NIHILO-PORNOGRAPHY

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Introduction

This thesis provides an account of my work *Death Row Dick*, a nihilo-pornography set in dialogue with works by artist Carolee Schneemann in a November 2015 performance at Wesleyan University. In so doing, I seek to provide a theoretical framework for the different conceptions and depictions of sex and desire from which my work draws upon and to which it stands opposed. Through nihilo-pornography, I propose the incapability of the mythological sex act for either transgression or transcendence.

*Death Row Dick* is discussed in various ways as a foil to Schneemann’s work in order to illuminate the tensions that exist between Schneemann’s particular feminism and the queer positioning that *Death Row Dick* attempts to enflesh. These tensions extend from intimate sexual experience outward to the contemporary media landscape as it pertains to the visibility and surveillance of sexual subjects. The complexity of what Leo Bersani calls homosexual “visibility” is brought to bear on Schneemann’s courageous insistence on the visibility of the sexual body and her own visibility and legitimacy as a woman artist. This is both so as to reframe Schneemann’s sexual and artistic idealisms, and to highlight the intransigence of the same issues of inequality Schneemann struggled against and strived to remediate forty years ago.

To begin, I provide an overview of Carolee Schneemann’s attitudes towards sensual experience, the erotic, feminism and art, providing context for the social and
artistic debate in which her film *Fuses* is situated. These are expanded through discussion of the concept of *jouissance* in psychoanalysis and queer theory, in order to identify their common conviction that sexual experience can serve as a wellspring of personal insight and radical social transformation.

This sets the stage for introducing nihilo-pornography, beginning with a presentation of *Death Row Dick* first as pornographic storyline and then as it was realized in performance as a "semi-staged abstraction." I discuss the definition of "pornography" and propose that nihilo-pornography be viewed as a kind of camp about pornography: a deliberate theatricalization and overstatement not of the stylistic affects of pornographic genres, but rather of the myth of sex itself. This clarifies how *Death Row Dick* should be viewed in opposition to the insistence on the political potential of jouissance outlined in the previous chapter, and enables an unpacking of the queer theoretic perspectives nihilo-pornography draws upon as an abject caricature of "the homosexual threat."

Finally, I outline the relation between representational technology, desire, and the death drive as embodied by the "Selfie Machines" in the Death Row Dick performance. Audience members used this technology to take photographs of themselves which were later projected onstage. Considering the photographic and cinematic image as forms of both death and desire, I examine the allegorical role of Schneeman's film *Kitch's Last Meal* and the role of Kitch herself in *Fuses* as a disinterested observer, then elaborate on the contrasting roles of surveillance in *Fuses* and *Death Row Dick* through a discussion of selfies and the gay cruising app Grindr. Drawing out the frictions between Schneemann's insistence on her role as
both an "image" and an "image-maker" on the one hand, and the fatalistic submission to surveillance in *Death Row Dick* on the other, I connect nihilopornography to the larger context of contemporary self-mediation in which crafting one's own image has become fraught with the very issues Schneemann identified and challenged as a visionary "maker" of her own image in a blossoming media context of *Fuses* that today has exploded and become nefariously transfigured.
I. Faith in "the Fuck"

What is the radical potential of sex? What constitutes its mystery and foreboding? What about "the fuck," in Carolee Schneemann's phrasing, needs to be liberated, and what can "the fuck" liberate in us? Wherefore its endless intrigue and apotheotic insight into self and society? Commenting on what he describes as the biopolitical regime of sexuality, Michel Foucault speculates wistfully on a future when the fuck is less exalted. "One day, perhaps, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex, so that we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of exacting the truest of confessions from a shadow."  

Yet Foucault would spend the rest of his life examining the mechanisms of this "austere monarchy" which beguile us, and to which, decades later, his most ardent students maintain fealty.

Among the disciplinary systems Foucault targets in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, psychoanalysis has continued to play an indispensable role in the critical discourses of sexuality he pioneered. In particular, queer theory relies as heavily on Foucault's work as on the writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Even in their nuanced critiques of psychoanalytic thought, Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman still exalt jouissance and call upon the death drive as singularly revolutionary forces of human relation and revelation. As Bersani writes of jouissance, "psychoanalysis has justifiably been considered an enemy of anti-identitarian politics, but it also
proposes a concept of the sexual that might be a powerful weapon in the struggle against the disciplinarian constraints of identity."²

Indeed, the modern student of desire, sexual or otherwise, appears to have little scholarly recourse if she is not acquainted with what psychoanalysis has to say on the matter, and must assume psychoanalytic discourse as the fundamental literary backdrop and dominant theoretical structure of academic approaches to desire. Foucault has observed how other cultures have developed "ars erotica" in which "truth is drawn from pleasure itself," maintaining the potency of sexual experience only insofar as it remains secret and esoteric, in contrast to our society's procedures of extracting the truth of sex "geared to a form of knowledge-power" - namely, the confession, whose centuries-old influence persists in contemporary notions of sex.³ Despite this acknowledgment that desire could be otherwise articulated (or not at all), contemporary scholarship on queer (non)identity and queer desire has hardly shaken off the grip of our "scientia sexualis" or moved beyond attempts to spell out the "truth" of sex.

