction. Where habit verges into addiction, a space nevertheless remains open for inhabiting humility, for instituting an ethical distance and for turning being-on-drugs into being-beside-oneself. What keeps Joelle from eliminating her own map (see Wallace 1996a, 220) is the very thing that almost kills her: that very addiction and absorption in a substance that opens onto the outside. That is rhetoricity; that is Joelle's Being-on-drugs. Being addicted to reading Joelle's story in *IJ* at once exposes and displaces one's own exteriority. You may want to identify, but you are not at the center of her story.

Some say that the AA program works (if it works) by replacing one habit with another. Ronell: "To get off drugs, or alcohol . . . , the addict has to shift dependency to a person, an ideal, or to the procedure itself of the cure" (*Crack Wars* 25). Certainly the AAers who populate *IJ* aren't "sober," strictly speaking—they drink coffee by the industrial carafe, smoke cigarettes even in their sleep. But Being-on-drugs implies that there is no such thing as the "sobriety" of not being under any influence at all: that kind of hermetic insulation from affection would imply not being at all. To be totally free of the influence of a foreign body would require the subject to be also totally free from the possibility of that influence. It would require the subject to close every route of exposure that connects her interiority with the possibility of affection from outside. It isn't an option to "just say no," since this saying would already be a response, conditioned on a prior "yes" that opens the line.[25] In *IJ*, the habit that replaces addiction does its work by exploiting habit, inclining it toward humility instead of addiction. We might call this habit recovery as opposed to sobriety. In *IJ*, recovery is about conceding that your particular addictive substance has *always* got you hooked, already made you vulnerable to it. Recovering addicts may not be using, but they are still definitionally exposed to the influence of their substance.

An addict takes up humility (if it gets taken up) through habit, in response to humility's call. In *The Telephone Book*, Ronell argues that one comes into Being humbly, not through autonomy or voluntarity, but first in response to a call. "Don't delude yourself," she cautions. "Being is yours only to the extent that you cannot shirk this responsibility; it is your duty, you are nothing before being" (71-72). But paradoxically, the humility of being responsible also singles one out through the granting of an "immoderately obliging assignment" (72). Ronell continues: "Being, finally, is *nothing other* than this duty that calls you, possesses and debits you, guiltifies you from the moment you are—you, the Unique, the Called" (72). I told you *IJ* was speaking to me. But I also said I can't be sure of what I think I've heard, or whether it was addressed to me. This writing is my own uncontrollable relationality: a responding I can't simply shut off.

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[25] In "A Number of Yes," Jacques Derrida argues that this prior "yes" is "presupposed as the condition of possibility for all other performatives," that is, for all other responses, affirmations or negations (129). Derrida also traces the thread of this unconditional "yes" through an unraveling of "willing" into "nonwill," opening still another avenue toward deconstructing voluntarity/compulsion.

IJ's Don Gately leaves his shoes and keys way under his bed at night so that in the morning, he has to get down on his knees to reach them again. This bodily habit of humbling himself, like other bodily routines, actually constructs and produces belief—we might call habit a belief before belief.[26] In Gately's case, as he is advised by multiple AAers, it matters less that he feels himself to really believe than that he acts as if he believes regardless of how he feels or how he believes himself to believe (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 466-468). What Gately primarily needs out of believing in and praying to a Higher Power is not the belief itself nor the symbolic guarantee that his Higher Power can or even will do anything to help him (which he doesn't at first believe)—in fact, precisely *not* those things—but the *habitual* practice of the belief, which helps enable him to remain in recovery, open to the influence of his addiction rather than attempting to seal himself off from its affection. The habits that keep Gately sober do so because they constitute a practice of humility: by kneeling to pray, Gately enacts the AA admission that "My Best Thinking Got Me Here"—that is, that his own autonomous judgment and beliefs are already compromised, already part compulsion and so not pure voluntarity.

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[26] In her book *Toward a Civil Discourse*, Sharon Crowley borrows this phrase from Slavoj Žižek. Crowley argues that a "*belief before belief*" names the kind of embodied belief that is often learned by "adopting bodily positions, making gestures, and performing movements"—or we could say learned by passionate commitment rather than (or prior to) intellectual commitment (69). Crowley notes that "beliefs acquired in any of these ways become habitual through repetition" (69).

Surrendering his judgment to the program, or to a solidarity without identity,[27] doesn't actually rehabilitate his judgment. He will never stop being an addict. But perhaps in spite of his every certainty to the contrary, it's the surrendering and the submission that works—if it works (Wallace, *Infinite Jest* 351, 1026 n135). Gately's habits affirm the rhetoricity, the exposedness to influence from outside that structurally underlies his addiction. But by inhabiting humility, he exploits addiction's structure of exposure toward something otherwise than addiction.

At the beginning of recovery, at a conjunction of addiction and exposure like Joelle's failed suicide attempt, one can say only that a decision takes place. It belongs to humility to find a way to issue its call. You can't be certain that it is really meant for you. But that is the essence of humility: in the midst of no clarity, no certainty, no assurance of your adequacy, you respond. You read, then you read again, prolonging your approach toward the limit but opening the possibility of still another reading, another saying, another tropium trip. Heidegger famously argued that language is the house of Being (239, 254). Revising Heidegger with Ronell, we might say that language is the house of Being-on-drugs. Reading *Infinite Jest* opens the house to anyone who responds when humility calls. Revising again, we might say that language is the halfway house of Being-on-drugs. It is the site of the practice of recovery, the inhabiting of humility, and above all the repetition of reading again. Rhetoricity, the exposedness in language on which this calling (and responding) first depends, is what keeps the line open, inviting us to keep listening.

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[27] For more on this distinction and its uses, see chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Sensitive Students

The perversion and pervertibility of this law (which is also a law of hospitality) is that one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one's own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one's own hospitality. (53)

— Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*

Student-desire as Godzilla, our curriculum as Tokyo.

— Geoffrey Sirc, "Writing Classroom as A & P Parking Lot"

This chapter examines the public debate that ensued when students at several universities and colleges in the US advocated for the use of trigger warnings in their college classes. Briefly, a trigger warning is a designation that warns a reader that the text they are about to read could be destabilizing, and this designation is often accompanied by an indicator of a specific issue, such as "rape" or "suicide." Readers who might be sensitive to mentions, discussions, or graphic descriptions of those issues are alerted to their presence in the text in advance of reading so that they will not be caught off guard. In the middle of the 2013-2014 academic year, two proposals to adopt the use of trigger warnings in college classes were introduced: one, by the staff in the Office of Equity Concerns at Oberlin College, which suggested trigger warnings as a possible accommodation for students dealing with trauma related to sexual assault, and the other, by student senate resolution at the University of California in Santa Barbara, which would have required instructors to list trigger warnings on their syllabi ("Support Resources"; "A Resolution to Mandate").

The time of controversy over trigger warnings is oddly out of joint. In December 2013, *Slate* published an article declaring 2013 "The Year of the Trigger Warning" (Marcotte).[28] But strangely, it was the year that followed that was crammed with more iterations of jeremiads against trigger warnings than one can count. In her keynote at the *Computers and Writing* conference in June 2014—barely halfway through the year—Melanie Yergeau mentions her review of around 50 articles about trigger warnings. In 2014, Entries into the debate over trigger warnings were published at *The New Republic, Salon, The Guardian, The LA Times, The New York Times, Mother Jones,* as well as at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* (Jarvie; Frank; Neutill; Filipovic; Goldberg; Medina; Drum; Kipnis; Wilson; 7 Humanities Professors). The majority of these trigger warning op-eds were not penned by college teachers, though several significant contributions were. It would stand to reason that students and their teachers have the most at stake in this debate. Although few (if any? none?) colleges have a policy requiring instructors to use trigger warnings,[29] arguments against them are still both frequent and impassioned. A September 2015 piece in the *Chronicle* called trigger warnings a part of "the gravest threat" facing the university today (Bass & Clark): that is, a threat to academic freedom posed by the sensitivity of our students.

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[28] The *Slate* article cites a post on the feminist blog *Shakesville* that raises the question, from an instructor's point of view, of how to sensitively negotiate potentially traumatizing topics in class without singling out vulnerable students (Looft).

[29] In 2015, Modern Language Association members were informally surveyed by the National Coalition Against Censorship. Of 808 respondents, 0.5% said their institution had adopted a trigger warning policy (Kingkade). The survey concluded that there is "no crisis, but deep concern" about trigger warnings (National Coalition Against Censorship).

The commonplaces that circulate in so many op-eds against trigger warnings are articulated (that is, joined together as well as expressed) with one another through an ideological objection to sensitivity.[30] I will inventory the forms this non- or *in*-sensitivity takes further on. First, I want to situate sensitivity as an excessive signifier in the trigger warnings debate, a signifier that calls for more sustained attention than it has heretofore received. The accusation of oversensitivity pricks my rhetorician's ears because it bespeaks an exposedness or vulnerability to affection in language. If as a child you learned the rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," you were probably learning to contrast the harm that language can do with the harm of physical violence, and so to minimize the effectivity of words to do violence. But words can and do hurt. Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Avital Ronell & others have argued that being called a name is the first wound or opening of existents in language.[31] In order to respond to that being called, one must first of all be sensitive, not simply able to hear a call (since strictly speaking one is not yet there to hear this first call), but *unable* to *not* be affected by this calling. Sensitivity is a radical passivity which precedes the agentive choice to open or close oneself to affection from outside: it is a telephone wire that delimits the rhetorical subject.

Thinking of sensitivity in this framework will change the way we read the debate over trigger warnings. For one, it will help us take notice in each instance of the way accusations of oversensitivity are deployed, and it will open the question that's been shunted aside: why? What service has sensitivity been pressed into, and for what purpose, in the debate over trigger warnings? In other words, why is this debate so severely overblown? In the second place, thinking of sensitivity as a condition of possibility for the rhetorical subject gives us a prism for refracting arguments against trigger warnings into an inquiry into why these arguments can be so hurtful, what gets covered over by the bad feelings they can generate, and how such arguments nevertheless expose the very sensitivity they set out to disavow. The question this chapter investigates is what service sensitivity has been pressed into for this debate, and what its deployment as a trope ascribed to students covers over, even in the scramble to protect the academic values that make a home for critical work in the academy.

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[30] Sharon Crowley defines the tissue of articulation as ideologic: "connections made between and among moments (positions) that occur or are taken up within ideology" (*Toward a Civil Discourse* 60).

[31] See Derrida, *On the Name*; Butler, *Excitable Speech*; *Precarious Life*; Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book*.

To speak of a "debate" over trigger warnings is to project a false image of two equal and opposing sides, when in fact there are multiple asymmetric parties to the controversy, and many competing beliefs available even to those who share the same position. Before I ask you to absorb the details of the arguments in circulation, I want to first report on the stakes for both critics of trigger warnings and for the student activists who have advocated for them. Among critics of trigger warnings, there's little disagreement that the most important value at stake is academic freedom. Specifically, critics of trigger warnings have argued that requiring instructors to use trigger warnings impinges on their freedom to select readings, design assignments, and assemble syllabi independently.[32] (*Requiring* would be a key word here: of the two institutional proposals to adopt trigger warnings that made headlines in recent years, only the UCSB student senate resolution would have *required* them; of course, the resolution would have to have been adopted by an institutional body with binding authority for faculty to be truly *required* to use trigger warnings.) The debate over trigger warnings invokes unstated beliefs about the scope of academic freedom, respective to whether and how this partly legal, partly academic-folk doctrine extends to what college teachers may teach, as well as how they teach it.[33] Some fear that students would use trigger warnings as an invitation to skip a reading, film, or class, perhaps to insulate themselves from exposure to ideas or beliefs with which they personally disagree.[34] These critics fear that untenured and adjunct faculty would be exposed to increased complaints about their teaching made by students to administrators, which could put their jobs in jeopardy. Scholars whose writing and teaching critiques hegemonic norms would be especially vulnerable to conservative scrutiny and targeting.

Of course, such scholars already are especially vulnerable to conservative scrutiny and targeting, as was Steven Salaita when in 2014 tweets critical of state violence in Israel apparently prompted the University of Illinois to attempt to revoke his hiring contract, and as was Saida Grundy when in 2015 a tweet critical of white masculinity became the center of a right-wing media firestorm. It is tempting to write, "Academic freedom has been under attack," but this metaphor reinscribes a Manichean freedom/terrorism opposition that has underwritten many such "attacks," such as those of academic concern-troll David Horowitz. Many a state legislature is hard at work to undermine faculty governance and eliminate tenure in state universities. Adjuncts and graduate students do not have the same freedom to select texts and assemble syllabi that tenured faculty do. In the era of the corporate university, college teachers, it may seem, are more vulnerable than ever before. And, in the midst of pandemic gun violence on campuses and its specific variants, school shootings and anonymous threats of school shootings, state laws in Texas and elsewhere will allow licensed students to bring literal loaded guns to class. Threats to academic freedom and to its practice in college classrooms are not in short supply.

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[32] Of course, there are already limits on this freedom. For example, a question now pending at California State University Fullerton poses whether a faculty member may assign a different (and cheaper) textbook than the one sanctioned by the department (Jaschik, "Can a Professor be Forced to Assign a $180 Textbook?"). The American Association of University Professors has stated that departments do have some authority over text selection, especially where multiple sections of a course are taught by several instructors.

[33] In *Versions of Academic Freedom*, Stanley Fish argues that the competing interpretations of academic freedom have inflated a doctrine which should be confined to one's disciplinary expertise.

[34] Of course, students don't need to use trigger warnings as a pretext in order to assert a right to refuse materials they find offensive. In the case of University of Utah, a lawsuit settlement required the university to adopt a formal "content accommodation" policy, which allows students to request alternatives if they believe a course requirement violates their religious beliefs. The policy also allows instructors to deny such requests if the requirement "has a reasonable relationship to a legitimate pedagogical goal" ("Policy 6-100").

But for students, especially those who have advocated for trigger warnings, the practice of academic freedom in the classroom is inseparable from accessibility. "Being triggered" means in mental health literature experiencing an emotional and/or physical disruption in one's cognitive process in response to a prior experience of trauma. When a person is triggered, symptoms of trauma and common responses to trauma may impinge on one's ability to focus. Symptoms can include "types of hyperarousal such as increased heart rate, sweating, difficulty breathing, cold sweats, tingling, muscular tension;

constriction of the nervous system and digestive system; dissociation and/or dysphoria; feeling numb, spacing out, or fully blacking out.... hyper vigilance, sensitivity to light and sound, difficulty sleeping, a reduced capacity to manage stress and anxiety, amnesia and forgetfulness, chronic fatigue, immune system problems, headaches, and diminished ability to bond or connect with other individuals" (Carter; Levine). A triggered student is not in a state of mind or body conducive to learning. When students request trigger warnings from their instructors, they are asking that their courses be made more accessible. Trigger warnings are designed to enable readers to prepare for the possibility of being triggered, and to take measures to reduce the disruption being triggered would cause. Avoiding potentially triggering material is not always possible, in a classroom or in any other environment. Trigger warnings could, sometimes, make it possible for students to encounter a trigger without being destabilized by it. It is important that people living with trauma choose for themselves whether and when to face triggers, since having no warning can make the trigger harder to confront. Being triggered can be damaging for a student's mental and physical health, and students who are triggered might miss out on more than a single text, film, class period, or course in order to cope and recover (Simpkins and Orem).

ACCESS IS NOT SAFETY: TRIGGERING AS HARM

Using trigger warnings does not eliminate the possibility that students may be triggered. As Kathleen Ann Livingston argues in "On Rage, Shame, 'Realness,' and Accountability to Survivors," trigger warnings should be viewed as one potential tool of a trauma-informed pedagogy. Livingston reminds us that trauma survivors have not only divergent but at times conflicting needs. Such conflicts must be negotiated. If teachers do nothing, we are likely to reproduce the ambient norms of academic culture, norms that shut out students with mental disabilities and mental illness (Price). Students who have advocated for the use of trigger warnings are asking to negotiate the norms and classroom practices of their courses. Every public space, every space of discussion, especially college classes, already has a great many sometimes contradictory or competing norms about what is appropriate and what is off limits. Trigger warnings cannot simply disappear such norms, but instead they offer a possible strategy for making these norms explicit, negotiable, and consensual rather than tacit, incontestable, and individual to a teacher, cohort, or institution. Trigger warnings will not always be the right fit, and there may be other ways of opening a conversation with our students about creating a class that's accessible to the students in the room. But it is precisely that accessibility that's at stake for our students.

Accessibility is not the same thing as safety, as Angela Carter argues in "Teaching with Trauma: Trigger Warnings, Feminism, and Disability Pedagogy." By conceptualizing trauma through the lens of disability, Carter argues for an expanded category of neurodivergence, including "people who may never receive a medical diagnosis, or clinical recognition as such" in the scope of students for whom access is an issue and not a given. But Carter also argues that conflating access with safety "illustrate[s] a prevailing fundamental lack of awareness about disability, access, and accommodation in higher education." She insists on a distinction between "experiences of re-traumatization or being triggered" and "being challenged outside of one's comfort zone, being reminded of a bad feeling, or having to sit with disturbing truths," and rightly so. Trauma is not the same as taking offense or even being harmed by another's injurious speech.

Diane Davis has called this inability to close oneself off from another's affection *rhetoricity*. According to Davis, a "responsibility to respond, a preoriginary *rhetorical* imperative, is the condition for any conscious subject rather than the other way around" (106). Drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Davis argues that the obligation to respond to the address of another actually structures subjectivity, where the subject or "I" in language comes into being already in response to the other's affection. This response/ability, or responsibility, is only possible because, prior to one's constitution as a subject, one is already open (or exposed) to the affection of the other—even though "I" am/is not properly *there* yet to hear it. Nevertheless, "I" am exposed to address, and this exposure is not something the subject is even around to choose, but rather a condition of "my" possibility as a subject. So before "I" ever show(s) up as a subject, already "I" am exposed beyond my ability to close myself off from the other's affection. First of all, "I" am sensitive.

In *Otherwise Than Being*, Emmanuel Levinas defines *sensibility* as "being affected by a non-phenomenon" (75). The language of ability seems to imply a capacity to be affected that precedes (and underwrites) the subject in language. To paraphrase, we might say this sensibility is so delicate that it "detects" or responds even to an absence, a non-phenomenon, a call or address that one may or may have heard. Responding to an affection that may not be there: it would seem Levinas's sensibility could resonate with the accusation that one is being too sensitive, oversensitive, hypersensitive. But *sensitivity* describes a slightly different arc than *sensibility*. Strictly speaking, the hyperdetection or hyperresponse Levinas describes is not an *ability* at all. It is rather a kind of trauma: It is an incapacity or inability to stop oneself from being affected. Sensitivity is not a power, but a nonpower marked by vulnerability and radical passivity. Sensitivity is a rhetorical receptivity that makes address possible. It is a structural opening into (and prior to) the subject through which affection from exteriority enters—not against our will but before it. Reading sensitivity in this way would change the way we argue about trigger warnings, about trauma, and about student activism. Instead of simply waiving along the derogative implications attached to sensitivity when it is deployed as an accusation, which are thoroughly politicized in terms of gender, race, and ability, we can call a halt to the derogation. We can take up rhetorical sensitivity as the site of a shared vulnerability, an exposure to one another's affection in language that implicates us all in an ethical question of responsibility.