This same urgent search for sex's "truth" appears, in quite another form, in the work of painter, filmmaker, sculptor, dancer and performance artist Carolee Schneemann. Notwithstanding the reconceptualization, complication and expansion the idea of “sex” has undergone at the hands of these thinkers, “the fuck,” for Schneemann as for Bersani and Edelman, is still desperate for interrogation, still holds some promise for human relation, still actualizes something ineffable even as it is inexhaustibly summoned to describe and explain sexual life.
What Foucault calls the “austere monarchy” of sex and Schneemann calls “the fuck” seems to refer to the same cultural mythologizing and disciplining of the sexual body. Both of these thinkers and sexual experimenters should rightly be viewed as working to dismantle such impositions of power upon sexual subjection. In the case of Foucault, this was to question the very notion of sexual subjection as such outside of a political regime of control. For Schneemann, it is more ambiguous whether in placing “the fuck” in quotation marks she is questioning the primacy and overemphasis of genital penetration itself, or whether she is indeed seeking to capture the essence of “fucking,” freed from the culturally contrived and masculinist limitations upon it. Foucault and Schneemann are, perhaps, struggling up different sides of the same mountain.

Psychoanalysis had a pervasive influence on American and European experimental artists. Steeped especially in the writings of Wilhelm Reich, who placed great emphasis on the orgasm as the centerpiece of psychic experience, Schneemann sustained an abiding faith in the potential for the erotic as a liberating force at the same time that she sought to extricate sexual experience from its erotic depictions and to frame it instead within a boundless, wordless field of saturated tactility. From such a field, the sexual could both emerge from and merge indistinguishably with sensory stimulation spanning the mundane and the transcendental, reinvigorated by a universalizing, egalitarian sensitivity to the gestalt of touch, sight, movement and sound.

This attitude was not formed as an abstract idealism, but out of what Schneemann considered to be an urgent political and artistic necessity from within
the context of the stifling misogyny of the 1950's and 60's art world. "Throughout the sixties," she has remarked, "only men maintained creative authority: women were muses, partners." Equity between men and women was "unacceptable," she said at a recent screening of *Fuses*, referencing the "impenetrable resistance" to her film work. Even Stan Brakhage, one of Schneemann’s closest colleagues, who became known for the film techniques that she developed, told her that her films "are not really films." Instead of acceptance in the art world, women "constellated on the margin of aesthetic significance around male authority figures." Schneemann relates countless anecdotes of the delegitimization by male peers of her body as image, her own standing as an artist, and the incorporation of her body in her work.

Schneemann was already a prominent figure in the New York art scene by the late 1950's, and an admirer of Happenings artists such as Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg. She figured prominently in several of their works in addition to those of Stan Brakhage and Robert Morris. The latter constitute the pieces most frequently cited as spurs for the development of Schneemann's artistic vision, namely Morris's *Site* (1964), and Brakhage’s *Cat’s Cradle* (1959). Morris’ piece, for example, involved Schneemann reclining naked as a live recreation of Manet's *Olympia* (1863), while Morris moved cardboard facades that revealed and obscured her, restricting her role to a "passive, silent, female nude ... watching the activity that centers on her." In *Cat’s Cradle*, Schneemann and her then partner James Tenney are depicted alongside Brakhage and his wife Jane in "sexual witchcraft involving two couples and a 'medium' cat." Schneemann commented on these works,
Whenever I collaborated, went into a male friend’s film, I always thought I would be able to hold my presence, maintain an authenticity. It was soon gone, lost in their celluloid dominance—a terrifying experience—experiences of true dissolution. Frightening. Being in Brakhage’s films *Daybreak* (1957), *Whiteye* (1957), and *Cat’s Cradle* (1959), being in a Dwoskin film—almost every time—and we were friends. I thought it would be okay. It was not okay for me. I was never filmed at my own work. Stan in 1959 insisted I put on an apron to be filmed. Peter Gidal had me nude in a bathtub . . . I felt that whoever I really was had been obliterated and that they had needed to obliterate me. Just as in the “collaboration” with Bob Morris for *Site* (1964), I became historicized and immobilized.8

Ara Osterweil cites *Loving* and *Cat’s Cradle* as examples of of the "frozen, idealized forms of gender and sexuality explored by Brakhage in his representations of hetero-relationality" against which Schneeman would come to posit a "utopian alternative" through *Fuses.* However *Fuses* was not prompted so directly in opposition to these works. Rather, it was "in conversation" with Brakhage, specifically with *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), Brakhage’s film of the birth of his first child. Schneemann credits Brakhage with authenticity and bravery for "actually looking at the body’s reality," and yet remained concerned about the male possession of the act of birth through film. "The camera lens became the Os, the aperture out of which birth was 'expressed.' The camera gave birth as he held the camera . . . " It was thus a complex acknowledgment of Brakhage’s ability to depart from the mythologies of gender in order to consider the "reality" of the body, even as it reasserted male dominance over the act of childbirth, that led Schneemann to investigate "'the fuck,' lovemaking’s erotic blinding core apart from maternity/paternity."10

Schneemann’s interest in "the fuck," itself already a conceptual distancing of erotic experience from gendered systems of power by dint of the definite article,
was also a search for a depiction of the erotic that approached the embodied
sensations of lovemaking. In her view, such a depiction had no precedent, and
women’s sexuality existed only in "medical and pornographic" terms. "Since my
deepest expressive and responsive life core was considered obscene," she has
written, "I thought I had better see what it looked like in my own vision. I had never
seen any erotica or pornography that approached what lived sexuality felt like." In
this way any depiction that could offer insight into the erotic in a way that was
sympathetic with embodied experience and female sexuality was already a deeply
political maneuver. In her words, "I had to wrest my body out of a conventionalizing
history." Schneemann describes this political orientation as something of a
naiveté, "a conviction that we were going to change things . . . everybody I met was
definitely going to change everything." Of course, her work was often met with
resistance on all sides. Whereas sometimes, she would screen a film after which
"women would sometimes cry and say, "Thank you, thank you. This is the first time
that I've seen a female genital and I'm going to be able to look at my own body! I'm
going to look at my vulva!", at other screenings she was hooted and screamed at by
women and left the theater crawling out on hands and knees. What about her work
caused such divisive reactions?

*Fuses* is a 28-minute silent film of Schneemann and Tenney making love in
the farm house in which they lived, as observed by their cat Kitch. The work
spanned several years, and involved elaborate manipulations such as baking,
painting, scratching and acidifying the film. For the audience, getting lost in the
images quickly becomes more important then being able to discern them. The film
depicts varying intensities of arousal and intimacy, incorporating both clothing and boredom. Bodies are canvasses as well as subjects. The abstract visual forms of sex acts and disembodied organs are drawn into relation with each other by superimposition and juxtaposition of their geometrical forms. The couple’s naked exploration becomes as much of visual-aesthetic as of interpersonal interest. It is an ornate, decorative work, colorful and playful, a kaleidoscopic subversion of the fixedness of the entities in intercourse: the room, the cat, the camera, genitals, Jim, Carolee, curves and lines. The constant slippage might be as disturbing as it is prettifying. The sky is turned red. Tendrilous ladyfingers wrap sinuously around a cock. Jim cuddles Kitch – cut to Carolee licking his penis – cut to Kitch licking his face. The color washes out and all crevices become fleshy. The film creates the sense of an undifferentiated sensuality. Edited differently, it could have been something much more frightening. But the camera zooms in and out playfully, and we are reminded who is behind it.

One of Schneemann’s stated intentions with Fuses was to enact a thoroughgoing visual egalitarianism, editing sequences so that "whenever you were looking at the male genital it would dissolve into the female and vice versa; the viewer’s unconscious attitudes would be constantly challenged" as every visual stimulus became its abstract geometric equivalent or counterpart. Equivalence was a guiding principle of her editing, itself informed by her intellectual partnership with James Tenney, from who she learned of the layers of rhythm, transformations of tempo, and repurposing of pitches and timbres in his study of Bach and Charles Ives. Through her meticulous processing of the film, color, timing, saturation and
genitals continually morph into each other. This is an attendant strategy of attempting to render the tactility of visual objects, and is necessarily as evocative of mundane, "non-sexual" objects as of the sexualized body. Thus, the "complicated charges" of the sexual organs were stripped away "so that the simplicity and the vital integral character of organs can be seen the way fruit is, or seashells, or the cup or the keys." Here visual egalitarianism and tactile response is understood as part of the project of social and sexual egalitarianism: "The primary category of what gives us pleasure and information is always being distorted. It has been my role in a way to struggle with those distortions. It's essentially about living in a sex negative tradition where even when sexuality is seemingly overt and expressive, it's still seen through these strange fragmentations."  

Bruce Elder observes how as the images in *Fuses* continually resist identification and naming, the viewer is overcome by washes of light, color and shapes, in which "the bodies of lovers become a single charged body of coloured light," and Ara Osterweil has noted that this flattening of the social charge of sexual images constitutes a "radical engagement with the flesh" in which corporeality serves as the basis for a profound similitude among all beings.

*Fuses* explores the "precarity of embodiment" that "links male and female, human and animal" in a "thickset consortium of the flesh," calling attention to an ontological kinship that always holds the potential for mutual identification. Schneemann's orientation towards sensuous tactility of the objectified visual body touches on an "unfinished universality" in which perceptive egalitarianism and constant transformation replace hierarchical classifications and the "closed order"
of phallocentric conventions. She and her commentators thus understand her political project expanding into a vast spiritual and historical repositioning: Gene Youngblood recognizes the "fluid oceanic quality" and sense of boundlessness in *Fuses*, which "moves beyond the bed to embrace the universe in oceanic orgasm";¹⁹ or as Osterweil has put it, *Fuses* enables a "feeling radical connectedness" in which "the boundaries between our bodies melt away, allowing us to transcend our own 'bag of meat' and merge with the flesh of the world."²⁰ Schneemann has frequently invoked "ancient" and "primal" forms of erotic knowledge in her own work, for example referencing the Minoan snake goddess and citing ancient cave paintings as sources of originary knowledge.²¹ It is with this vast historical valence that Schneemann describes the vaginal orgasm as "cosmic"²²: the vagina’s "interior knowledge" - "sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation" related "womb and vagina to primary knowledge."²³