Without this rhetorical view of sensitivity, the arguments that are in circulation over trigger warnings might make sense as commonplaces that are articulated in defense of academic freedom. When I weave the commonplaces all together, I see an argument that runs something like this:

> The popular history of trigger warnings narrates their emergence from feminist blogs to social media sites, namely Tumblr, and from there to college classes. Students are the hosts responsible for the transmission of trigger warnings from

"the feminist blogosphere" to the previously uncontaminated space of college. Young people are the beneficiaries of generations of feminist activism, and while previous generations of activists sustained real damage, this generation has learned to elevate every loss and injury to the level of trauma. Trigger warnings are not advocated by real activists, but by young people who confuse being traumatized with being offended, and who criticize others by calling them out for perceived offenses. The performance of outrage replaces real activism, fracturing what should be a coalition of shared political interests with the distraction of infighting and internal critique. In the real world, which is not the feminist internet, social media, or college, even millennials will not be shielded from trauma: so students should not be shielded, either. After all, triggers can be anything, even smells. Some people might object to strong odors like perfume, or smoke. Putting a warning on every possible trigger is therefore a potentially limitless task. Students with real disabilities should seek accommodations through their university's student services. But also, students should not rely so much on the individual, medical model of trauma since it elides systemic and structural violence. Such violence is omnipresent, and no space can ever be made totally safe from it. Students should learn how to deal with things that are hurtful or offensive. They should develop a sense of humor and learn to take a joke. Demanding that instructors cater to students' needs reflects the entitled attitude of a consumer. Instructors should make decisions about teaching according to their judgment as scholars, free from the influence of student demands. Nothing would stop students from claiming to be traumatized by teaching about privilege and systemic violence, so faculty whose work deals with such issues would be more vulnerable to student complaints.

But thinking differently about sensitivity may dissolve the ideologic that connects these premises. Perhaps you think of yourself as sensitive, or you feel that sensitivity can be a good quality, or for some other reason, sensitivity resonates differently with you than with its critics. If so, then the intensity of the fear of sensitive student can make the critiquing them sound hollow. In a 2015 blog post called "Against Students," feminist scholar Sara Ahmed traces out the figure of the problem student, analyzing how different variations of this figure are used to minimize, dismiss, and undermine the political positions of students. Most relevant to this discussion is the variant Ahmed calls the oversensitive student, "the one who responds to events or potential events with hurt feelings." Even as I revise this chapter, the figure of the oversensitive student seems to be on the rise, appearing in more debates about other campus issues, especially in the wake of student protests over racism at Yale and the University of Missouri.[35] This figure of the oversensitive student draws on and activates related raced and gendered tropes that further marginalize the advocacy and interests of the people these tropes target (the angry black woman [Tomlinson]; the feminist killjoy [Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*]; the lazy, faking disabled person aka "Somnolent Samantha" [Yergeau]). The backlash against students is of a piece with a backlash against sensitivity. For the past several years, it has been recirculated and amplified in a reactionary echo-chamber, and what makes it striking is the alliance of opinion between conservatives like Jonah Goldberg and Greg Lukianoff and leftist humanities scholars like participants in the Entropy Magazine roundtable on trigger warnings, Jack Halberstam and Lisa Duggan writing at Bully Bloggers, or the 7 Humanities Professors of *Inside Higher Ed* (Lukianoff and Haidt; Milks; Halberstam, "You are Triggering Me!"; 7 Humanities Professors). The backlash against sensitivity structures what it is possible to say, and has bound and constrained what can be said even by feminist scholars, and contorted those available means into attacks against students. Why is this critique of sensitivity gaining purchase and proliferating now? Why has it attached to college students?

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[35] And in the wake of dozens of other campuses protests and meetings focusing on Black student life, and in student activism against rising tuition and fees at universities and colleges around the world. The figure of oversensitive students also appears in the debate over campus carry laws, especially in the aftermath of an ongoing school shooting and mass shooting epidemic.

Critiques of sensitive students postulate that students are outsiders to academic life, interlopers against a culture that *students themselves are already saying is hostile to them*. Another way of saying the same thing: Some students are not at home in the university.[36] At least since the wave of student activism in the 1960s, students in the US have posed *as a question* whether the university can be a place that welcomes them, a place of hospitality. I argue that this question has to remain open, that it is, each time we teach or convene, the site of a decision, which is to say, of an undecidable obligation in the face of which a decision nevertheless takes place. In the trigger warning debate, the knee jerk reaction against sensitive students closes the question of hospitality, territorializing the classroom as a space where freedom belongs to the instructor (only) and the role of students is not to be welcomed but to decrease their own resistance / obey. What has made feminist scholars and tenured professors feel so at home—or perhaps, so not at home—that the activism of our students is felt as an assault? What makes us unwilling or unable to welcome our students, strangers though they may be, into the university / institution? We must know we are not simply at home in the university: we must know the special torsion exerted by the institution on those of us most outside of its norms, a torsion which aims to draw us into alignment with it. Following Jacques Derrida, we must observe that our defense of academic freedom and of our right to access this institution and even of our right to open it to those we see being excluded from it is always at risk of becoming xenophobic in defense of the own home that makes hospitality possible, even equally violent as the exclusions we seek to correct.

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[36] An incident at Yale over the Halloween weekend in 2015 revolved precisely around the fact that students of color who live on campus in residences administrated by professors are still not at home in the university.

If we take a rhetorical view of sensitivity to the problematic of hospitality that student advocacy for the use of trigger warnings has opened, we may see certain arguments differently. The next sections of this chapter aim to perform a re-reading of the trigger warning debate in order to expose this sensitivity as a condition of possibility being affected or addressed in a rhetorical relation. I'll focus on a select few of the arguments against trigger warnings that were written by college teachers: Jack Halberstam's post on *Bully Bloggers*, "Trigger Warnings are Flawed" published on *Inside Higher Ed* by "7 Humanities Professors," and the Entropy Magazine roundtable on trigger warnings, which included writing instructors. These arguments share a framework in which the value of academic freedom is asserted in the form of a right to hurt others. Quite intelligibly, this right is reserved by scholars who work to critique hegemonic norms, and who know all too well that such critiques are frequently received as (or shut down for) offending normative sensibilities. But by looking at sensitivity as a rhetorical trope that structures the debate about trigger warnings, I want to demonstrate that while it is certainly possible to rebuke, regulate, and punish those uses of language that offend, it's actually impossible to threaten the relation which makes hurt or harm possible. If sensitivity describes an exposedness to one another in language that conditions the possibility for all existents to come into being, then it is never really possible to sever this connection, or block up this route of affection from the outside: one is always sensitive, and the "best" we can do is bury the mutuality of our exposedness, installing ourselves as authorities, experts, police, judges, or teachers, knowers, positioned as immune to or exempt from subjection to another's affection.

TEACHING AT THE SCENE OF TRAUMA

Some critics of trigger warnings have argued what constitutes a "trigger" is not harmful in itself, but only a representation of trauma. A trigger is defined as a representation, words or an image or any signifier, that sets off someone's response to a prior experience of trauma by causing them to remember and even relive that experience. The premise that underlies this argument is that sensitive students respond inappropriately to *representations* of violence: A text that some students may consider triggering is merely a text, and being exposed to such texts cannot do any real trauma.

There are several ways to read this claim. One might counter that words and representations can do violence. Judith Butler sorts this through J. L. Austin's theory of performativity in her book *Excitable Speech*.[37] Butler holds that in order for humans to be hurt by language, we must be vulnerable to it somehow. Butler's account of this vulnerability is that we are constituted in language. We are made to exist as social being through language; interpellated by having been called a name in language. Even the body, Butler argues, its gestures, its habits, its hexis are made to exist by and through social interpellation. Butler argues that language injures when and because it exposes the body of the addressee as vulnerable to address. Injurious language exposes our exposition to language itself.

Another approach would focus on the working definition of a "trigger." Being triggered entails an emotional and/or physical disruption in one's cognitive process. While such disruptions could be viewed as inappropriate responses to mere representations of trauma, many in mental health fields and in disability studies view being triggered as "re-traumatization" (Carter). The cognitive disruption means that a person who has been triggered has in some sense withdrawn from the experience of being triggered; we could argue that being triggered is not an experience at all. Trauma is not graspable, not experienced as such, not limited in its effectivity to representation because trauma is not represent*able*; not available to typical cognitive meaning-making. Rather than construing a trigger as a representation subject to a process of interpretation, we could understand the experience of being triggered as a repetition of trauma, that is, as a rupture in experience itself, as a non-experience by which the process of signification is derailed rather than simply directed to another track. In this case a trigger is not a constative, not a description/representation that points to some other referent in the world, but a performative.[38] Thinking of a trigger as a performative rather than a constative changes its relationship to trauma from one of indirect reference (constative) to one of synonymy. To be triggered is not just to be reminded of a prior wound, but to be wounded again.

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[37] Butler is careful to distinguish, though, between harm that results from language (perlocutionary effects) and harm that is accomplished by and through language (illocutionary effects). An illocution is a speech act that accomplishes the thing it also announces. Butler contends that for someone to be wounded by words, the speech act must be perlocutionary. Austin pointed out that one doesn't hurt someone else by announcing it, as in an illocution, i.e. "I humiliate you!" Eve Sedgwick challenges and complexifies this view with her analysis of the performativity of shame, as in the illocution, "shame on you" (*Touching Feeling*).

A third reading may connect the premise that triggers are not *really* harmful to the view that students of this generation have been spared the more real or legitimate violence and trauma that earlier generations underwent. For example, Jack Halberstam argues that "being queer no longer automatically means being brutalized" ("You are Triggering Me!").[39] With some hyperbole, Halberstam claims students of "the triggered generation" paradoxically demand to be provided safety from overstated harms. Students are "accustomed to trotting out stories of painful events in their childhoods (dead pets/parrots, a bad injury in sports in college applications and other such venues," Halberstam contends. Sensitive students "have come to think of themselves as communities of naked, shivering, quaking little selves—too vulnerable to take a joke, too damaged to make one" ("You are Triggering Me!").[40] But notice how these student subjects move rhetorically from a state of defenseless sensitivity to reckless wielders of power, paralyzing others with overactive critique. Halberstam contends that the "politics of the aggrieved" have created a culture of "finger snapping moralism" in which the performance of outrage takes precedence over and displaces *real* activism ("You are Triggering Me!"). "[I]nstead of building alliances," sensitive students are blamed for "dismantling hard fought for coalitions," chilling the speech-climate so severely that hardly an event can be hosted or a conversation had—or a class taught—without offending someone's fragile sensitivity ("You are Triggering Me!").

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[38] This distinction between constative and performative language is one introduced by philosopher J. L. Austin in the series of lectures that became *How To Do Things With Words*. Austin introduced a sea of classifying terms, including "felicity" and "infelicity" for describing the "success" of a performative utterance, that is, whether it accomplished its aim. Austin called into question the referentiality of language, the stability of the relation between an author/rhetor and their text, and even whether truth and falsity are categories separable from his felicity and infelicity.

[39] Not that it ever did: Whiteness, class, and masculinity have always insulated some of us (Love).

Halberstam's portrait of the feminist and queer activist scene is perhaps the most toxic one yet painted in the debate over trigger warnings. I mean both that it's a portrait of a toxic scene, and a toxic representation. Here's what Halberstam says of the bad old days of sensitivity run amok during the "cultural feminism and lesbian separatism" of the 70s and 80s:

> Hardly an event would go by back then without someone feeling violated, hurt, traumatized by someone's poorly phrased question, another person's bad word choice or even just the hint of perfume in the room. People with various kinds of fatigue, easily activated allergies, poorly managed trauma were constantly holding up proceedings to shout in loud voices about how bad they felt because someone had said, smoked, or sprayed something near them that had fouled up their

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[40] I confess it took me months to catch the Monty Python reference. Halberstam enfolds his critique of trigger warnings in a Monty Python motif, a performance of joking and taking lightly that is meant to exhort readers to laugh and do the same.

> breathing room. Others made adjustments, curbed their use of deodorant, tried to avoid patriarchal language, thought before they spoke, held each other, cried, moped, and ultimately disintegrated into a messy, unappealing morass of weepy, hypo-allergic, psychosomatic, anti-sex, anti-fun, anti-porn, pro-drama, pro-processing post-political subjects. ("You are Triggering Me!")

It feels almost unfair to quote this passage without interruption, so flippant and insulting are its claims. Two scholarly articles on trigger warnings have quoted this same passage, also as a block quote, because perhaps we're unable to break up this monolith, unwilling to disrupt its affective impact, which widens and weighs heavier with the enumeration of what are insinuated to be frivolous complaints (anti-fun?). This passage is perhaps the peak of misunderstanding and minimizing the trauma trigger warnings are meant to acknowledge and respond to.

Many students do come to college with a privileged background that has insulated them from experiencing discrimination, violence, or poverty. But many do not. Following the protests at Yale and Mizzou, more than 35 student groups have issued lists of demands addressing systemic racism at their campuses (see http://www.thedemands.org/, or #BlackOnCampus on Twitter). Black students report on the damaging effects of insufficient campus mental health resources, insufficient staffing where cultural resource centers do exist, insufficient health care plans, insufficient financial aid counseling, and insufficient residential services during breaks; official titles, traditions, and monuments on campus that venerate slaveholders and erase Black labor; hanging nooses, drawn swastikas, marks on the portraits of Black professors. Black faculty too are underrepresented, overutilized, sometimes assaulted by campus police and unsupported by the university. As more campuses consider institutional strategies to deal with the epidemic of sexual assault, some voice complaints about sensitive students availing themselves of legal protection under Title IX (Kipnis; 7 Humanities Professors). Queer students risk losing the support of their families and can lose their homes. Transgender students are not protected by non-discrimination laws in 31 states (Transgender Law Center). Almost 80% of students work while in school, many for long hours at low wages to pay their tuition (Fottrell). These are real issues, sometimes they constitute, cause, or stem from trauma. Prior or subsequent anxiety, depression, and or other mental health issues can undermine the perseverance required of even the most privileged students.[41]

Students have a lot at stake in their college classes. We may hope to get our students to focus less on their grade point average and more on learning, but we know that many scholarships are tied to grade point average. We may think students who are hurt by some part of our curricula are under no obligation to stay enrolled, but we know that student loans can enter repayment if students don't maintain required minimum hours of enrollment. Students are not simply free to extricate themselves from college courses, even those that become unpleasant, embarrassing, or traumatic. Attendance and grades are not only about the mastery of course material: They are in many cases about the stability of students' lives and livelihoods. Teachers do exercise a real authority with a material impact on our students.

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[41] A 2015 student at Berkeley found that, of 790 graduate students surveyed, 47% met criteria for depression, with numbers at their highest among Ph.D. students in arts and humanities: 64% (Jaschik, "The Other Mental Health Crisis"; Panger, Tryon, and Smith).

When teachers repudiate the sensitivity of students, insinuating that they ought to toughen up, these repudiations function as a defense of the right to inflict harm. When critics of trigger warnings express fear of being censored or of chilling the speech-climate, they are objecting to the possibility that when what they say is construed as injurious, they will no longer be allowed to say it, and their freedom to criticize configured as central to academic freedom will be diminished. A right to inflict harm, in the form of critical and potentially injurious speech, is what they defend. An appropriately insensitive student would resist the hurt of injurious speech, submitting to their instructors' will to expose them to such speech but nevertheless resisting its ability to pierce. When critics of trigger warnings argue that the normal procedures of their classrooms would be disrupted if they had to warn their students about possible triggers, that argument makes it sound like the potential for trauma is so regularly inflicted on students that to advise them about it would halt the day-to-day activities of teaching. If we say that trigger warnings are disruptive of normal teaching, then the underlying premise is that such teaching is traumatic. There are a few critics of trigger warnings who have claimed that surprising students with difficult and even traumatic texts is a part of their pedagogical strategy. That pedagogy supposes that simply exposing students to difficult texts is enough to persuade them. It's on par with the pedagogy of the street preachers who travel from campus to campus throughout the year, shouting their messages of condemnation and redemption at passersby. The chances are no greater that surprising your students with graphic descriptions of the brutality of white supremacy, e.g., will make them into anti-racists than that your students will experience a religious conversion because they overhear the street preacher's graphic description of hellfire.

Of course, students can't simply be insulated from the surprise of experiencing a trigger, which is to say that people who live with trauma cannot simply avoid or opt-out of its aftermath. Even the case of the street preacher illustrates a prior vulnerability to being addressed that one can't simply shut off or shut out. Before whatever potentially triggering speech will issue from the preacher's mouth, one is already vulnerable to being addressed. Perhaps like me you crank the volume on your headphones to drown him out: but even ignoring him—even a *non*response—is already a response to the possibility of being addressed. Even before this stranger speaks, you are affected by the possibility of address, without which there would be nothing for you to willfully ignore. There is a kind of trauma in this possibility of being addressed, and teachers and their students are always implicated in precisely this rhetorical relation. It is a violence from which we cannot simply absolve ourselves. Perhaps we should be (more) anxious about the normal violence involved in exposing students to difficult and traumatic material—which is not to say we should not teach. Davis argues, following Levinas, that learning is "necessarily a trauma," that only in the failure of understanding and the inability to grasp do students (of all kinds) every undergo the rupture of knowledge that makes way for learning something different from what I already know, grasp, and understand (*Inessential Solidarity* 74). Trauma of this kind *is* disorienting: Davis calls it "a shattering of self and world" (74). It is impossible to skirt the ethical implication. A triggered student is stranded in this disorientation. Teaching is the possibility of beginning to respond, reorganize, and instantiate self and world differently. Surprise or exposure are not gone from this scene of learning, but rearticulated as possibilities that are opened up by sensitivity, not shut down by it.

I want to circle back, briefly, to underscore that routinely traumatizing one's students with a pedagogy of shock is not what I am arguing is ethical. But that doesn't mean trauma is not, in other ways, routine. If learning is a space of trauma, it *is* a violent space, and that means it is also a space of ethicity. Teachers *and* students are *more* responsible, not less, because of the risks. Some critics of trigger warnings have argued that students must learn to manage their trauma (without requesting accommodations such as trigger warnings, it's implied), and that exposure therapy requires one to face their triggers to overcome them. This argument poses a contradiction, since of course exposure therapy is *therapy,* not college teaching: it is controlled, paced out, and protected by a therapeutic relationship, and therapy does not necessarily have a terminus, let alone a finals period. Therapy is not a teacher's responsibility, and many critics of trigger warnings seem troubled by the idea of designing accommodations for students with mental health issues, protesting that such students who need accommodations should be referred to student services and counseling centers (7 Humanities Professors).[42] Trigger warnings could be seen as a rich example of a community literacy practice through which students with disabilities design and advocate for their own accommodations (Simpkins and Orem). Such a view might even change how we understand the student activism at UCSB that sought to require the use of trigger warnings by all professors on their syllabi.