Moving beyond our own "bag of meat," the ego becomes dissolved: *Fuses* challenges the "fiction" of an "impenetrable, sovereign ego and the social divisions it supports."²⁴ Quoting Amelia Jones, Osterweil suggests that Schneemann's work has promoted a "profound shift in the conception and experience of subjectivity," positing the individual as "intersubjective (contingent on the other)" rather than complete within itself.²⁵ Although difference may still exist between subjects, Schneemann's visual technique functions as a radical equalizer of those subjectivities that calls attention to their inherent connectedness. Bruce Elder, calling upon the Lacanian concept of the realm of the Symbolic, connects this aesthetic vision to a spiritual and psychological project of escaping "the binding
processes involved in mimetic identification (and all the verbal requirements of such identification); we are freed from the antilibidinal economy that operates along a syntagmatic chain of functionally differentiated forms to accede to an experience of reintegrative jouissance.”

Elder again calls upon Lacanian concepts to describe Schneemann's work as undermining language's "semiotic rigidity," that is, the fixity of meaning which ensures phallocentrism's dominance through the repression of difference: “An attack on the Symbolic order of discourse ruled over by the Law of the Father is a part of the struggle against patriarchy as a whole.” Against this cognitive binding, Schneemann's work valorizes jouissance as "a cognitive mode that is more intimate and more undifferentiated."

Jouissance, as with any Lacanian concept, is notoriously difficult to define, but can be understood as the enjoyment produced by the function connected with a drive. Jouissance depends on the frustration of desire and is thus self-perpetuating, an overriding force which upsets the equilibrium of subjectivity. It is only available in what Lacan terms "limit experiences": that which is self-annihilating, transgressive, unbearable or overwhelming. Jouissance is therefore akin to the death drive in its function. In Lacan's schema of Registers - the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real - jouissance, as with the death drive, is most closely associated with the Real, that which resists symbolization absolutely.

This is, from quite a different perspective than Schneemann's, what Lee Edelman refers to when he writes that "queerness . . . is never a matter of being or becoming but, rather, of embodying the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnamable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is
jouissance . . . a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law."\textsuperscript{28}

In his theorization against "futurity," the social investment in the promise of a future bound up with heterosexual reproductivity which merely reproduces the past, "through displacement, in the form of the future,"\textsuperscript{29} Edelman calls on queers to "figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity." Thus jouissance is "intrinsic to queer (non)identity" and works to annihilate that which consolidates and enables the ritual reproduction of identity in the form of futurity.

Jouissance is also hailed as an ultimate homosexual political recourse by Leo Bersani, who writes that the "self-shattering" jouissance enables is "intrinsic to the homo-ness in homosexuality."\textsuperscript{30} Resonating strongly with Schneemann's aim in depicting sexuality, Bersani writes,

\begin{quote}
We might, then, think of sexuality not only as the strategic production described by Foucault but also as a good term to describe the nonstrategic effects of the body's exercises in power . . . Remember that much of the appeal of sadomasochism for Foucault is that, as he says in the Mec interview, 'with the help of a certain number of instruments, of signs and symbols or of drugs,' it eroticizes the whole body, thereby desexualizing pleasure . . . These practices also bracket what may be — and here I can speak only of male sexuality — a man's most intense experience of his body's vulnerability.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

In this detailed discussion of the psychoanalytic and Foucaultian implications of sadomasochistic sex practices, Bersani celebrates the potential for jouissance to enable escape from the political regulation of sexual bodies and even the surveillance of the sexualized subject by rendering the subject "invisible, "making him unfindable as an object of discipline."\textsuperscript{32} Thus, "psychoanalysis challenges us to imagine a nonsuicidal disappearance of the subject," a surrender to ecstatic self-shattering that operates as "resistance to coercive designs."
For Schneemann as for Bersani and Edelman, the gestalt provocation of the senses which produces jouissance and dissolves the ego functions as a profound reconfiguration of sexual experience extending outside and beyond oneself, and thereby becomes available as a subversive political tool. Kathy Battista relates one of Schneemann’s "Naked Lectures," in which she spoke on art history in various states of undress, then enacted a live collage demonstration with men from the audience who were asked to undress, place glue on themselves and jump into piles of shredded paper. After this lecture-demonstration, Schneemann screened *Fuses*. It is remarkable how Schneemann came to view *Fuses* itself as requiring a sort of aesthetic-political preparation, through a lived experience of the collage technique as total sensory stimulation. In Battista's words, "Claiming back female sexuality, a motif that runs across Schneemann's body of work, would require a radical assault on the senses."33

In the discussion of nihilo-pornography that follows, I will articulate an imagined counterpoint to these conceptions of the experience of jouissance and sexual self-shattering as radical political undertakings. Death Row Dick is a character whose lust is not a matter of discovery but is predetermined, a sexual subject dutifully living out the desires destined for him, whose pathetic sexual longings serve only to reaffirm the ego in the hours before his actual inglorious death. Nihilo-pornography thus offers a means of unpacking the sexual-political projects of both Carolee Schneemann and queer theorists Bersani and Edelman, and presents an alternative vision for the depiction of sex by representational technologies as an anti-utopian project.
II. Nihilo-pornography

“I don’t do abjection.”