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[42] In many cases, disabled students have good reasons not to seek a letter of accommodation from student services–such as when the accommodations made available by law are not actually helpful for the student–or not to seek counseling at a university center–such as when timely appointments are not available, relevant professional expertise is not available, or when a student's confidentiality may be compromised by the university through a FERPA loophole, as was the case in 2015 at the University of Oregon (Pryal).

We could understand the request, and even the requirement, of trigger warnings as a request for hospitality. Derrida argues that the foreigner who seeks a right of asylum is "first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated" (*Of Hospitality* 15), and so finds himself "ask[ing] for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities," (15) the teacher, the department chair, the dean. Students are foreigners to the university, and rhetoricians have long argued that students must be taught to speak its language (Bartholomae, "Inventing the University"). When students advocate for themselves *as students*, as in the case of trigger warnings, they still do so in translation, in the language of the university, that is, according to its norms and rules. When the UCSB student senate resolution aimed to require trigger warnings be used on every syllabus, student activists crafted a demand in the language they have been taught: that of the university's policies. There are doubtless some contingencies which helped to produce this resolution: that the author of the resolution is a sexual assault survivor who also serves in the student senate (Loverin). But if students turn *first* to a policymaking body (however non-binding) for redress instead of to their instructors and their classmates, perhaps they have hit a wall in the classroom which does not permit them to negotiate the norms by which class is conducted. Trigger warnings are one strategy that some students have adopted for making these norms explicit, negotiable, and consensual rather than tacit and reserved exclusively to the judgment of a teacher or institution.

Perhaps it is really threatening to instructors to imagine that our students could become participants in the design and delivery of their own education, but isn't this the goal of a critical pedagogy? Trigger warnings are a request students make in the only language they have been taught to not be so actively harmed by the institution they hope to be a part of.[43]

The specific point of using trigger warnings—to refrain from forcing others to relive or rehearse their experiences of trauma—is part of Derrida's illustration of hospitality. He cites this passage from Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which Oedipus, exiled, asks the chorus, "In the name of your hospitality (*xenias*), don't ruthlessly open up what I suffered" (qtd. in Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 41). This request doesn't protect Oedipus, but rather it exposes his vulnerability. A student request for trigger warnings exposes a similar vulnerability. It may expose that a particular student has undergone a particular trauma, and for this reason I believe that any policy on using trigger warnings should be negotiated together by a particular class of students. But a request for trigger warnings also exposes a solidarity in our mutual exposedness to trauma: we are all vulnerable to this affection. We are first of all sensitive to being addressed. How can one warn about what is by definition unanticipatable, unannounced, and unaccountable? Trigger warnings can be a way of welcoming students who are living with trauma, but they also welcome the trauma of being addressed: in the attempt to make it possible to confront triggering texts, they acknowledge the fact that language and representation can and does touch us in traumatic ways. Trigger warnings are one way of acknowledging our inability to stop ourselves from suffering, from undergoing affection in language. This acknowledgement could be thought of as sensitizing, as making oneself sensitive to the destitution of others. This sensitivity welcomes within the trauma of the stranger or foreigner's need. It is not a way of coddling or insulating students from this affection, but precisely a way of opening it. Rather than being a way of shutting down and closing oneself off from wounding words, sensitivity opens one toward trauma, welcoming the affection of address. Teaching and learning depend on this sensitivity. Trigger warnings may sometimes help students prepare for trauma, for the rupture or (non)experience of being triggered. At the least, they offer teachers a way to signal that there might be rupture ahead.

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[43] Black student activism in the fall of 2015 reminds us that there *are* other ways to issue demands, sit-ins and walkouts among them, and that classroom norms are not the only aspects of college life students want to have a say in.

GENDERING SENSITIVITY

The repudiation of sensitivity in the debate over trigger warnings is a reaction against the trauma of exposedness. I want to make a case for understanding this reaction in gendered terms. Gender is an indispensable matrix of intelligibility for thinking about both what it means to be sensitive and what it means to experience or express sensitivity according to a particular style. Masculinity and femininity are shorthand that code for a shifting set of characteristics and styles. Sensitivity is gendered feminine. To be sensitive is not simply to be feminine, so the association of femininity and sensitivity in the trigger warning debate should prick our ears—it is a received part of our cultural understanding of gender. To undo this association would be to evacuate a part of what femininity means, i.e. what it signifies. The problem is that gender can't simply be separated from what it has been made to signify through fiat. Sensitivity does not tell us anything essential about women or femininity, but it does tell us something about the service that women, and femininity, are pressed into rhetorically, standing in for the exposedness that masculinism must repudiate in order to cohere ideologically as impenetrable and insensitive.

What is getting taken for evidence of students' sensitivity in the trigger warning debate has to do with exposure and receptivity. If we look closely at the knee-jerk reaction against sensitivity, at what it buys the rhetors who engage in it, and at the ideological commitments it entails pedagogically, I think it can open a window on the masculinism and misogyny that inflects our willingness to be exposed to one another in a rhetorical relation: in fact, to be sensitive. When critics of trigger warnings chide students for being too sensitive, they are rebuking what they see as an excessive emotionalism and attempting to constrain the authority of students to advocate for their own interests. In *Feminism and Affect at the Scene of Argument*, Barbara Tomlinson argues that associating femininity with excessive emotion is a rhetorical tactic deployed to curtail feminists' ethos. Tomlinson argues, "the ways we frame textuality, argument, authorship, politeness, and emotion emerge from and participate in gendered and racialized hierarchies," meaning that even the norms by which a conversation or debate is judged to be civil are coded masculine, as well as white (18). I'd add that gender and race are not the only hierarchies involved either. Tomlinson argues that the excessive emotionalism ascribed to "angry feminists" (hark, the racialized note of anger) constricts the rhetorical authority feminists and feminist arguments can wield in a debate. Repudiating sensitivity can generate the appearance of a contrast between positions, making critics' seem rational and dispassionate and committed to elevated values over (against) feelings. By denigrating sensitivity, critics of trigger warnings imply that students shouldn't feel, or feel too much.

It is perhaps unsurprising to see this anti-feminist argument circulated by conservative opinion columnists like *The LA Times'*s Jonah Goldberg ("The Peculiar Madness of Trigger Warnings"), or even by *The Atlantic*'s Greg Lukianoff ("Trigger Warnings are Hurting Mental Health on Campus," with Jonathan Haidt), whose book *Freedom From Speech* is published by Roger Kimball's (*Tenured Radicals*) Encounter Press. But it is surprising, I think, to see feminist and queer scholars circulating similar claims, as several did in blog posts on Bully Bloggers, starting with Jack Halberstam's "You are Triggering Me! The Neoliberal Rhetoric of Harm, Danger and Trauma" in July 2014. Halberstam is a professor of English and the Director of the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California. Halberstam cofounded Bully Bloggers with Lisa Duggan, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tavia Nyong'o in 2009 and its deliberately provocative and frequently tongue-in-cheek style was in part a response to the conservative backlash of the Tea Party, and in part to conservative norms prevailing in gay and lesbian activism (for example, the *Bully Bloggers* "Freedom to Marry Our Pets Society Page" lampoons homonormativity in the gay marriage movement).

When Halberstam's post was published, the internet had been atwitter with alarm and outrage over trigger warnings in college classes for more than six months. I want to take a moment here to draw attention to the affective force Halberstam's writing had on me and on others who might consider ourselves part of what Halberstam called "the triggered generation." It hurt. It was deflating, depressing, and disappointing. The depressing feeling made it difficult for me to find a way to write about trigger warnings—as if hurting made it harder to grasp and to respond, as if it were traumatic. In this way my experience of hurt and disappointment was not an experience at all, but rather a nonexperience in which emotion and affective force moved me but were nevertheless inappropriable to meaning-making. But the disappointment eventually became instructive: it provoked me to ask what hopes I thought were dashed in Halberstam's rejection of sensitivity, to explore the relationship I saw between feeling, feeling too much, and feminism, and to reflect on my own affective response as itself evidence of my own exposedness to the injuriousness of language. Language wounds and opens us all, and in this way we are all all too sensitive. While I make no claims about the capacity of my own experience reading Halberstam's post to represent the experiences of others, it was my own sensitivity that allowed me to feel Halberstam's defense of injurious speech as itself injurious. Because the tone of the piece is so flippant, and the argument so organized around the tonic power of humor, the feeling of being wounded can seem like an anticipated or even invited affective response. It is doubtless the central (non)experience that organizes what's at stake in the debate over trigger warnings.

The remainder of this section focuses on Halberstam's post and on one particularly barbed response to it in part because Halberstam has already made the case for precisely the kind of interjection in the academy from outside it that trigger warnings represent. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam argues for "low theory," a subversive form of intellectualism that "seeks not to explain but to involve" (15). Low theory would seem to call for us to privilege the involvement of marginalized and underrepresented students as not just fully equal but crucial participants in higher education. So what has made the repudiation of sensitivity so appealing as to override prior ethical, political, and intellectual commitments of feminist scholars? I contend that critiquing sensitivity appears on its face to be a neutral critique of a nongendered quality, but that it actually conceals a complex set of switchbacks in the distribution of gendered norms that govern the relative values of sensitivity and whatever its opposites may be (i.e. toughness, hardness, resilience, and so on).

It is difficult to be specific in tracing out cultural beliefs about gender. Even hegemonic beliefs are not universally shared. Still they are at once so deeply and thoroughly sedimented that they seem obviously, trivially true—and yet to excavate them and state them plainly makes them sound totally indefensible. In the conversation about trigger warnings in college classes, sensitivity is aligned with the passive, timid, receptive, weepy, overly emotional, and hyper allergic as feminine. The grouping together of these characteristics under the heading of femininity works to enable a certain masculinism in the critique of trigger warnings: that is, a certainty about one's critique, about the coherence and impenetrability of one's position. Masculinity is engendered by the disavowal of all the things it purports not to be, which are ascribed to femininity, making femininity into a holding tank for everything not sufficiently masculine. But this feminine work of holding masculinity together also betrays and undoes the selfsufficiency, coherence, and constancy that make masculinity up. Without a secondarized femininity to oppose itself to, masculinity appears as extremely fragile. Masculinity is vulnerable to comprise or contamination by basically anything: the Twitter hashtag #MasculinitySoFragile, which trended in 2015, inventoried vigorously gendered marketing campaigns, from "camouflage" scented candles to q-tips, sunscreen, and dryer sheets for men (see Banet-Weiser and Miltner). Masculinity must constantly police its borders, hyper allergic to everything exterior to it, in need of shielding, energetically disavowing and excluding its own fragility by ascribing it to femininity instead. Anything insufficiently insulated from the affection of the outside must be thrown out. On this view masculinity amounts to nothing other than a series of exclusions, nothing other than the negation of femininity, the secondarization of a term posited to en-gender a dichotomy we wouldn't hesitate to call "false" if it weren't so extremely powerful. And yet, so vulnerable it requires protection at all costs. Masculinity retains its shape and its position of dominance by excluding everything it wants not to be. This exclusion is frenetic and wide-ranging, it trips on a hair trigger, and it has to be in order to stabilize the appearance of binary gender. We have known this for at least decades—Halberstam was a major contribution to the project of this exposition—but binary gender is an ideological illusion that requires maintenance, and will not disappear from hegemony, let alone effectivity, simply by being unmasked according to a hermeneutics of suspicion. It hasn't yet.

Take for example Halberstam's call on Bully Bloggers for sensitive students to learn how to take a joke. The emphasis on having a sense of humor and taking things lightly configures humor as a kind of inoculation against the violence or harm of trauma.

The blog post opens by acknowledging that "humor is something feminists in particular, but radical politics in general, are accused of lacking," but it then recirculates this trope of the humorless feminist, or feminist killjoy, as a way of minimizing trauma as trumped up ("You are Triggering Me!"). Simultaneously arguing that queer youth groups have propagated the investment of millennials in safe spaces, and that these millennials face no real threats that they would need to be shielded from, Halberstam calls for a hardening instead, a laughter that would deflect whatever piercing or wounding could possibly take place in *only words*.

And someone did answer Halberstam's call, with a piercing joke of their own: a parody Twitter account named Jock Halberslam (@halberslam). @halberslam's first tweet was posted the day after Halberstam's Bully Bloggers post on trigger warnings was published. The profile picture for the account is an author photo of Halberstam that's been modified with (apparently) MS Paint, to add black sunglasses and a red backwards ball cap, which is emblazoned "WALL-E," a reference to Halberstam's writing about Pixar films in his 2011 *The Queer Art of Failure*. It should be obvious enough from the name that Jock Halberslam's main target is this certain masculinism, and the valorization of thick skin. Perhaps my favorite example of @halberslam's skewering of masculinism is the following tweet: "don't ever warn me about anything. people say jock ur about to fall into that manhole and i'm like what are you, a baby? i can take it." And apparently Halberstam can take it: @halberslam is cited/embraced in a follow-up post on Bully Bloggers, "Triggering Me/Triggering You: Making Up Is Hard To Do" (posted July 15, 2014). A lot of the @halberslam tweets are really funny, and/but a lot of them are quite cutting, and many (in my opinion) exaggerate whatever reinvestment in or glorification of masculinity can be traced to Halberstam's work.[44] Halberstam may have felt some sense of obligation to live his creed and laugh off the wounding that attends the joke. I can't know. But this "laughing off," this gesture of embracing the cutting joke could also be read as a doubling down on Halberstam's imperviousness to being wounded.

A reading of the embrace as deflective opens an inquiry into what the cutting of @halberslam has to teach us. In the first place, the jokes are funny *because* they are cutting. And that cutting not only answers the charge of humorlessness with humor, but it also exposes the exposedness of the critic to that cut. The aggressivity of the parody account could be read (am I overreading here? ...reading that which is not over?) as evidence of a similar affective response on the part of the parodist(s) to the response that I had: disappointment, and damage, but especially anger. The cutting joke may be intended as just a joke, but it is also clearly an attempt to wound,[45] pointed at making the point that we are all exposed; if Bully Bloggers can hurt its readers and say it's just joking, a Twitter account can hurt the bully back. If it couldn't hurt, didn't cut, then there'd be no need for Halberstam to deflect the hurt it by embracing it, by laughing it off. If the joke didn't pierce, there would be no need to demonstrate one's imperviousness to puncture. The disavowal of sensitivity is what makes the joke sting. It is aimed at wounding: you hurt me for hurting, so hurting you back will show you that you can hurt, too.

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[44] Whether a post on Bully Bloggers would be defended as part of a scholar's "work" is a question worth raising; one assumes a blog post is several revisions away from scholarly writing that has been subjected to peer review. At the same time, Bully Bloggers has often served not only as a site for provoking and instigating debate, but for developing lines of argument into panel discussions and conference papers, or for posting remarks delivered in another venue.

[45] Even, to wound *back*: to retaliate for one's own feeling wounded. The parodist feels hurt by Halberstam's hurtful critique of feeling hurt, and responds by trying to wound Halberstam. Halberstam's critique is that hurt feelings, taken too seriously, might be used to hurt others, but he argues that critique in a way that hurts others for feeling hurt.

In the paragraph that opens José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, he writes, "Queerness is a thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (1). Queerness is a thing that lets us feel. Oblique to and defiant of the gendered norms that govern and discipline feeling, queerness opens a channel through which we are affected by exteriority. This opening both structures and destructures rhetorical agents, at once making it possible to be sensitive to the address or affection of another, and at the same time making it impossible to simply grasp, experience, or apprehend this affection. In the debate over trigger warnings, sensitivity has been made to signify an excessive vulnerability and neediness, and to locate these features in others (students) in order to disavow it everywhere else. But even this posturing of impenetrability nevertheless exposes a fragility, vulnerability, or sensitivity which underwrites it. What use is the fiction that one doesn't feel? Or that one's feelings are always appropriate, restrained, and subjected to one's faculty of reason? Repudiating sensitivity works to absolve the critic of the violence of address, as if one could simply opt out of the ethical questions opened by teaching when learning always call for trauma. But through its disavowal, sensitivity has become the center of public discussion about harm and responsibility in the scene of the college campus. And from that position sensitivity has continued to signify excessively, calling for attention as a thing that lets us feel, a rhetorical relation that obtains despite every attempt to stop feeling and close that sensitivity off.

Chapter 3: Twisted Together: Twine Games and Solidarity

Write to be read.

— Porpentine, "Creation Under Capitalism and the Twine Revolution"

I can only understand things in terms of what I am. What a dumb racket

— *Mountain*

In 2014, artist and animator David OReilly released a video game called *Mountain*. OReilly had earned some notoriety for animating the fictional game *Alien Child* played by Joaquin Phoenix's character in the Spike Jonze film *Her* (2013). Hailed as OReilly's "first real video game," *Mountain* also contested many of the features people have come to expect of video games: although you can change your perspective, zooming in on the leeward side or out into space, or changing the angle of view, the controls for *Mountain* simply say: "NOTHING." Playing *Mountain* means watching time pass, seasons and weather change, as goofy and sometimes strange foreign objects collide with (or zip uneventfully by) the mountain: a bowling pin, an orange traffic cone, a giant banana. From time to time, a musical ping sounds and text that seems both randomly generated and poignant appears in the game's screen, as if you are the sole audience member for the mountain's inner thoughts. (This chapter's epigraph is drawn from my own playthrough of *Mountain*.) If you're not quick to capture these brief apparitions of text, they'll be forever lost. Occasionally, a sunlike source of light seems to dawn and a single-note chorus seems to greet the day.

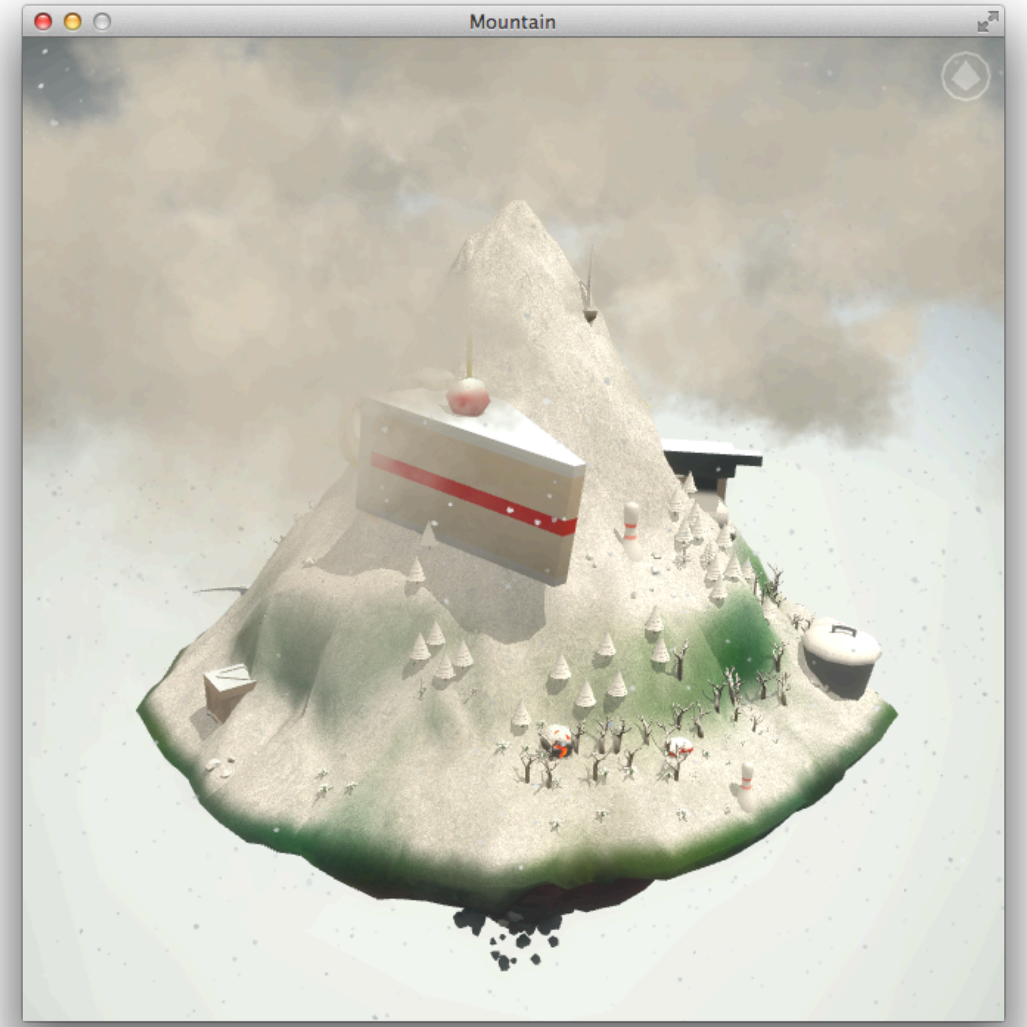

Fig. 1. Mountain, embedded with cake, crate, trash can, and other objects.

Mountain certainly contests the commonplace criteria usually used to identify a video game: there seems to be no quests or puzzles, no hero, no win condition. OReilly commented on his expansive view of what constitutes a video game when he told online tech magazine *The Verge*,

> Everything is also a game, including this sentence, where I can make your eye move left to right, and make sense of these abstract shapes we've agreed upon. You're rendering these shapes into thought on my behalf, it only feels like you're in control, and you are for the most part, but I'm guiding you, and I want you to keep going, even though you can quit at any time (Webster).

Mountain received a good deal of press after its release. It was accessible to purchase; it cost one dollar. And even though *Mountain* was a brazen incursion into the territory occupied by an insular and contentious community of gamers, made by a virtual outsider, as far as I can tell nobody sent OReilly a barrage of physically threatening and sexually violent messages, or posted his personal contact information online publicly, or called the police with a fake crisis situation in order to get a SWAT team dispatched to his home address. But all these things have happened to women video game developers, with more frequency and a higher profile in the two years since the culture war known as GamerGate was touched off by the success of a text-based game called *Depression Quest*, which was built with an open-source software tool called Twine.[46] Twine games are exported as HTML files, so many of them are published as websites, but they can also be made available for download and played offline. Like *Mountain*, *Depression Quest* contests commonplaces about what constitutes a video game.

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[46] Video games and interactive fiction (IF) actually have a shared history, which many trace back to the 1976 computer game *Colossal Cave Adventure.* Some argue that Twine is a return to the text-based roots of video game history (see Zhu). *Colossal Cave Adventure*, like many IF or text-based games, relies on parser for the player to interact with the game. To be effective, your input has to exactly match the language and syntax of the computer program. The Twine author Porpentine has written a critique of the exclusionary

When you launch *Depression Quest* on a computer, which you can do through the popular digital game distribution software called Steam, you are greeted by a description of depression penned by the late David Foster Wallace overlaid on a background that looks like a staticky tv screen. A lengthy description of the game contextualizes the goals of the game: to simulate depression, so that "other sufferers will come to know that they aren't alone," and to make people without depression aware of what living with depression actually feels like.

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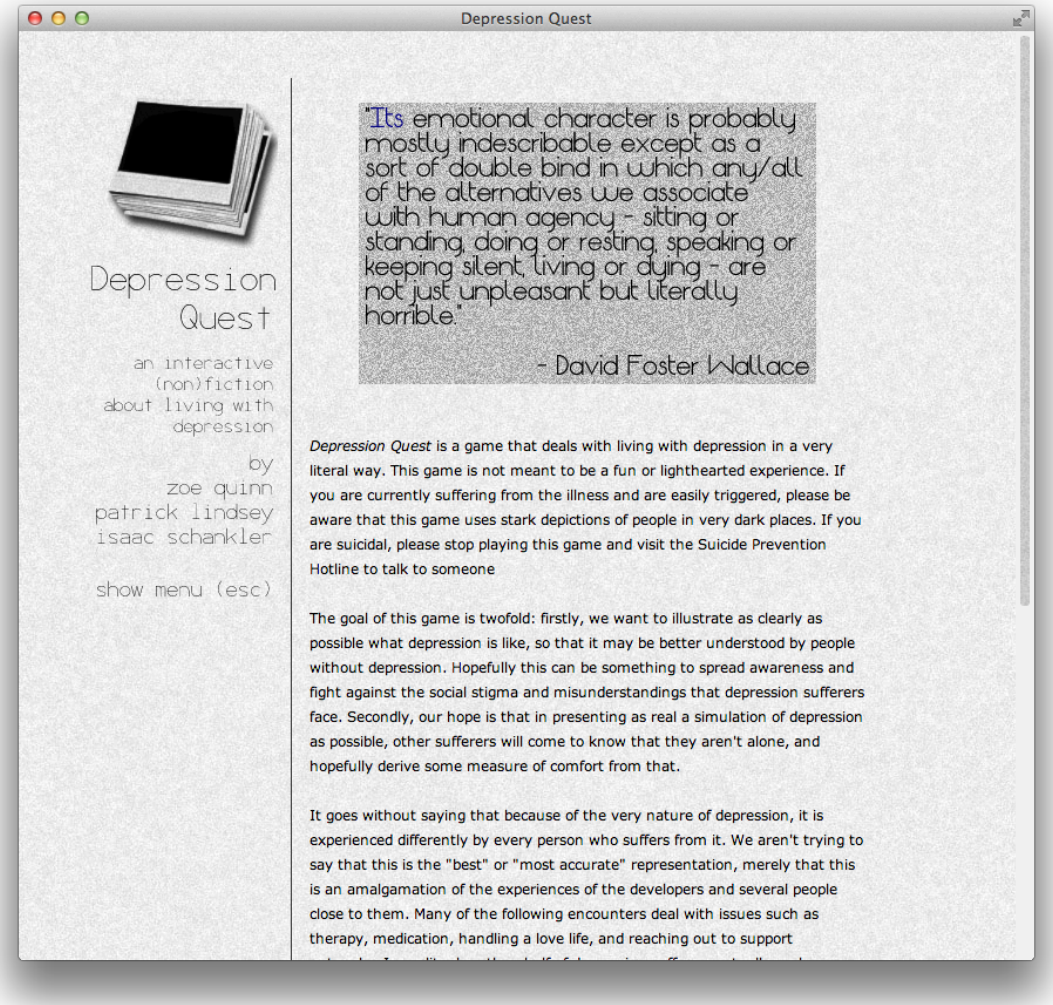
function of parser in her essay "Creation Under Capitalism and the Twine Revolution," exemplified, I think, by this succinct parser failure: "> hug is not recognized" (Porpentine).



Depression Quest

an interactive (non)fiction about living with depression

by
zoe quinn
patrick lindsey
isaac schankler

"Its emotional character is probably mostly indescribable except as a sort of double bind in which any/all of the alternatives we associate with human agency - sitting or standing, doing or resting, speaking or keeping silent, living or dying - are not just unpleasant but literally horrible."

- David Foster Wallace

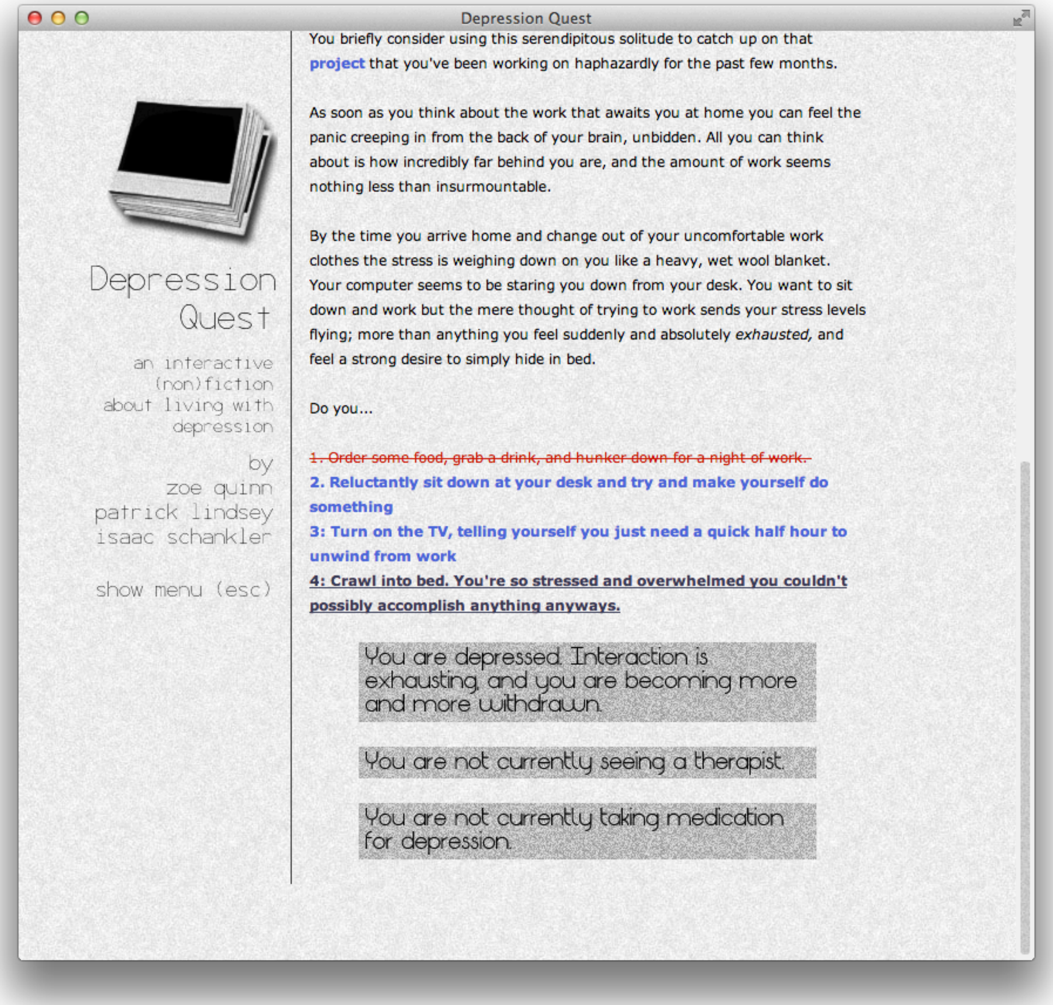
Depression Quest is a game that deals with living with depression in a very literal way. This game is not meant to be a fun or lighthearted experience. If you are currently suffering from the illness and are easily triggered, please be aware that this game uses stark depictions of people in very dark places. If you are suicidal, please stop playing this game and visit the Suicide Prevention Hotline to talk to someone

The goal of this game is twofold: firstly, we want to illustrate as clearly as possible what depression is like, so that it may be better understood by people without depression. Hopefully this can be something to spread awareness and fight against the social stigma and misunderstandings that depression sufferers face. Secondly, our hope is that in presenting as real a simulation of depression as possible, other sufferers will come to know that they aren't alone, and hopefully derive some measure of comfort from that.

It goes without saying that because of the very nature of depression, it is experienced differently by every person who suffers from it. We aren't trying to say that this is the "best" or "most accurate" representation, merely that this is an amalgamation of the experiences of the developers and several people close to them. Many of the following encounters deal with issues such as therapy, medication, handling a love life, and reaching out to support

Fig. 2. The opening screen from *Depression Quest*.

When a player begins the game, the player is addressed in the second person—"You are a mid-twenties human being"—in a way that invites you to identify with the protagonist of the game. Characteristic of a game made with Twine, the text that appears on screen is laden with hyperlinks that connect to other nodes in the game (these nodes are called "passages" in Twine). At crucial junctures, *Depression Quest* presents you with choices to make about what to do and how to care for yourself, but in order to simulate the limitations of living with depression, some of these options expire—instead of appearing as a bold purple hyperlink, the text appears in red with a strike through. The game assesses your choices, and tracks the state of your depression, which eliminates more possible choices as your depression deepens.



You briefly consider using this serendipitous solitude to catch up on that **project** that you've been working on haphazardly for the past few months.

As soon as you think about the work that awaits you at home you can feel the panic creeping in from the back of your brain, unbidden. All you can think about is how incredibly far behind you are, and the amount of work seems nothing less than insurmountable.

By the time you arrive home and change out of your uncomfortable work clothes the stress is weighing down on you like a heavy, wet wool blanket. Your computer seems to be staring you down from your desk. You want to sit down and work but the mere thought of trying to work sends your stress levels flying; more than anything you feel suddenly and absolutely *exhausted,* and feel a strong desire to simply hide in bed.

Do you...

~~1. Order some food, grab a drink, and hunker down for a night of work.~~
2. Reluctantly sit down at your desk and try and make yourself do something
3: Turn on the TV, telling yourself you just need a quick half hour to unwind from work
4: Crawl into bed. You're so stressed and overwhelmed you couldn't possibly accomplish anything anyways.

You are depressed. Interaction is exhausting, and you are becoming more and more withdrawn.

You are not currently seeing a therapist.

You are not currently taking medication for depression.

Fig. 3. Your limited and diminishing choices in *Depression Quest*.

Depression Quest uses what video game scholar Ian Bogost has called "procedural rhetoric" to make its argument. In *Persuasive Games*, Bogost writes, "Procedural rhetoric is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created" (3). The "rules" of the game constrain, enable, and in this case purposefully diminish the agency of the player. The game's argument is made by way of its rules. In Anna Anthropy's 2012 manifesto on do-it-yourself digital games credited with popularizing Twine, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Dropouts, Queers, and People Like You Are Taking Back an Art Form*, Anthropy argues that "[s]ince games are composed of rules, they're uniquely suited to exploring systems and dynamics" and "especially good at communicating relationships" between "actions or choices and their consequences" (20).

Depression Quest was made by game developer Zoe Quinn, and when the game garnered awards and accolades, its growing prestige ignited an anti-feminist and misogynist backlash against women, feminists, and cultural critics in the video games world. Dubbed GamerGate, the so-called movement purported to be about "ethics in video games journalism" (a flimsy pretext that derives from the embittered ranting of Quinn's ex-boyfriend), but in reality, GamerGate is defined by the sustained harassment (both online and off) and threats of violence against women and any remotely cultural critic of video games.[47] Feminist games critic Anita Sarkeesian, who was scheduled to give a talk at Utah State University in October 2014, was forced to cancel when the university, bound by the state's campus carry law, could not forbid attendees from bringing guns to the lecture, even in the face of an explicitly threatened school shooting if

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[47] For more thorough treatments of GamerGate's specious claims, anti-feminist and misogynist context, and the historical patterns of harassment and abuse within gamer culture, see Mantilla; Massanari; Chess & Shaw; Heron; and Mortensen.

Sarkeesian's talk went on as planned.[48] Although GamerGate was not an unprecedented upwelling of misogynist harassment (Sarkeesian and other prominent women in the video games industry, including Felicia Day and Brianna Wu, had been targeted with threats and harassment since 2012; see Tomkinson & Harper), it does represent an intensification that some have argued bespeaks the growing power and visibility, within gamer culture, of historically underrepresented people (Todd). Sarah Beth Evans and Elyse Janish argue in "#INeedDiverseGames: How the Queer Backlash to GamerGate Enables Nonbinary Coalition" that "[f]eminists became the scapegoats of GamerGate" because they "represent[ed] the larger trends of growing diversity and queerness in gaming that can no longer be denied or ignored" (127).

A major force in this trending toward diversity and queerness is an open-source software called Twine. Developed in 2009 by Chris Klimas, Twine enables its users to design games without requiring much knowledge of programming languages or computer code. Users of Twine can create a game by making hyperlinks that connect passages or nodes. Twine can be complexified using computer protocols like HTML, CSS, and Javascript, but its simplicity means that virtually anyone can use it to make a game, even those who don't have the access to the resources or coding knowledge possessed by industry insiders. In an essay called "Love, Twine, and the End of the World," game designer Anna Anthropy argues, "All you need to know to make a game in Twine is how to write. And the same way that people who don't think of themselves as artists know how to doodle on napkins, folks who don't think of themselves as writers know how to scrawl in a journal" (36). Using Twine can make video game design more personal, ephemeral, and accessible than ever before. You don't have to be affiliated with a corporate studio to make a Twine game. You don't even have to be familiar with how to write computer code.

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[48] The contradictory positions gamers took up in relation to public debates about gun violence and its representation in video games was succinctly articulated in this tweet by @TheSquink: "1999: gamers demand we stop blaming school shootings on videogames. 2014: gamers threaten a school shooting because videogames" (Squinky).

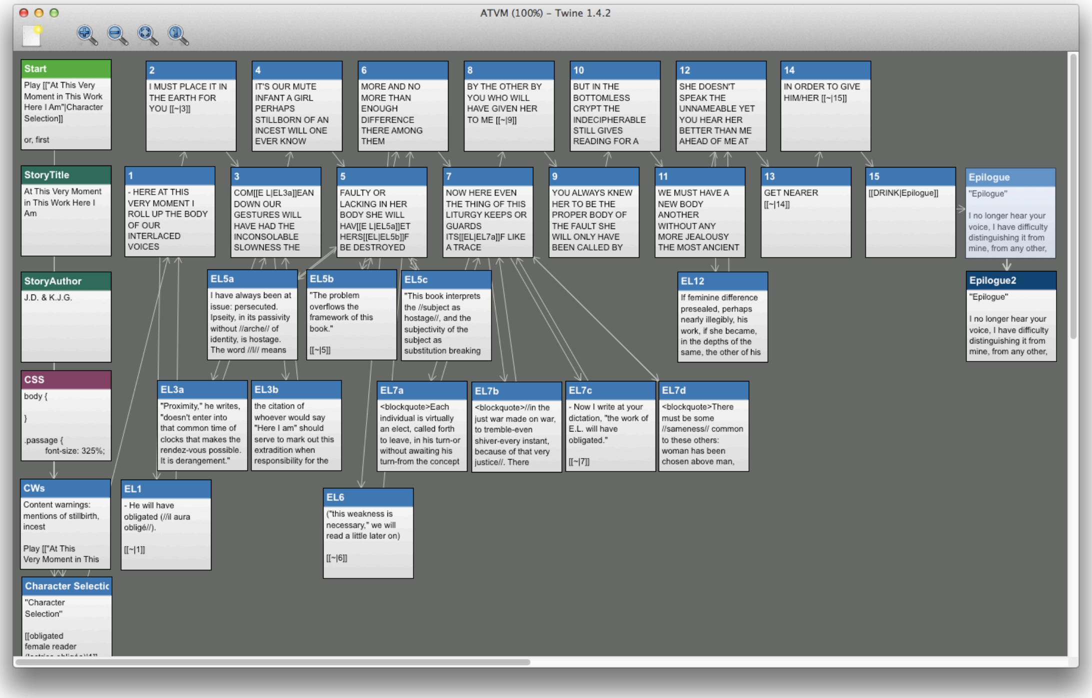
In this chapter, I am going to give examples of some of what's possible in Twine that doesn't have much precedent in traditional video games. I argue that these games are each rhetorically inventive in the sense that they expand the available means of persuasion. Video games always make arguments, however implicitly. Twine, billed by *The New York Times Magazine* in 2014 as the "video game technology for all," opens this rhetorical space to voices that have previously been marginalized or altogether silenced (Hudson). Twine has empowered a cohort of game designers—many of whom are underrepresented in and by mainstream games—to design and disseminate games that critique or altogether abandon the violent, corporate, masculinist, and even humanist values of predominant gamer culture. Twine games contest the highly policed definition of video games, and as the reactionary backlash to *Depression Quest* demonstrated, the values articulated with these definitions are passionately held but also deeply gendered.