– Carolee Schneemann, interview with Scott Macdonald, *A Critical Cinema*

**Death Row Dick**

Dick, a nefarious felon on death row in a maximum security prison, has committed some heinous, unforgivable and ineffable crime - it does not matter to the story exactly what. While in prison he develops a reputation for his ability to perform extraordinary oral sex, hence his nickname, Death Row Dick. However, the character’s given name is also Richard.

Dick is unremarkable in every way but for his crime and sexual talent. He is unattractive and dull, unsociable, and harbors a disconcerting glare in his oft-averted eyes.

Dick’s execution approaches, and three days before his scheduled death a prison employee known only as the Correctional Officer, with whom Dick has developed, one might say, a guarded friendship over his many years of incarceration, asks Dick what he wants for his last meal. Dick tells the CO that all he wants is to suck his dick. The CO feels forced to consider the proposition because he is, on the one hand, Dick’s closest friend, and on the other he hand feels morally compelled as an accomplice to his execution to oblige Dick’s last request to the extent possible.

There is an element of absurdity in the CO not rejecting the proposition out of hand, but it is made somewhat plausible by the possibility of an unacknowledged
erotic lure. Thus the CO entertains the possibility that indulging Dick's desire is actually feasible, morally right, and - perhaps supervening on these other two evaluations, but perhaps taking precedence over them - erotically tolerable, or even enticing. Over and beyond all of these considerations is the question of trust, since there is patently something worrisome about the man tasked with keeping Dick imprisoned placing his genitals in the prisoner's mouth, especially for such a foreboding ceremonial purpose as a "last meal."

The meat of the plot, as it were, unfolds over these three days prior to Dick's last meal and execution in the working out of a trust relationship between Dick and the Correctional Officer, in which the CO considers letting Dick suck his dick. They talk, fleshing out the personal, moral and practical issues together, and sketch covert plans for subverting the systems of control in the prison in order to actualize Dick's request. Fantasies whispered through plexiglass and prison bars, on hushed queues shuttling prisoners to and fro, Dick and the CO elaborate in low voices what the oral sex would be like, as if the CO needed to be convinced by the fantasy of its quality and worth - how long it would last, what Dick's technique would be, and most importantly, how it would end. The CO's need to know is clinical, brusque, authoritative, for there is a pull in Dick's manner that he feels he must resist. It remains ambiguous whether the CO's foremost consideration is his sense of duty or his allure to an ultimate risk for the promise of an ultimate pleasure.

In the end the CO succumbs. Despite their lame efforts at hiding the act from the rest of the system, they are caught by surveillance - Dick is much more cunning than the CO and couldn't care less about the precautionary steps they take, since it is
of no possible consequence to him - but the guards witnessing the sex act on the other end of the cameras, thrilled by the ridiculousness of the scene, decide to allow it to happen with lusty guffaws and watch.

The fellatio is quick and of middling pleasure. The encounter ends with an ashamed haste. The CO zips up and leaves quickly without looking at Dick and with no parting words exchanged, not to be seen again. The guards in the surveillance room consider visiting Dick to beat him up, but grow as quickly disinterested by the prospect of physical exertion as they were turned on by the passing spectacle. We see Dick alone in his bright grey cell. The next day he is executed, witnessed in its entirety as the final scene of the pornography.

For the performance of Death Row Dick, rather than pursue a literal deployment of the pornographic plot, I centered the event on the working title of “a semi-staged abstraction of a nihilo-pornography-in-progress.” I attempted to follow the process of Schneemann’s works Meat Joy and Fuses, which she relates in writings and photographs, and so I chose to work with a framework for improvisation, drawing on the abstract theater of Antonin Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty. The performance was enacted by an ensemble of musicians who were situated around the audience and amplified onstage, and my performance group the Cult of the Illuminated Orifice.