TWINE'S PROCEDURAL RHETORICS

I want to take a moment to reflect on the second-person address that I'm adopting in this chapter. Though its informality is not usually preferred in scholarly writing, addressing you, my readers, as "you" serves an important rhetorical function here. It places my authorial voice somewhere in the same neighborhood as the second-person address adopted by the developers of many text-based digital games, and it aligns me to some extent with David OReilly's claim that even this sentence is a game: governed by certain normative and/or interpretive rules, temporally precarious should you be interrupted or decide to quit, and most importantly for my purposes, relational. If you will accept, even provisionally, that reading can be a game, then a related (underlying) premise is that rhetoric, or addressed language, can be a game, and it depends fundamentally on your ability to be affected in and by language. So a question is: can language be a video game? And what if language is a video game? And as you are reading this chapter, I ask that you take time, if you have it, to play at least a few of the games I'll discuss—it will give you a very different experience than only reading about them, or in addition to reading about them. Throughout this chapter, I've included screenshots where I think having a visual of the thing I'm describing is most helpful.

Like the video games that are made with Twine, Twine itself is a rule-governed digital program, and it too has a procedural rhetoric delimited by the operations it can perform. In an essay on video games and sexuality called "*Ludus Interruptus*," Twine author Merritt Kopas argues that video games have tended since their inception to be about conflict, competition, overcoming resistance and obstacles, and solving problems or puzzles (Kopas). These tendencies make it difficult, she argues, to develop games that incorporate sexuality without making sex into another conflict or challenge. Answering the claim that it's just technologically easier to develop ballistic mechanics rather than responsive dialogue, or to show bodies ripped apart and dying rather than embracing, Kopas reminds us that even if this claim were true, "development technologies aren't neutral; they're informed by the interests of their creators, often in subtle and totally unpredictable ways" (223). In other words, the procedural rhetoric of mainstream studio games has been shaped over time to privilege violence—and it could, in theory, be reshaped in other directions. In "The Machine That Therefore I Am," Jim Brown reminds us, "rules are not only followed. They are also *authored*" (497). By looking at the procedural rhetoric of Twine games made by outsiders to that mainstream studio game world, we can explore what new procedural rhetorics have been made possible by Twine, and by its ability to open the writing of procedures to "all," as *The New York Times Magazine* claimed.

Jane Friedhoff's platform study of Twine, published in the 2013 proceedings of the Digital Games Research Association, takes a closer look at what about Twine's software design makes it such a fruitful tool for queer authors/game makers, for people without much experience coding, and for creating games that deal with "taboo" topics and traumas that would never see the light of day on Xbox Live or in the Apple's App Store (Friedhoff). Friedhoff argues that Twine's reference materials focus not on the technical aspects of making games with the tool, but first on "answering '*why* would you make a game at all?'" (3). Twine's documentation is oriented toward what Friedhoff calls "the expressive potential" of using hypertext's interactivity. Twine also has unofficial documentation, including tutorials by Anna Anthropy and Porpentine, which contextualize Twine's capabilities in political and artistic terms. As Friedhoff contends, "These tutorials act as a call-to-arms for potential developers, validating and encouraging the use of individual experience as the subject of a game" (3). The validity of writing about your individual experience is also a key part of Twine's accessibility: Friedhoff argues that Twine lends itself well to writing in the genre of the vignette, which she defines, citing Ian Bogost, as a "brief, indefinite, evocative description or account of a person or situation" (6). Although nothing in Twine's design restricts it to proceeding mainly by text rather than say, images, or even sounds, Friedhoff points out that the visual, spatial layout of Twine's passages resembles writers' planning and organizing technologies, from notecards to Scrivener. But the connections between passages in Twine also resembles an organic structure: Porpentine compares Twine games to "creatures under a microscope or root networks carrying information" (qtd. in Friedhoff, 4). Porpentine even runs a Tumblr account that posts pictures of Twine "node maps," fittingly called "Twine Garden" (http://twinegarden.tumblr.com/).



Start
Play [["At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am"|Character Selection]]

or, first

2
I MUST PLACE IT IN THE EARTH FOR YOU [[~|3]]

4
IT'S OUR MUTE INFANT A GIRL PERHAPS STILLBORN OF AN INCEST WILL ONE EVER KNOW

6
MORE AND NO MORE THAN ENOUGH DIFFERENCE THERE AMONG THEM

8
BY THE OTHER BY YOU WHO WILL HAVE GIVEN HER TO ME [[~|9]]

10
BUT IN THE BOTTOMLESS CRYPT THE INDECIPHERABLE STILL GIVES READING FOR A

12
SHE DOESN'T SPEAK THE UNNAMEABLE YET YOU HEAR HER BETTER THAN ME AHEAD OF ME AT

14
IN ORDER TO GIVE HIM/HER [[~|15]]

StoryTitle
At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am

1
- HERE AT THIS VERY MOMENT I ROLL UP THE BODY OF OUR INTERLACED VOICES

3
COM[[E L|EL3a]]EAN DOWN OUR GESTURES WILL HAVE HAD THE INCONSOLABLE SLOWNESS THE

5
FAULTY OR LACKING IN HER BODY SHE WILL HAV[[E L|EL5a]]ET HERS[[EL|EL5b]]F BE DESTROYED

7
NOW HERE EVEN THE THING OF THIS LITURGY KEEPS OR GUARDS ITS[[EL|EL7a]]F LIKE A TRACE

9
YOU ALWAYS KNEW HER TO BE THE PROPER BODY OF THE FAULT SHE WILL ONLY HAVE BEEN CALLED BY

11
WE MUST HAVE A NEW BODY ANOTHER WITHOUT ANY MORE JEALOUSY THE MOST ANCIENT

13
GET NEARER [[~|14]]

15
[[DRINK|Epilogue]]

Epilogue
"Epilogue"

I no longer hear your voice, I have difficulty distinguishing it from mine, from any other,

StoryAuthor
J.D. & K.J.G.

EL5a
I have always been at issue: persecuted. Ipseity, in its passivity without //arche// of identity, is hostage. The word //I// means

EL5b
"The problem overflows the framework of this book."

[[~|5]]

EL5c
"This book interprets the //subject as hostage//, and the subjectivity of the subject as substitution breaking

EL12
If feminine difference presealed, perhaps nearly illegibly, his work, if she became, in the depths of the same, the other of his

Epilogue2
"Epilogue"

I no longer hear your voice, I have difficulty distinguishing it from mine, from any other,

CSS
```
body {

}

.passage {
	font-size: 325%;
```

EL3a
"Proximity," he writes, "doesn't enter into that common time of clocks that makes the rendez-vous possible. It is derangement."

EL3b
the citation of whoever would say "Here I am" should serve to mark out this extradition when responsibility for the

EL7a
<blockquote>Each individual is virtually an elect, called forth to leave, in his turn-or without awaiting his turn-from the concept

EL7b
<blockquote>//in the just war made on war, to tremble-even shiver-every instant, because of that very justice//. There

EL7c
- Now I write at your dictation, "the work of E.L. will have obligated."

[[~|7]]

EL7d
<blockquote>There must be some //sameness// common to these others: woman has been chosen above man,

CWs
Content warnings: mentions of stillbirth, incest

Play [["At This Very Moment in This

EL1
- He will have obligated (//il aura obligé//).

[[~|1]]

EL6
("this weakness is necessary," we will read a little later on)

[[~|6]]

Character Selectic
"Character Selection"

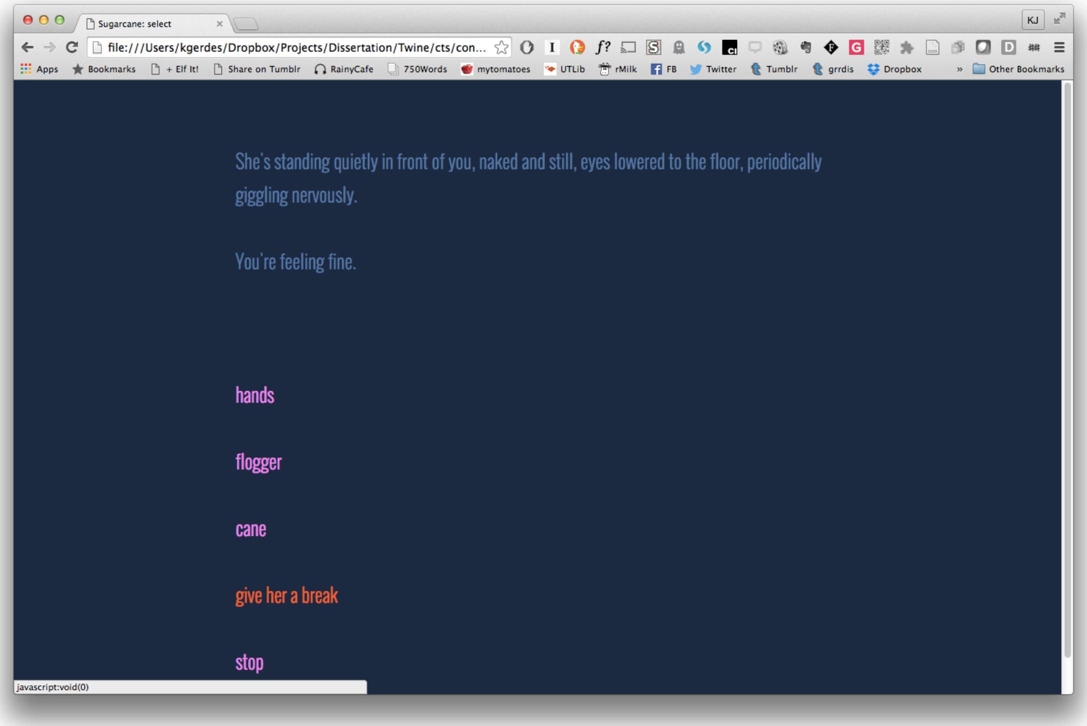
[[obligated female reader

Fig. 4. Node map of the Twine game *At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am*.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Friedhoff points out the "Twine's distribution model is key to its support of non-mainstream games" (7) While developing a game for iPhone or Xboxes may require payment for a development kit, permission to release work in the format and/or to sell work released in the format, and even the scrutiny of a review process that may explicitly bar some kinds of content, Twine has none of these barriers. It can be used for free on Mac or Windows operating systems. Twine games can be exported directly to HTML files that can be uploaded to your own site or to a free Twine hosting site like philome.la (http://philome.la) or even emailed directly to players. There is no customs authority reviewing your game's content. Twine's openness and flexibility have earned it the reputation of "the video game technology for all."

INTIMACY, EPHEMERALITY, AND APOCALYPSE

So what kinds of games are we talking about? Kopas also argues in the same essay that "tools like Twine that are making it possible for new kinds of authors to make games about forms of sex and kinds of relationships that are totally underrepresented" (232). Here's one example from Kopas's own body of work: *Consensual Torture Simulator*. In *Consensual Torture Simulator*, you have agreed to an SM scene with your girlfriend in which you will use impact play (slapping, spanking, flogging, hitting) to make your partner cry.


Sugarcane: select
KJ
file:///Users/kgerdes/Dropbox/Projects/Dissertation/Twine/cts/con…
Apps
Bookmarks
+ Elf It!
Share on Tumblr
RainyCafe
750Words
mytomatoes
UTLib
rMilk
FB
Twitter
Tumblr
grrdis
Dropbox
Other Bookmarks
javascript:void(0)

She's standing quietly in front of you, naked and still, eyes lowered to the floor, periodically giggling nervously.

You're feeling fine.

hands

flogger

cane

give her a break

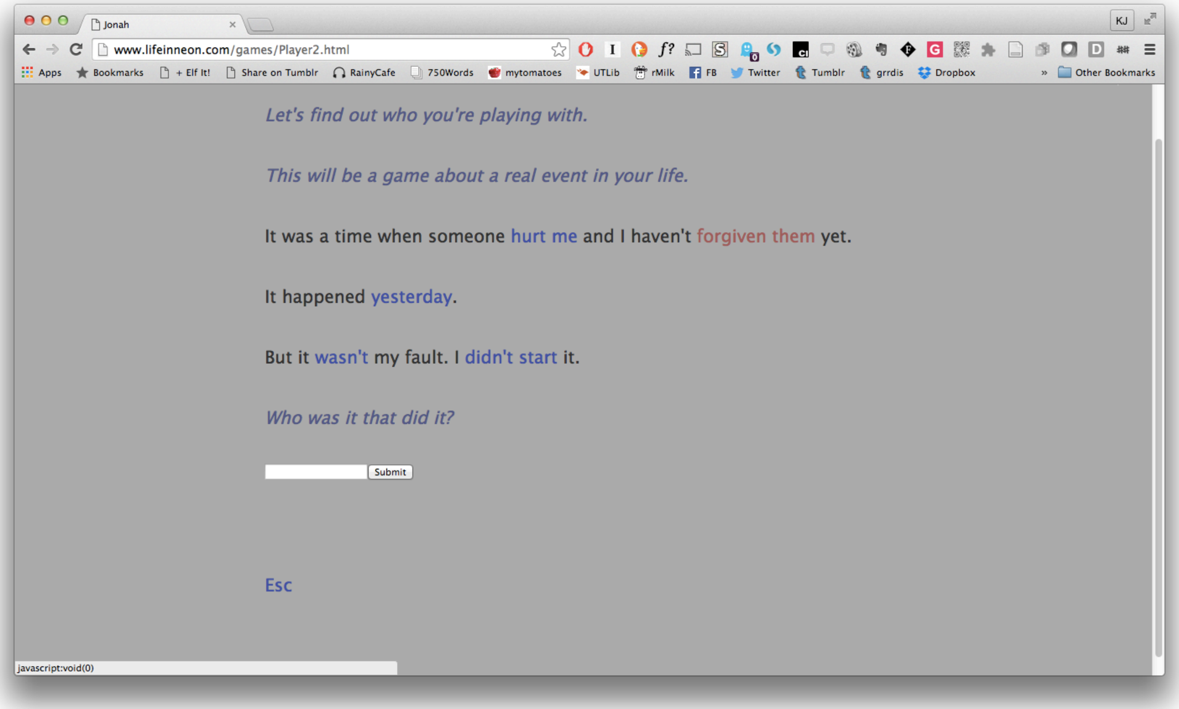
stop

Fig. 5. A decision point in *Consensual Torture Simulator*.

Getting her to cry is the goal of the scene, but it is not necessarily the goal of the game: you can stop the scene at any time, and your decisions can escalate or de-escalate the scene's intensity. When I played *Consensual Torture Simulator*, I had already read a lot about it, so I thought I knew what would happen in the game, and I thought I had a sense of the argument it could make. I suppose I thought I was emotionally prepared to play it, but I was surprised by my own resistance to escalation. I found that I had to exceed the level of sustained impact I was comfortable with in order to make my partner cry. Moreover, her tears come in varying intensities—"crying" isn't a simple or obvious win condition—so I felt it was up to me to decide when and if we had met our goal. In the denouement of the game, you administer aftercare to your partner, praising and comforting her and getting her a glass of water or fixing her a cup of tea. It's remarkable how much responsibility you feel, how you confront your own normative beliefs about sexuality, violence, partnership, negotiation, consent, and care in just the few minutes it takes to play the game.

So one thing you can do in a Twine game that you can't do in a traditional video game is negotiate sex and consent as physical and emotional activities instead of just conquest. In the blockbuster game of 2015, *Fallout 4*, for example, sex is essentially the result of stat check. During dialogue with a potential partner, the option to "flirt" appears. There's no description of what strategies you might use to flirt; no multiple ways to approach flirting as a task. If you choose to flirt, the game checks your character's charisma stat. This is basically a pick up artist's idea of the interplay between sex and procedural rhetoric: seduction is a performance that deserves to be rewarded, and sex is the reward. *Consensual Torture Simulator* disperses this transactional view of sex with a scene of trust, risk, decision, and care. Rather than procedures that orient your partner as a target, *Consensual Torture Simulator*'s procedures affect *you*, making you feel the limits of your character's agency and, perhaps, your own.

Twine can also create ephemeral experiences. As studio games get exponentially bigger, featuring huge traversable worlds, 50-hour main quests and dozens of repeatable side quests, games like Lydia Neon's *Player 2* or Anna Anthropy's *Queers in Love at the End of the World* stand out in sharp contrast. *Player 2* is a reconciliation game, and it was the first Twine game I ever played. The game opens by announcing that your playthrough will be kept safely anonymous, and it even explains how you can download the game and play offline if you so prefer. "Player 2" isn't a party to the game, not directly, but someone you choose to fill the role, someone who has hurt or wronged you. The game puts you in control of how you represent and respond to them.


Jonah
www.lifeinneon.com/games/Player2.html
Apps
Bookmarks
+ Elf It!
Share on Tumblr
RainyCafe
750Words
mytomatoes
UTLib
rMilk
FB
Twitter
Tumblr
grrdis
Dropbox
Other Bookmarks
KJ
Submit
javascript:void(0)

Let's find out who you're playing with.

This will be a game about a real event in your life.

It was a time when someone hurt me and I haven't forgiven them yet.

It happened yesterday.

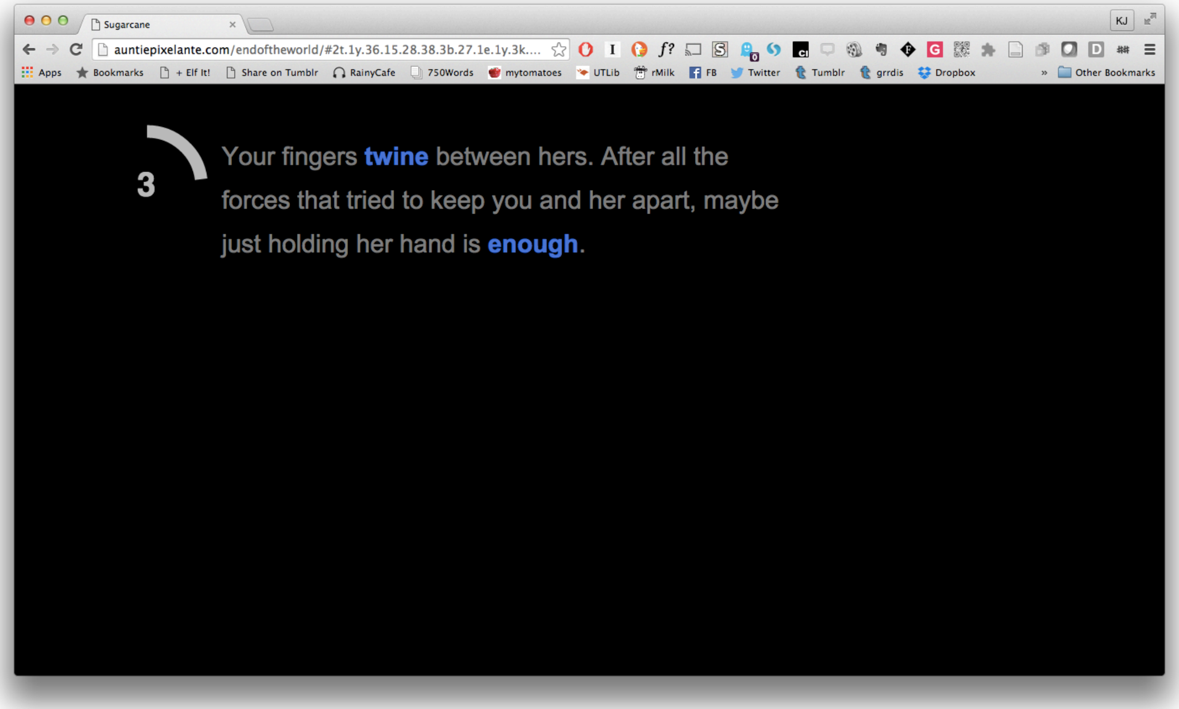
But it wasn't my fault. I didn't start it.

Who was it that did it?

Esc

Fig. 6. You control the situation in *Player 2*.

Player 2 is about forgiveness, or letting go of negative feelings and moving on from an interpersonal conflict that's weighing you down. When the game is over, nothing you've done has been saved. In *Queers in Love at the End of the World*, like *Player 2*, nothing is saved: a timer counts down ten seconds before the apocalypse wipes everything away. According to the author, there are 180 unique nodes in the game—far more than even the speediest reader could navigate in the allotted time. When the game ends, an option to "Restart" appears—I find myself replaying this game five or six times in a row every time I play it.


Sugarcane
KJ
auntiepixelante.com/endoftheworld/#2t.1y.36.15.28.38.3b.27.1e.1y.3k....
Apps
Bookmarks
+ Elf It!
Share on Tumblr
RainyCafe
750Words
mytomatoes
UTLib
rMilk
FB
Twitter
Tumblr
grrdis
Dropbox
Other Bookmarks
3

Your fingers **twine** between hers. After all the forces that tried to keep you and her apart, maybe just holding her hand is **enough**.

Fig. 7. Time is running out in *Queers in Love at the End of the World*.

Each playthrough offers you a tiny slice of a vast and varied world. A brief moment of possibility opens right before, and because, "Everything is wiped away." *Queers in Love at the End of the World* lets you explore that possibility. The sense of magnitude is humbling for me, especially against the apocalyptic backdrop: you'll only see as much of this world as you can in the limited time you have left. Even when a path ends before the timer runs out, you can never exhaust all the possibilities in one run.[49] And yet, even in the face of total annihilation, you're always offered the chance to "restart." *Queers in Love at the End of the World* is a testimony about the force of even ephemeral love to outlast—to outlast both the norms and laws that have prohibited it, and the shared world that made it possible. The procedurality of the ticking clock has a rhetorical force of engendering panic, but the consistency with which the world is destroyed can also allay your sense of urgency.

VIDEO GAMES AND RHETORICAL IDENTIFICATION

In just these few examples, you can get a sense of the range of what's possible in Twine: games that deal frankly with subjects like sex, trauma, and loss that engage their players through a close description of experience. These games frequently invite their players, or incline them, to identify with the protagonist by addressing the player *as* the protagonist in the second person. Players are positioned to make decisions for/as the main character, even when their choices are limited, illusory, or simply *bad.* The player takes responsibility for, or takes the place of, the game's character. In an article for *Bitch Media* about Twine games and the emerging "gender horror" genre, Carli Velocci puts it this way: "As a system that, at its core, is about interactivity and sympathy, games can experiment with the idea of the narrator in a way that other mediums can't. While the printed word can place you into the first-person view of a character, there often remains a distance in that you don't have to fully inhabit them. In these horror Twines, the world created by the game developer traps a player in a gruesome experience" (Velocci). This aspect of video games, which rhetoricians might be tempted to label "identification" in familiar terms, is hotly contested in video games scholarship and in online gaming communities.

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[49] My colleague Steven LeMieux points out that some e-poetry projects have engendered a similar endlessness, including, for example, computer-generated poems so long that the time it would take to read them is longer than the time left before the heat-death of the universe. One way of reading all the possible text, he suggests, is by looking at the web site's source code. Of course, that's a somewhat technical and highly trained way of reading, radically different than what Twine anticipates its readers will want to (or are able to) do.

Games scholars, have approached identification a bit differently than most rhetoricians. Gee argues in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* that identification with characters in a game happens as a projection of your own identity into the identity of a character. In what Gee dubs a "tripartite play of identities," the virtual identity of the character is tied to the real-world identity of the player through a "projective identity" (58-66). In Gee's view, projective identity is the place where your pre-existing values and ways of being in the world can be challenged and revised, since projective identity is where your beliefs come into contact with the values and capacities of your character. Media studies scholar Jonathan Cohen has developed a set of criteria that others have used to assess identification with video game characters (Cohen; Shaw), but his definition of identification as the internalizing of another's perspective and explicitly *not* "a process of projecting one's own identity onto someone or something else" sets him in conflict with Gee's approach. For Gee, identification is a complex scene that can, given the right conditions, enable learning. For Cohen, identification is more limited, but his view still privileges what he calls "vicarious experience" (249)—the chance to see things according to someone else's perspective. To some extent, these views of identification comport with rhetorical views of learning through identification advanced by exercises in character, such as ethopoeia and prosopopoeia (See Hagaman; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*). But another widely held view of rhetorical identification is drawn from the work of Kenneth Burke.

In his influential *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke argues that identification is the better part of what rhetoricians call persuasion. Rhetoric, which Burke defines as addressed language, always implies an audience (38), and so rhetoric is always relational (even if your audience is yourself). At times Burke seems to hold the position that persuasion is not complete without or until the rhetor and audience successfully establish identification; at other times, it seems he holds identification to be a precondition for persuasion: "Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice from within" (39). But what's clear about Burke's theory of identification is that it is "compensatory to division" (22)—identification is a way of crossing a chasm that contains and separates individuals from one another. For Burke, the independence of the individual is axiomatic, a biological given. This independence has, of course, been called into question by not only rhetorical theorists, but also by scholars working in ecology, human neuroscience, animal biology, and more. And, arguably, it is called into question by Burke's own theory that language has the power to move individuals to take action through symbolic means alone. While Burke's view of identification is widely circulated (a Google Scholar search for "identification" in texts citing *Rhetoric of Motives* shows more than 2900 hits), rhetoricians have extended this work (Ratcliffe 2005) and offered it significant challenges (Davis 2010). In "The Machine That Therefore I Am," Jim Brown writes, "Kenneth Burke's work on identification can be understood as one long line of attempts to deal with withdrawal, with how rhetoric is an attempt to narrow the gap between humans, to show how 'I' am like 'you'" (507).

IDENTIFICATION AND/AS VIOLENCE

Even though identification is understood to unite audience and rhetor, or player and character, identification can also serve an exclusionary and even boundary-policing function. GamerGate is a heated example of this policing, and of its self-reinforcing nature. Evans and Janish argue that a gendered binary which align "real gamers" with hypermasculinity and fake gamers with femininity and feminism structured GamerGaters' arguments about the controversy. Evans and Janish point out that this doubling down on the toxicity of gamer identity further drives out people who play games but don't wish to associate themselves with the attributes of "real gamers." They write: "The rejection and harassment of nonnormative players embedded in games culture undoubtedly influences the many players who do not claim 'gamer' as an identifier because they do not identify with the prevailing values and practices associated with 'gamers.'" Of course, such hyperallergic policing of ingroup identity effectively produces a fallacious "no true Scotsman" fallacy: even someone who lived and breathed video games could have their credibility to offer critiques assassinated, since no true gamer would offer such critiques to begin with. Or in Zoe Quinn's case, no true gamer would *make a video game* worthy of press and accolades if that game dared to differ from the hypermasculine norms of true games.[50]

It may seem like identification in gaming culture requires strict adherence to harsh and narrowly defined norms. But compare the fate of Quinn's *Depression Quest* to that of OReilly's *Mountain*. It's not like you're any more a mountain than you are a trans lesbian space bandit (probably), as in Anna Anthropy's *And the Robot Horse You Rode In On*, and for most people Quinn's depressed person is probably a much more relatable character. But men are allowed much more leeway with the norms than women; or more precisely, people who deviate from more than one cultural norm are exposed to more intense scrutiny than are others more proximate to the center. But so *Mountain* itself has a commentary to offer on the policing function of identification, and its insight heads this chapter as the epigraph: "I can only understand things in terms of what I am. What a dumb racket" (*Mountain*).

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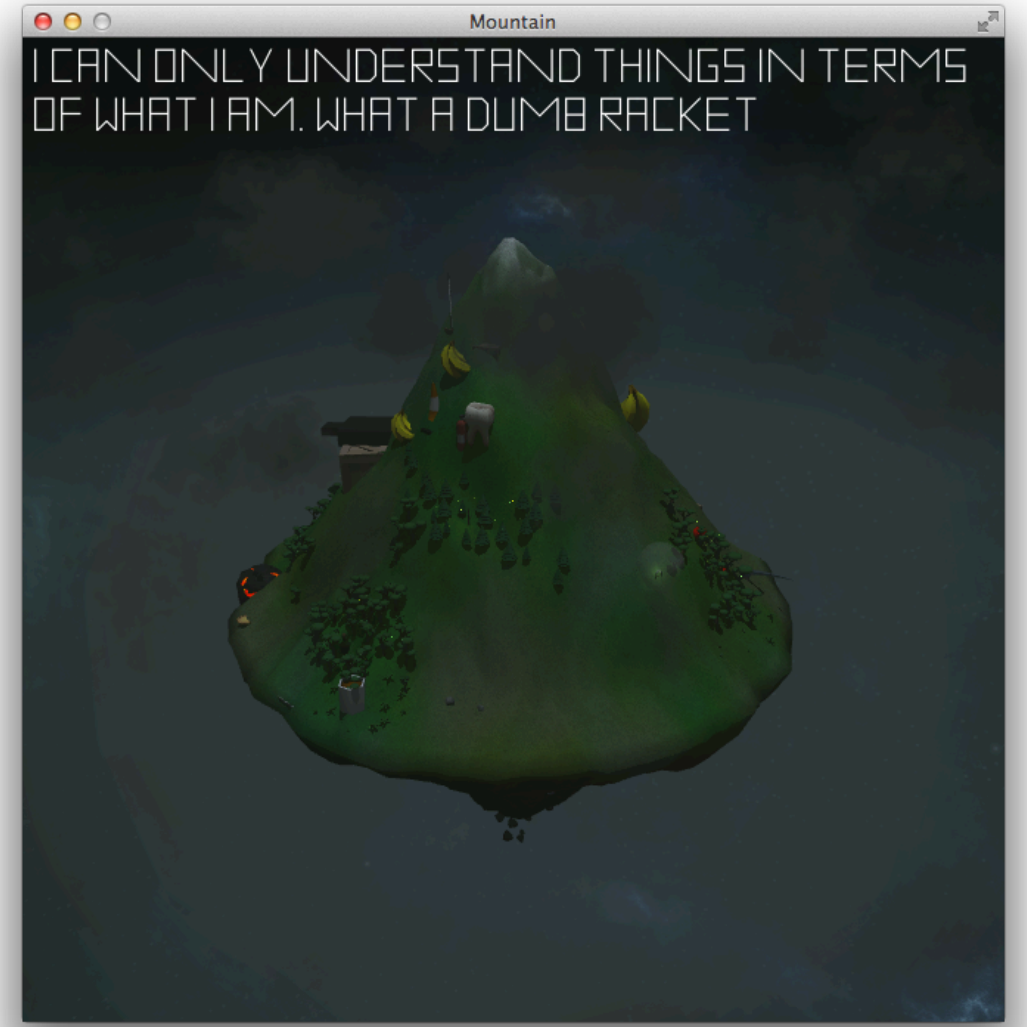
[50] One may wonder why games like *Animal Crossing* or *Harvest Moon* did not attract this intensity of backlash, perhaps because they had the protection of a major corporate brand (Nintendo).



I CAN ONLY UNDERSTAND THINGS IN TERMS OF WHAT I AM. WHAT A DUMB RACKET

Fig. 8. A poignant, computer-generated thought from Mountain.

Mountain's evaluation of the limits of understanding crystalizes an argument in circulation about rhetoric and identification: the only thing that can be grasped, mastered, and assimilated to understanding is the *same* thing, something that is in fact already understood. This argument has been made by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, although it is perhaps much more centrally articulated in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas, the alterity of the other is so tremendous that identification can never overcome it: it can only diminish it. Identification that erases the alterity of the other is violence.

The violence of identification is put under the microscope in the first chapter of Diane Davis's *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations*. Davis puts Burke's theory of identification back into conversation with one of Burke's major influences: Sigmund Freud. What Davis calls Burke's "quiet rivalry with Freud" is located in the question of whether identification is conscious and symbolic, as Burke came to contend, or unconscious and unavailable to rational critique, as in Freud. Carefully tracing the consequences of Burke's position, Davis argues that if identification was first of all symbolic, if it does depend on shared *meaning*, then the subject (who identifies) must *already* know itself as and through symbolic representation—the self-knowledge of the subject must be mediated. This sticks Burke with a bit of a contradiction. Davis: "Burke describes identity as an effect of the processes of identification *and* identification as the achievement of an already discernable (biological) 'identity'" (22). It takes some digging into Freud's perspective to see what Burke left out: suggestibility. In his early work with hypnosis, Freud discovered a radically generalized affectability (or sensitivity) that precedes the human use of symbols, logic, and even language. Davis unpacks the implication of reconciling Freud's insight with Burke's theory of identification: "What suggestibility suggests is a human capacity to be 'directly and immediately' induced to action or attitude by another, sans all logical foundation and cognitive discretion; it involves a nonrepresentable and each time originary identification that takes place behind the back and beyond the reach of critical faculties" (32). This suggestibility, or the vulnerability to an *im*mediate affection, closes the space between for identification that Burke will argue takes place through symbolic meaning.

Burke, Davis speculates, perhaps advanced his theory of identification as compensatory to division in an effort to install some distance, some space of ethicity between self and other, making a place for rational critique to call a halt to "*horde* instinct" that Freud posited as holding sociability together. But, Davis contends, the possibility of *dis*connection or *dis*identification is *not* "the effect of a critical intervention"—rather, "it emerges instead from a *failure* of identification, and interruption in narcissistic appropriation" (34). In other words, the consuming operation of identification is thwarted, the "devouring affection is interrupted... by a surplus of alterity that remains indigestible, inassimilable, unabsorbable." Davis emphasizes that "this failure cannot be *produced* through reason or critique" (35)—since an irrepressible affectability obtains, ensuring that reason alone cannot pierce it. The distance between self and other required to institute a space of ethicity only opens, Davis argues, "in the failure of identification, each time," since in that failure "'I' am opened to the other *as* other and get the chance to experience something like responsibility for the other that exceeds (and conflicts with) 'my' narcissistic passions" (35). That is, when you fail to fully identify with an other, your failure opens a chasm across which some relation to difference other than its total assimilation—through identification *or* through suggestion—becomes possible. Instead of the mastery of this alterity through understanding it in terms of what you already are, your nonunderstanding, or disidentification, makes another ethical relation possible.[51]

This relation, I contend, can be called *solidarity*. The common sense of solidarity is that 'we are all in this together'—and what is it that we are all together in? Some shared world; some kind of struggle; something unites us, joins us to each other through what we share; something essential, crucial to the sharing of identity that is so important to rhetorical action. That is the common sense of solidarity. But an inessential solidarity is different: it is a solidarity based on *nothing*, based on nothing in common, nothing the same, and nothing shared. It is a solidarity based on no *essence*, in fact, based precisely on the fact that there is no essence to guarantee the individualism of the human being. Human being rather is given already in response to the alterity of the other (and this alterity is precisely what resists our identification and hampers our striving toward rhetorical action—it undoes figuration, refuses our identification, rejects our commonality, and in this distance/chasm/gap, it issues an ethical command: Thou shalt not kill. You should not and will not eradicate the difference between us. This complicated order of priority is what Levinas calls the "anachrony" of responsibility (Davis 14); that it comes first, before the subject "I" am/is there to properly hear and respond. Levinas argues, being is therefore already being-for: it must come first or else it would never come at all. Rhetorical address is already a response, always an address to an other, always across a chasm of difference, or else there would never be a reason to write or speak or make recourse to symbols. The appearance of the subject, the "I" who takes responsibility, responds to the command not to kill, does so (appears, responds) already in "a demonstration of solidarity that precedes understanding" (Davis 60). Inessential solidarity is the opening of a rhetorical relationality, through which the perception of difference or alterity comes *after* the response to it. The perception of difference is also a non-experience of it, a failure to grasp it, a sense that alterity has eluded your understanding. You only realize after you have missed it that there was something to be missed. This perception is a result of your response, a response which is not captured/contained/exhausted by/dependent on your understanding.