Rehearsals for the Cult focused on the act of “creating orifices” through movement and various group formations, relying on contact improvisation and theater techniques in order to generate improvised material and acquaint the performers with exploring movement onstage. Two Cult members were selected to
perform as the Correctional Officer and Dick, while the remaining four performers were dedicated to the Flesh Horde. The Flesh Horde was the most direct analogue to Schneemann’s *Meat Joy* (1964), in which performers follow a loose score in realizing a live collage with their nude and semi-nude bodies involving paint, torn paper, plastic, rope, brushes, and raw meats. The Flesh Horde, in contrast to the ecstatic “erotic rite” of *Meat Joy’s* excessive, indulgent “celebration of flesh as material,” was lethargic, menacing, and limited to strict rules of movement: in stages, they were instructed to open and close their mouths slowly, wriggle their torsos and then their legs, convulse their entire bodies from head to toe, and eventually join others in making “group orifices.” The Cult attempted to embody the movement of a sphincter expanding and contracting, prompted by the images of holes collapsing and reopening, seeing how far they could move their head off balance from their center, how they could manifest a single contraction throughout their entire body, how they could make rising to their feet over the course of thirty seconds an act of orifice-making, how they could make contact with other bodies an act of orifice-making. In addition, the Cult was costumed in uniformly bright red swaths of cloth, loosely covering every part of their body except their mouths, which aimed at the effect of loose folds of flesh such as an elbow, a clitoris, a bellybutton or foreskin. The two “archetypal characters” of the Correctional Officer and Dick, so named because their roles were closer to figurative symbols of domination and submission than literal named characters, were similarly instructed with strict rules. Both characters barely moved when onstage. Dick wore a full-body flesh colored leotard which covered his face, seated and “staring” fixedly in an unrelenting posture that
came to be known as “Dick Slouch” or “Dick Pose: curved back, hunched shoulders, protruding neck, apathetically spread legs, drooping arms. The Correctional Officer accompanied Dick whenever he was onstage, hovering directly alongside him and. This character's shaping, by contrast, was rigidly upright, unmoving whatsoever except for one moment where the performer prods Dick excruciatingly slowly with a large, red bat, just enough for his head to be visibly disturbed from its position. The Flesh Horde, tasked with different kinds of orifice-making, served to establish the pacing and escalation of the piece, and their constant, restive movements provided formal contrast to the stillness of the archetypal characters.

The performance was organized around sound and lighting cues issued by myself controlling playback audio and a projector, two additional projectionists and “Internet DJs,” and the musical ensemble. The sound playback I controlled in the performance consisted of audio from pornography that was ripped from the internet over the course of a year. Each of musicians received stop and start cues based on the on-stage events, and a list of possible actions for relating to the porn audio and to each other. The effect of having the musicians surround the audience but amplifying their instruments onstage, was effectively a form of diffusion which displaced and disoriented their acoustic presence as it created an immersive environment for the audience.

The Internet DJs and myself served as the only lighting for the performance. The DJs were equipped with computers and projectors in the elevated rear corners of the concert hall, who prepared various media to be projected directly onto the stage. Their projection cues were alternated so that with each scene the stage was
illuminated by a differently angled rhombus. The material they projected provided literal external reference points for the “reading” of the performance, including written text, such as excerpts from Schneemann’s writings and Leo Bersani’s *Homos*. However they also projected live craigslist personals searches, Google searches of people in the audience, video of *Meat Joy*, pictures of personals ads I had saved along with the porn audio, and video from an earlier performance by the Cult of the Illuminated Orifice, the Mobile Colonoscopy Clinic.

The DJs also projected a Grindr display featuring the faces of the audience members as Grindr profiles. Grindr is a smartphone app for connecting gay men that lists the profiles of nearby men in a scrollable grid of squares. Profiles typically feature a picture of the user’s face accompanied by his distance in feet or miles. Selecting a profile will reveal the user’s age, height, weight, race, and other “statistical” information, as well as a short text written by the user. The images of the audience were captured by Selfie Machines.

One becomes a Selfie Machine with a harness constructed out of string that is used to strap a smartphone across one’s eyes, with the screen facing outward and the camera on. Before the performance proper, the Selfie Machines formed part of an installation in the lobby of the concert hall, which was transformed into both a bathhouse and a prison. Before entering the lobby, Adele’s song “Someone Like You” was playing on repeat outside the entrance, a reference to the use of the song as a universal designator of the covert locations of bathhouses. Upon entering the lobby, the audience had to “check in” at an impromptu ticket box-cum-intake center, where they had to present IDs and were then given a piece of paper towel and instructed to
go take a selfie with one of the available Selfie Machines. A user could approach the stationary Selfie Machine, see herself by looking into its “eyes,” and record their own image by tapping the capture button on the phone.

Once in the hall, an endless audio loop was playing over the sound system in which I recorded my voice in a lifeless monotone reading the first lines of all the Grindr messages I have received on my phone. The result was a darkly meditative stream of halfhearted come-ons, all bitterly identical but with sudden exceptions of single messages containing some inscrutably bizarre or disarmingly candid comment – an interrupted landscape of lust, of cool, detached, mollified desire.

After several minutes, letting this audio settle into the background, the performance begins with the darkening of the hall and the recitation of another disembodied monologue, in the voice of a young man: 35

I’m a fucking faggot, Sir, I’m a hole, Sir. I’m a hole I’m all a hole, Sir. Only a hole. I’m a dumbass, Sir. I’m just a hole here to serve you Sir. I’m - I’m a fucking hole Sir I’m a - dumb fuck Sir I don’t know anything Sir - I have to listen to you Sir . . . Can I come please Sir? . . . Please Sir? Please Sir? Your fucking hole beg- begs you Sir, please. I’m oozing pre- come Sir and I really want to come Sir. Please Sir. I’m a fucking hole Sir. And I only - only want to serve you Sir. Please Sir. I only wanna - please you Sir, please Sir, can I come Sir, please . . . fucking hole Sir I’m so horny right now Sir, please Sir . . . Please Sir, I really rea- I really really want it, Sir. I’m a fucking - I’m a- I’m a hole, Sir. I’m only a hole, Sir. I’m just a clit.

In the darkness accompanying this epigraph, the Flesh Horde crawls unseen onstage.