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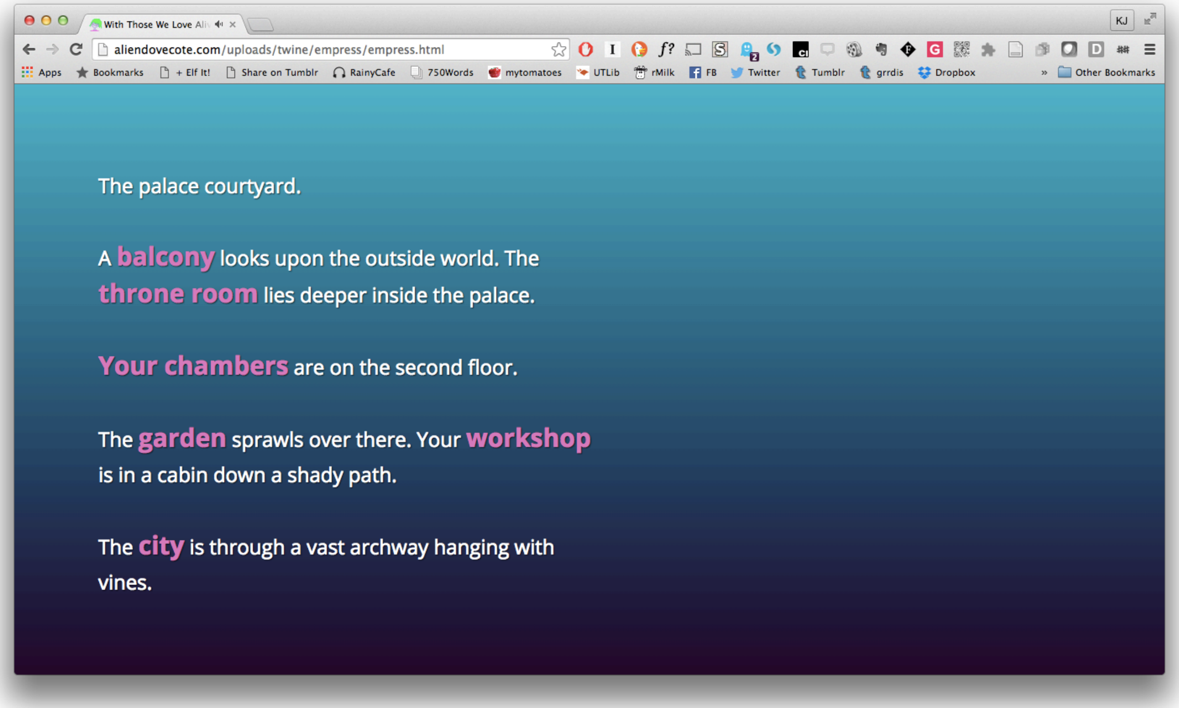
[51] "Disidentification" is used here to describe more than a simple miss or complete failure of identification: disidentification bears a transformative or revisionist relationship to identification, altering the dominant cultural scripts/fantasies through their reinscription (see Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*).

BEING ADDRESSED: SOLIDARITY WITH ALTERITY

I want to show how this relation becomes legible in Twine games. You, for example, are often addressed in the second person. But instead of being asked to identify yourself with a heroic protagonist capable of superhuman strength and speed, your difference from the main characters of many Twine games is what actually matters. Instead of identifying with the "you" of the game and suppressing the differences, you are invited and encouraged to take notice of these differences, to experience them as instituting a space of ethical distance. You may not have reckoned with the trauma, violence, gender regimes or regimens, and more that Twine games can take you inside of. But what you can discover is that even from the inside, the seams still show. For example, in Porpentine's *With Those We Love Alive*, you are a smith or "artificer" who makes weapons, crowns, and prostheses for a monstrous queen. You can leave the castle and visit the city, where there is a temple and a barlike dream distillery.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The palace courtyard.

A **balcony** looks upon the outside world. The **throne room** lies deeper inside the palace.

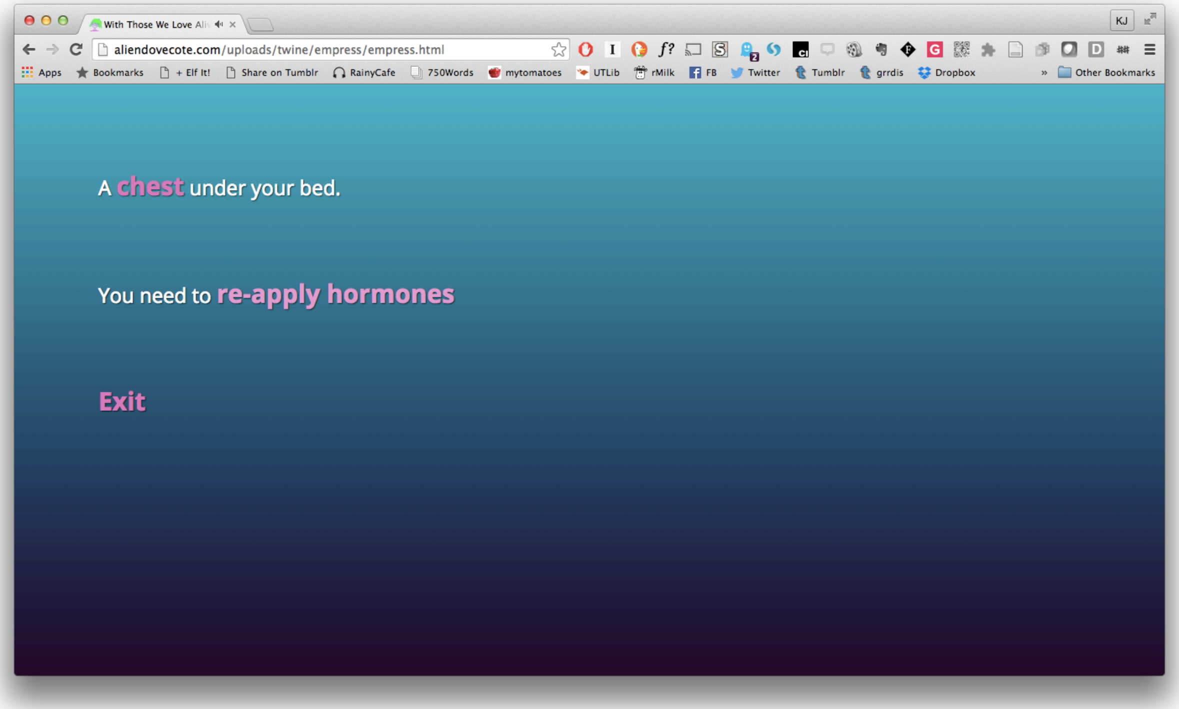
Your chambers are on the second floor.

The **garden** sprawls over there. Your **workshop** is in a cabin down a shady path.

The **city** is through a vast archway hanging with vines.

Fig. 9. The places you can explore in *With Those We Love Alive*.

You can walk through the royal gardens, or go down to the lake and meditate. When you go to your workshop, you can only work if you are rested, and you sometimes have to go back to your room to sleep. I bounced erratically, a bit bitterly, between drinking in the distillery, cursing the silence of the gods in the temple, and glowering when I'm unable to go to work. There are many rituals in the game, both optional and required—but every so often, before you can sleep, you have to have taken your hormones.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A **chest** under your bed.

You need to **re-apply hormones**

Exit

Fig. 10. Take hormones before you can sleep in *With Those We Love Alive*.

Refusing to do so will keep you up—no matter for how long you rage between other places—and when you exhaust the temple, bar, and workshop, you finally have to attend to your body. You administer a gendering regimen that's almost incidental to the game's plot, but it is integral to your health and wellbeing and your advancement through the game. The hormones don't *alter* your character in any apparent way, but they keep you self-similar; they are identity maintenance, even self-care. And if the *you* who exists outside of the game doesn't have this type of gender regimen in your own life, you may notice the ritual as a stark difference. (And if you *do*, then you probably already have a visceral knowledge of the opening hormones can make for navigating the rigid gender binarism that dominates your lived experience.)

Playing *With Those We Love Alive* can give you an opportunity to 'identify' with your character in which the difference between you remains indigestible, inassimilable, unabsorbable. Rather than identification, we may call this solidarity: your share in the experience of your character is always limited by your difference from her. *With Those We Love Alive* asks you to attend not only to the body of your character within the game, but also the own body that you are using to play the game. At various times throughout the game, you are asked to draw a sigil on your arm representative of some decision point or moment in the game. The stack of sigils you wind up with echoes the inscribed arms of others that are housed in the game's temple. Through the physical act of inscription, you are invited on the one hand to identify with your character—to imagine that your sigils are *her* sigils, too—but on the other hand, your attention is drawn to how you are not the player character: how your inscriptions stay outside of the game, on your own flesh, and how it maybe hurts if you chose too sharp a pen to draw with, or how long your drawings will last (probably days after you're done playing the game) if you chose a softer nibbed marker. When you complete the game, a link can take you to Porpentine's tumblr tag for the game, where she posts photos players have submitted of their sigils.[52]

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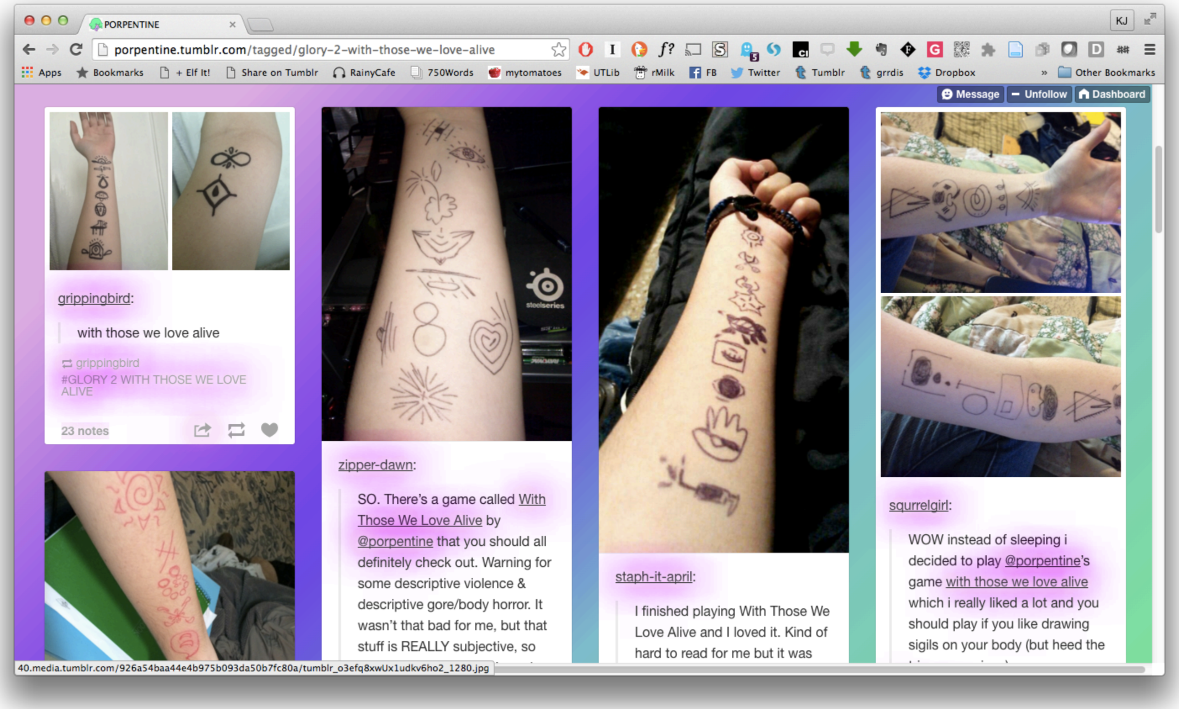
[52] The photos are overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) white. Porpentine's Twine tutorial/manifesto "Creation Under Capitalism and the Twine Revolution" offers a stringent critique of whiteness and/as the repression of ordinary creativity. Merritt Kopas acknowledges in the introduction to *Videogames for Humans* that the Twine games that garner the most press are "still overwhelmingly white." For another look at Twine's diversity narrative, see Soha Kareem's "Tying in Diversity with Twine Games."


PORPENTINE
porpentine.tumblr.com/tagged/glory-2-with-those-we-love-alive
Apps
Bookmarks
+ Elf It!
Share on Tumblr
RainyCafe
750Words
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UTLib
rMilk
FB
Twitter
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Dropbox
Other Bookmarks
KJ
Message
Unfollow
Dashboard
steelseries
23 notes
40.media.tumblr.com/926a54baa44e4b975b093da50b7fc80a/tumblr_o3efq8xwUx1udkv6ho2_1280.jpg

grippingbird:

> with those we love alive

grippingbird
#GLORY 2 WITH THOSE WE LOVE ALIVE

zipper-dawn:

> SO. There's a game called With Those We Love Alive by @porpentine that you should all definitely check out. Warning for some descriptive violence & descriptive gore/body horror. It wasn't that bad for me, but that stuff is REALLY subjective, so

staph-it-april:

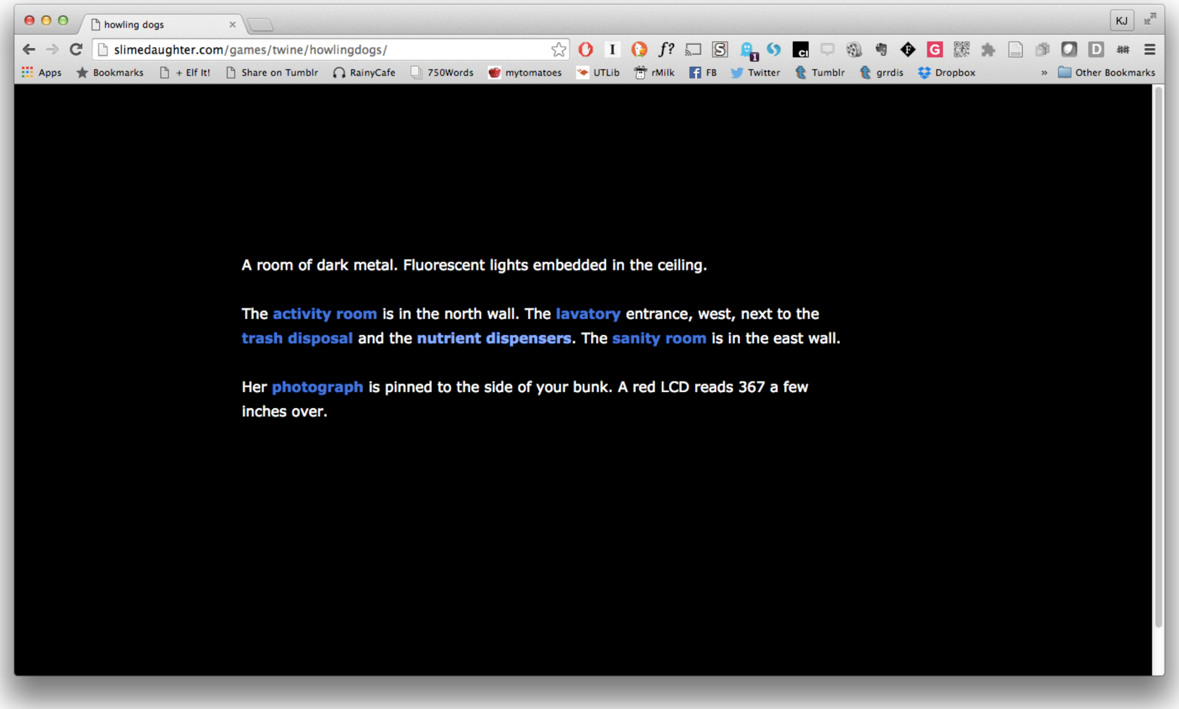
> I finished playing With Those We Love Alive and I loved it. Kind of hard to read for me but it was

squrrelgirl:

> WOW instead of sleeping i decided to play @porpentine's game with those we love alive which i really liked a lot and you should play if you like drawing sigils on your body (but heed the

Fig. 11. Photos of sigils drawn on the arms of *With Those We Love Alive* players, published on Tumblr.

Another game, also by Porpentine, offers an even more explicit example of this solidarity, a sharing in experience that nevertheless underscores difference and distance. *Howling Dogs* garnered several awards, but it received a lot of attention in 2013 when Richard Hofmeier, winner of the 2013 Independent Games Festival's grand prize, spray painted "*howling dogs*" over his own festival booth. In *Howling Dogs*, you are trapped in a closed system of rooms. A room with your bunk in it is connected to a lavatory, metered food and water dispensers, a trash chute, a photograph of someone you seem to have known, a room full of soothing screens identified as "the sanity room," and an "activity room" housing a virtual reality machine.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KJ

A room of dark metal. Fluorescent lights embedded in the ceiling.

The **activity room** is in the north wall. The **lavatory** entrance, west, next to the **trash disposal** and the **nutrient dispensers**. The **sanity room** is in the east wall.

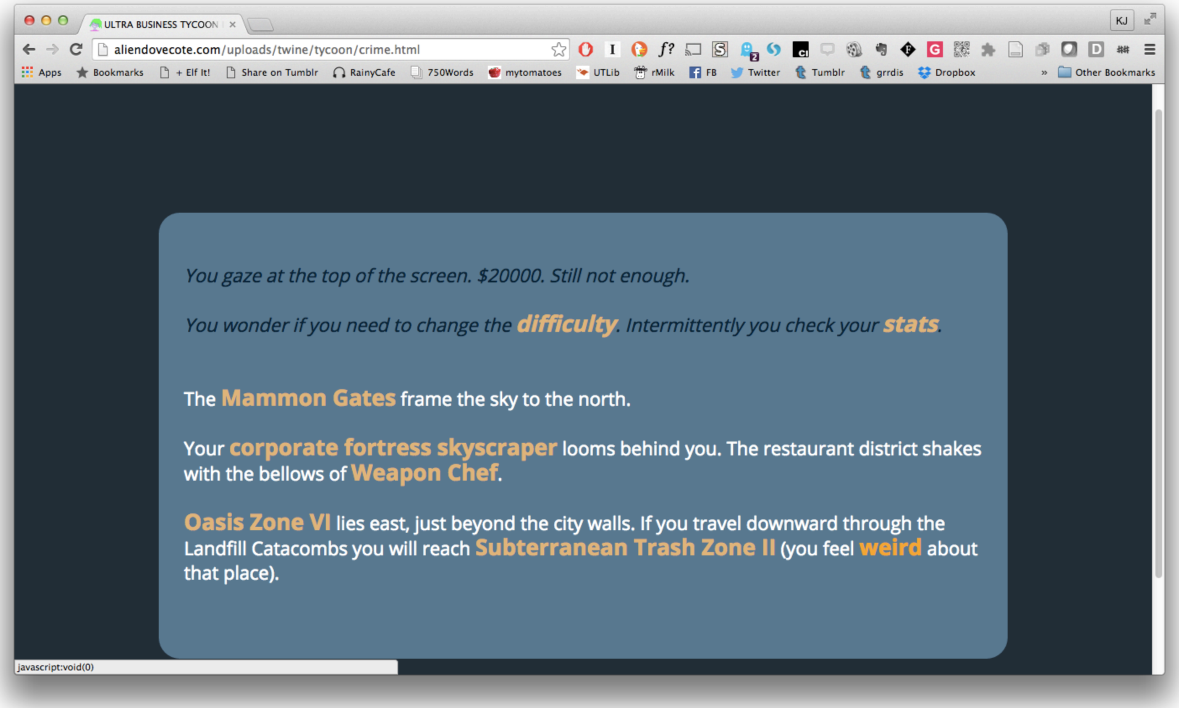
Her **photograph** is pinned to the side of your bunk. A red LCD reads 367 a few inches over.

Fig. 12. Your captive habitat in *Howling Dogs*.

Once you've fed and watered yourself, you can engage the virtual reality machine and negotiate a series of varied scenarios: you are a scribe for the empire, a trapped and murderous woman, a Joan of Arc. The virtual reality machine—and the fact that most of the game's "action" only takes place when you're inside of it—installs even another layer of distance, to draw your attention to the artifice of the game and the constructedness of your experience of reality. Not only are you being asked to identify with the player character that you are addressed as by *Howling Dogs*, but your player character within *Howling Dogs* is also asked to identify with the characters in the virtual reality machine. The ethical distance between you multiplies; imagining yourself to be the protagonist is not enough to fully close it.

Porpentine's *Ultra Business Tycoon III* opens with a simple and familiar interface that mimics a traditional computer game: you may start a new game, load a game, view options, read the guide, view the credits, or quit. You can get an early hint that *Ultra Business Tycoon III* is not what it purports to be if you try to load a game: clicking the link for the only saved file results in an italicized message: "*Your big sister's save file. Best not to fuck with it.*" As you wend your way through the parodically violent business world, amassing tens of thousands of dollars and eluding cops, more italicized reflections create incursions into your opportunity to identify with the ultra business tycoon, and the "you" of ultra business tycoon separates from the "you" of Porpentine's game, and you learn that the power fantasy makes a kind of dissociative escape for the player, a young girl growing up in a violent home.

In a 2014 conference presentation, rhetorician Jim Brown offered a reading of *Ultra Business Tycoon III* as what he calls "obfuscated mapping," a kind of turn on the cognitive mapping done by graphical user interfaces. Brown writes, "The vast majority of games teach us that what we do makes sense, that we can control an environment, and that there is a clear relationship between actions and results." *Ultra Business Tycoon III* is not like this. This game is home to a "realistic Bee AI," Subterranean Trash Zones, animals that ooze, and vomit you can't monetize.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javascript:void(0)

You gaze at the top of the screen. $20000. Still not enough.

You wonder if you need to change the ***difficulty****. Intermittently you check your* ***stats****.*

The **Mammon Gates** frame the sky to the north.

Your **corporate fortress skyscraper** looms behind you. The restaurant district shakes with the bellows of **Weapon Chef**.

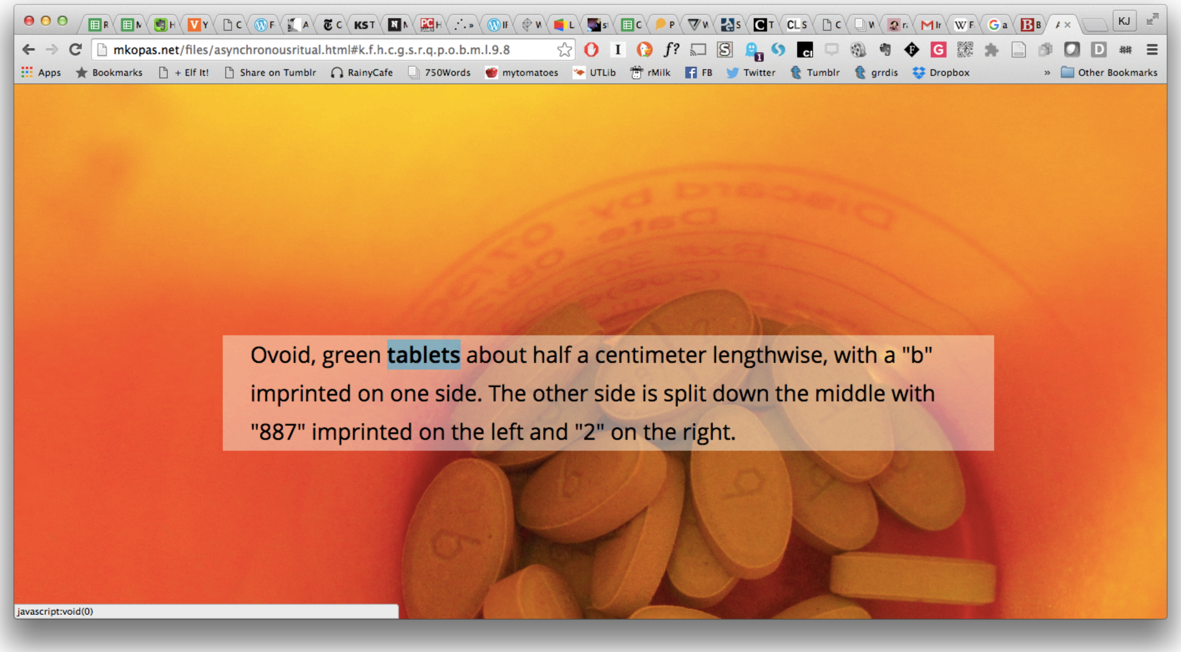
Oasis Zone VI lies east, just beyond the city walls. If you travel downward through the Landfill Catacombs you will reach **Subterranean Trash Zone II** (you feel **weird** about that place).

Fig. 13. Your thoughts on playing *Ultra Business Tycoon III* inside *Ultra Business Tycoon III*.

Brown argues that obfuscation in the game's interface—impotence over a degrading trash landscape cordoned off from cleanliness, order, and safety; non sequitur consequences of illogical actions, death as random as rewards—obfuscation can "productively defamiliarize" your interaction with the game, and with its subjects (trauma, trash and capitalism), and you can learn to look at the screens that organize meaning that you're usually taught to look through. Of course, Twine is one of those screens. Drawing on

Friedhoff's platform study of Twine, Brown argues that "the taboo material" of many games made in Twine is linked to its status as an outsider platform through its low threshold for learning how to make games with it. And, I'd add, an emphasis on what Brown calls "forcing choice"—this hyperlink or that, or else the game won't advance—makes Twine's procedures as crucial to this obfuscated mapping as the procedures of the games it has been used to produce. Brown closes his argument by positioning obfuscated mapping as not a simply neutral rhetorical practice of sense-making (or unmaking) but as inflected by the "array of practices and strategies deployed by LGBTQ writers" who "have used Twine to describe lives in which concepts like agency and control are especially fraught."

A Synchronous Ritual by Merritt Kopas is a game I can't win. When I start the game, it asks me if it's 6 p.m.; I answer no, and I'm instructed to wait. On the next day, I missed 6 p.m., and I think, maybe I should set an alarm on my phone. But for the second day in a row, I missed 6 p.m.—I was in the car when the phone alarm went off. On the third day, I finally made my appointment: at 6 p.m., I advanced the game and followed the instructions to not cheat, "and carry out all actions asked of you as far as possible." Per the game's instructions, I sat down with a full glass of water and two prescription bottles, although mine were empty. I let the game's sensuous descriptions of spiro and estradiol pills, which trans women may take for hormone replacement therapy, populate my imagination.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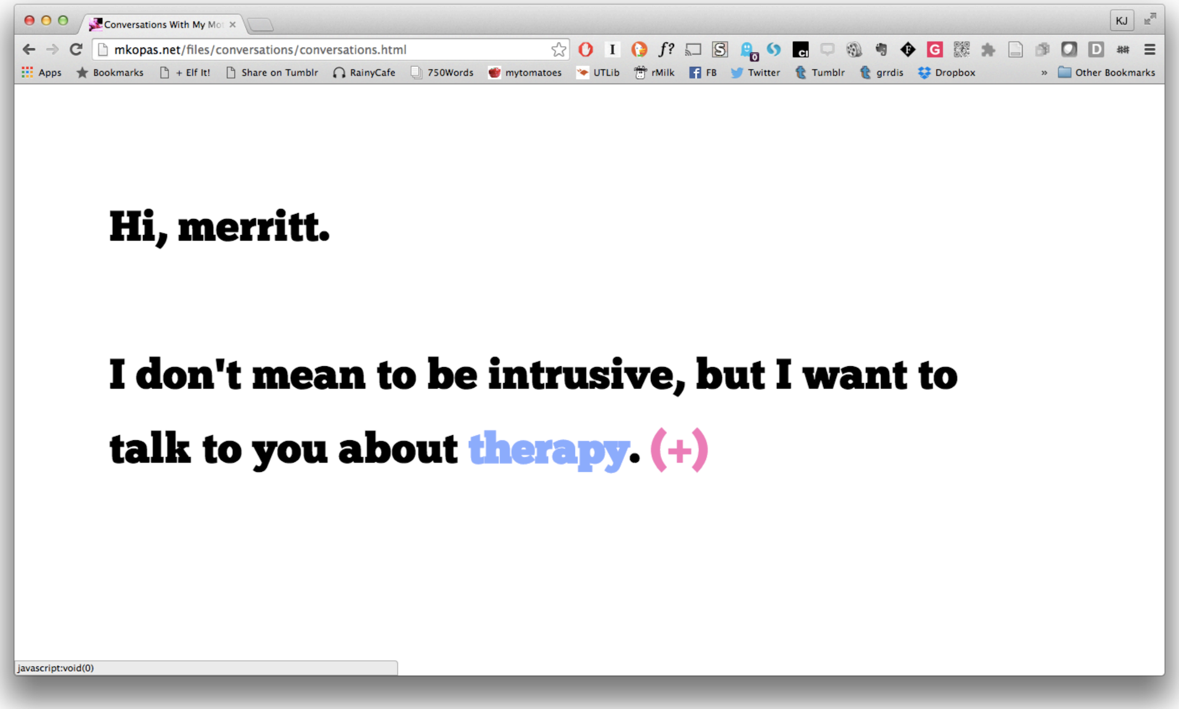
Ovoid, green tablets about half a centimeter lengthwise, with a "b" imprinted on one side. The other side is split down the middle with "887" imprinted on the left and "2" on the right.

Fig. 14. Staring down a pill bottle in *A Synchronous Ritual*.

But when the game told me to wait for the chemicals to affect me, to scan my reflection in the mirror for signs of feminization—that was not possible for me. I hit a rigid limit in my own gender against which I couldn't push further, couldn't identify, and so for me, I also hit a rigid limit in the reach of identification. And yet, in this failure of identification, I am opened to the other as other. I experience what Davis calls "something like responsibility" that exceeds and conflicts with my narcissistic passions, the limits of my own self-identity. I experience not identification—in this case, a vehement disidentification—but I am also open to solidarity with trans women who, because they have found or made routes of access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT), because their daily lives can accommodate or be made to accommodate the routines HRT requires, are participating in a synchronous ritual—to maintain self-similarity through transformation.

Another game by Merritt Kopas makes a slightly different intervention through its address of the player as character. *Conversations With My Mother* also highlights the branching structure of Twine. The player is not addressed in the second person, but first chooses the name by which they will be addressed from three available options: "m------," "sweetheart," or "merritt."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javascript:void(0)

Hi, merritt.

I don't mean to be intrusive, but I want to talk to you about therapy. (+)

Fig. 15. You compose your own address in *Conversations With My Mother*.

Your choices compose an email or letter from Kopas's mother. At the end of any path through the game, hyperlinks take the player to tweets from Kopas's Twitter account that reflect on real exchanges with her mom like whichever one you've just had in the game. You might be tempted to say that *Conversations With My Mother* is autobiographical, but it's more complex than that. In the form of a game, you the player are addressed by Kopas's representation of her mom, so it is Kopas that you are invited to identify with. But the variables in the game that you select are part of the address coming from Kopas's mom—so your choices to some extent ventriloquize the person who addresses you. (It's worth noting, the Twitter account is a somewhat unstable object: the background and profile pictures change, for example, and you can see how people have replied to these tweets, or even how they continue to reply, after discovering them through the game.) Both *Conversation with My Mother* and *A Synchronous Ritual* address themselves to trans women: one of their most immediate and persuasive rhetorical effects is identification with predicaments of medicine and family e.g. that are specific and common to trans women's lives. But the games are also addressed to others, over and beyond the intention of the authors, to people who do not understand these experiences already because they are not part of your identity or experience already. This is part of what makes video games capacious and moving as a medium: even very specific stories for very specific audiences remain open for unanticipated audiences, too. The relation you are able to have to the characters you play is not simply identification, but solidarity: Twine games make use of the identificatory address of the second person as well as of its failure, sidelining identification and substituting in solidarity.

A question that looms over all these games is how much identification actually is necessary for *you* to become "you," for anybody in particular to become the addressee of the game. You have to respond to the call. Take too much distance from the position of addressee and the tether that gives you occasion to dis/identify with the game might snap. *Depression Quest* offers a great example of this other kind of failure to identify: its Steam forum reviews are peppered with obnoxious complaints that you can't, for example, kill yourself in the game. Quinn has commented on the design decision not to make suicide an option: in part, she thought the possibility would be too triggering for players who already are struggling with depression. But she has also remarked on her responsibility as a developer to set a limit on the kind of violence players can do in the game. *Depression Quest* sits at an interesting juncture, having elicited the violent harassment of GamerGaters telling Quinn to kill herself, e.g., when the game itself was already a response to that violent exhortation. Many of the Twine games I've described are like this, too: already a response to the violence of mastering identification; already a way of issuing the command Levinas said comes from the face of the other: thou shall not kill. You are responsible for the other. That is solidarity.

And yet, nothing is assured. It's not as though a simple failure to identify can be counted as ethically pure. Solidarity is only an invitation, a condition of possibility for an ethical space to open. Porpentine's Twine tutorial/manifesto, "Creation Under Capitalism and the Twine Revolution," opens with this rhetorical invocation: "Our global network is composed of human minds uploaded into word form. On this plane the word is the most potent unit of force." She continues, presaging David OReilly's remarks to *Vice*: "It costs a couple of keystrokes to control someone else's brain for a second, and longer if you do it right" (Webster). The affection of a word *is* forceful. Address exerts a control for which you *are* responsible. But this force of affection, this commanding of attention is the scene of relationality. Without it, there could be no solidarity. And, no identification: no gap to ever aim to close. Before the brass tacks of how to use Twine to make games, Porpentine makes an impassioned case for *why*, delving into the history of interactive fiction and the different affordances of parser and hypertext, and offering a stringent critique of the way whiteness and capitalism have colluded to kill off ordinary creativity. In a sea of stirring phrases that blur the line between manifesto and technical documentation, the phrase that speaks (calls) to me the most is this: "Write to be read." The relationality or rhetoricity of address rings out of this declaration: write for others.

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Dehiscence: Inconclusion

[H]ow can you hear anything, since you are nothing and you do not as such exist *prior to* the call? The call befalls you, and you cannot prevent the "falling" which you are: it throws you. You are thrown (*geworfen*)—thrown off before any "I" can constitute itself or any subject can be thrown together.

— Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book*

For there to be any sharing of symbolic meaning, any construction of common enemy or collective goal, any effective use of persuasive discourse at all, a more originary rhetoricity must already be operating, a cons[t]itutive persuadability and responsivity that testifies, first of all, to a fundamental structure of exposure.

— Diane Davis, *Inessential Solidarity*

In this inconclusion or afterword, this dissertation finally reaches its expiration. Expiration: defined in the Oxford English Dictionary first as "the action of breathing out" (), expiration implies that a breath has been drawn in, maybe held, and now releases, air exiting to the outside from an inside that it both traverses and joins. I have argued that this work is already responding to a call for scholarship that tracks what Diane Davis called "a radically generalized rhetoricity" (36). Rhetoricity is the irremissible exposedness that brings one into being as a subject in language, that is, as a rhetorical subject. Rhetoricity accords priority to rhetoric as a relation of addressivity: before symbolic persuasion, before thinking and knowing, and even before the experience of being, a rhetorical affectability obtains, calling singularities into existence as subjects in language. In *Inessential Solidarity*, Davis argues that scholarly inquiry into rhetoricity demands a rethinking of both "affect" and of the language relation itself (166).

What I hope to have shown in this work is that rhetoricity is already freighted with a compelling affective force. It is a force we may describe as moving, cutting, even shattering, operating at a presubjective level. As Avital Ronell argues in a Heideggerian register in *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*, a call comes in before you have put or pulled yourself together—before any individuated "you" is there to hear the call at all. "[Y]ou are nothing and you do not exist *prior to* the call," Ronell contends (66). And yet, something in you, or something that gives an inwardness to you, responds. Outside of the rhetorical domain of symbolic exchange, prior to the agentive power of the rhetorical subject, a rhetorical *effectivity* takes place: it moves, it cuts, it shatters. Your exposedness to being addressed means that you are always first of all open to receiving a call; *The Rhetoric of Sensitivity* has sought to explore rhetoricity as the condition of possibility for this reception.

The three chapters this dissertation comprises offer three different exposures of the exposedness that brings this rhetorical subject into being, but never fully or independently of the structure of addressivity which opens every one to others. One's own being is always outside oneself, beside oneself, and for the other. If addiction represents a certain attempt to close the subject off from the affection of exteriority, even addiction still also keeps its subject open, under an influence that joins one's interiority to the outside it seems to threatens to block off. Trigger warnings are, rather than another such attempt to close students off, another possible way of opening, of negotiating the many forms of violence and trauma that affect each of us in language, even in the classroom, even among friends. Rather than subsuming the differences that shape and define the queer quiddities of others, an inessential solidarity, beneath and before the suasive sameness of identification, can be glimpsed in the "obfuscated mapping" of Twine games. The rhetorical activities of reading, feeling, and identifying are resignified as routes into and through the rhetorical subject and not only tasks undertaken by it.

The Rhetoric of Sensitivity is one inscription of the "fundamental structure of exposure" (Davis 3) that makes any address possible. I cannot say I have *answered* the call that brought this writing into being, only that I have responded. Already this work is ready to be rewritten, to expire, and then inspire a reinscription, a different exposure. Inspiration: the action of breathing in, "a drawing in of air" (OED). My hope is that this work will open for other rhetoricians the rhetoric of the saying that opened it for me. Underneath this writing, or any reading, or question, the rhetoricity of address forges the way. In "Violence and Metaphysics," Jacques Derrida writes:

> I could not possibly speak of the Other, make of the Other a theme, pronounce the Other as object, in the accusative. I can only, I must only speak to the other; that is, I must call him in the vocative, which is not a category, a case of speech, but, rather the bursting forth, the very raising up of speech.

So this writing, which investigates the ways that language cracks us open, can never simply say how we are cracked, but always must travel the same pathway that it seeks to describe. A dissertation is also an address, a writing to others, an enunciation which it cannot only (simply) describe. There will be no definitive text that captures rhetoricity by appropriating it to meaning, "no way to assume a masterful scholarly pose" (Davis 15) and leave the rhetoric of the saying in repose. Every rhetoric of the saying does instead the ceaseless work of "excavating, examining, and affirming the saying *as* rhetoric, as an extra-symbolic rhetorical appeal" (Davis 17). One more text will not be enough.

In my introduction, I described my method as dehiscence, a rupturing open that may describe either a blossom or a wound. There is perhaps an indeterminable relation between those two alternatives: what bears fruit may also injure; what pierces one's defenses may also germinate and thrive. I consign this exposition to a futurity where rhetorical receptivity will have been amplified, when we will have realized and already begun to reinvent the possibility for responding otherwise.

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