When the stage is illuminated the audience beholds the Cult beginning its orifice-making, here in solos. At predetermined intervals, the sights and sounds are stopped and Fuses is projected onto the ceiling in four-minute segments, while at
other intervals, the Flesh Horde and archetypal characters appear and disappear from the stage in contrasting formations. The Correctional Officer at one point distributes a crateful of various raw meats for the Flesh Horde to consume, who in this scene become some mass of cringing, salacious inmates at feed. The performance ends with the Correctional Officer looming over Dick, the large, authoritative, bright red bad at hand and erect, as Dick, with a menacing lethargy, slinks his way down the steps upon which he is seated and slowly turns his faceless head towards the Correctional Officer’s crotch. Dick and the Correctional Officer were instructed to hold this pose, with Dick’s head almost pressed against the crotch, for as long as possible after the house lights come on, making the ending of the performance indeterminate for the audience but also suggesting the performers as objectified fixtures, or dead symbols, rather than living actors.

“Pornography” and Nihilo-pornography

Nihilo-pornography is pornography camp, a deliberate theatricality that melodramatizes power and sex and knowledge and surveillance, defeating titillation and withholding the surfeit of graphic images characterizing what we deem "pornographic": bracketing and exaggerating, to the point of its undoing, what Linda Williams calls "on/scenity" and Laura Kipnis describes as the "economy of pleasure" in which "not only is there always enough, there’s even more than you could possibly want." Nihilo-pornography is overcooked porn. Whereas Carolee Schneemann has called Fuses “a sorely needed reference to dismantling the structures of rationalized power – a clear imaging of erotic intimacy – the farthest
point from pornography,” *Death Row Dick* strives towards the myth of the pornographic and overreaches. It is not flamboyant and fantastical but too real, a camp that diminishes “the fuck” into mundanity, disappointment and understatement; it is lackluster, banal.

This banality is partly abetted by the pervasiveness of camp sensibility today. Writing fifty years after Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp,” Bruce LaBruce laments that “‘camp’ has replaced ‘irony’ as the go-to sensibility in popular culture, and it has, at the risk of generalization, long since lost its essential qualities of esoteric sophistication and secret signification, partly owing to the contemporary tendency of the gay sensibility to allow itself to be thoroughly co-opted, its mystery, and therefore its power, hopelessly diffused.” At this moment, he inveighs, “the whole goddamn world is camp.” In order to approach nihilo-pornography, we must consider the transfiguration of the camp sensibility.

What, as camp, does nihilo-pornography place "in quotation marks?" Not the style of some genre of pornography, but more essentially the work that all pornography does: pornography as fantasy of, and threat to, the biopolitical management of society and the self.

Attempts to define "pornography" are necessarily perilous. We might begin with the Oxford English Dictionary: "the explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings; printed or visual material containing this." In direct contradiction to the discussion of Carolee Schneemann in the previous chapter, this practical definition would appear to make easy work of the
matter, giving expression to a common view of pornography as representation of sexual subjects, distinct from representations whose primary aim is other than erotic stimulation. However I wish to forward the reading of pornography developed by Frances Ferguson, which has at heart nothing necessarily to do with depictions of "sexual subjects," but rather relations of inequality. In fact, Ferguson dispenses with the necessity of defining pornography at all. This highly abstracted consideration of the subject, we will see, ends up providing much more traction than our dictionary definition.

To approach Ferguson's conceptualization, we must contend with the analytic terms that have had likely the most significant shaping influence on the definition of pornography in the last forty years, from which Ferguson arrives at her non-definition. This comes from anti-pornography feminists including, most centrally, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. In their ongoing efforts to reformulate pornography as a matter of material danger to women and injury to women's civil rights, Dworkin and MacKinnon have momentously shifted the discourse surrounding pornography towards a discourse of social harm. Thus, in the infamous anti-pornography ordinance first proposed in 1983 at the behest of the Minneapolis Council, pornography is defined as

the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and words that also includes (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy humiliation or pain; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects experiencing sexual pleasure in rape, incest or other sexual assault; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up, cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or (vi) women's body parts — including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks — are
exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or (viii) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, humiliation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.41

The ordinance is remarkable, foremost, for gaining much of its force from closing off pornography as specifically a portrayal of "subordination," namely of women. (Although Mackinnon and Dworkin add that the role of "woman" is interchangeable for that of "man, child, or transsexual," this interchangeability apparently poses no real threat to their definition of pornography, eliminating the possibility that sex acts between different sexes and genders might form different cultures of sex between which "subordination" doesn't instantly translate.)42 Moreover, the peculiar move of assigning the task of defining a given work as pornography to the courts as a legal matter43 serves to strengthen the terms of portraying "pornography" as necessarily harmful. By proposing the interpretation of some depiction as "pornographic" insofar as it breaks the law and causes harm, it also curtails the "pornographic" reading of any text that, say, would not warrant being brought to court in a civil suit. Both despite and because of this extremely narrow, legalistic construal of pornography, the massive mobilization of anti-pornography activism continues today to have great influence on the scholarly discourse of what is considered pornographic.

Just a few years following the proposal of this ordinance, the field of Porn Studies can be said to have emerged with the publication of Linda Williams' *Hard Core* in 1989, which helped retrieve pornography from its essentialized and categorical treatment at the hands of the anti-pornography movement. Seeing her
investigations as following both Michel Foucault's project in his *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, as well as the work of contemporaneous feminisms in accounting for Foucault's alleged oversight of the role of women in discourses of sexuality, Williams attempts to consider "hard-core film and video pornography as one of the many forms of "knowledge-pleasure" of sexuality," with the goal of tracing "the changing meaning and function of the genre of pornography in its specific, visual, cinematic form." In speaking to pornography's irreducible definition and its mutability with time and social circumstance, Williams acknowledges that "despite pornography's almost visceral appeal to the body . . . it is not the only genre to elicit such 'automatic' bodily reactions. [Richard] Dyer notes that other film genres aimed at moving the body, such as thrillers, weepies, and low comedy, have been almost as slow to be recognized as cultural phenomena." Still, by Williams' account pornography remains a self-contained, if unstable, discursive entity, since the organizing prompt of *Hard Core* is to investigate "just what the genre is and why it has been so popular."

Yet decades later, Porn Studies seems to some still overly constrained by the strategically delimited terms of debate set by the anti-pornography movement in the 70's and 80's, as Helen Hester claims in her critique of the field. "Despite its admirable attempts to transcend the reductive arguments of previous approaches to pornography," Hester writes, "I feel that much of Porn Studies is still mired in debates about whether adult entertainment is a good or a bad thing for the wider culture." Characterizing the field's "tendency toward valorization" of pornography in the wake of anti-pornography, Hester urges moving still further beyond this
"binary logic" of vilification and valorization of pornography, since the "redemptive" tone of porn studies "does little to broaden the critical landscape." Indeed, "not all pornographic material is radical, disruptive, subversive, progressive, or likely to have a positive effect on sexual minorities."\(^{46,47}\) John Mercer similarly contends that "academic attempts to discuss pornography all too frequently seem overburdened with an ostensibly self-imposed responsibility to either justify or condemn this medium; to provide exhaustive overviews of the volatile and often contradictory nature of debate on the subject; to either apologise, or endlessly qualify, the validity of academic interest in such an area; and/or to stray into the treacherous and muddied semantic quagmire that surrounds definitions of the term pornography."\(^{48}\)

Truly, struggling to define what exactly qualifies as pornography and reasonable limits on its proliferation has itself become an endless academic pleasure of sorts. But what if Porn Studies is onto something in its continual preoccupation with evaluating a text in terms of social impact? What if this evaluation is exactly what makes a text viable as pornography? Or, what if Porn Studies is continually rediscovering that this evaluation is inextricable from any critical stance on pornography? What if pornography as pornography hinges precisely on whether it is "a good or a bad thing for the wider culture"?

This, we shall see, is the position Ferguson stakes out, superseding whatever content pornography consists of. Her case suggests that the threat of pornography most loudly proclaimed by Dworkin and MacKinnon still deserves our bent ear. Through these past several decades spent disentangling, contesting, and reaffirming their painstaking effort to define the enemy, as it were, pushing the conversation
outward to the juridical, sociological, psychoanalytic, literary, and beyond, their influential arguments have not yet lost currency. However, insisting on a definition of pornography in terms of content as Dworkin and MacKinnon have raises unnecessary, possibly inherent difficulties, evinced by the countless, incommensurable theoretical postures on the pornographic. But let us explore the definitional project a bit further in order to elucidate which discursive features remain most prescient for articulating the nihilo-pornography concept.

Minimally, defining "pornography" appears to derive clarity from application to a particular purpose. Most broadly, what counts as "pornography" has no clear limits. Losing sight of this indeterminacy, internal contradictions are prone to arise in theoretical developments of the pornographic. Porn Studies scholar Zabet Patterson, for example, describes pre-internet porn by declaring that "images become effective as porn to the extent that they elicit certain bodily sensations, almost involuntarily." This premise for interrogating the supposedly special case of internet porn resonates with Williams’ discussion in Hard Core, placing pornography in a wider context of affective experience through representational media; but puzzlingly it would render porn that fails to turn on the viewer (a straight man watching gay porn? poorly or ineffectively made porn?) as simply not porn. And yet somehow space is also made for the viewer to contribute his own agency to the stimulation of "bodily sensations," since his arousal from porn proper is only "almost involuntary." If an image fails to "elicit bodily sensations," then, is it because the text in question is not actually pornographic? Or perhaps because the body in question isn't living up to its fair share of the task? Even if we work around
this self-defeating vagueness, it is critical to ask to whom or to what Patterson wishes to point in determining whether an image amounts to "porn" or "not-porn": the viewer? The producer? The media? Some affective response?

Just a few paragraphs following her putative definition of pre-internet porn, Patterson summons Vivian Sobchack to observe that "representational technologies, such as the computer, convey their logic in two ways: first, through the representations they display; and second, through the manner in which they latently engage our bodies."50 We are left to wonder what, then, distinguishes pre-internet porn from internet porn - or for that matter, what content would differentiate porn from that of any other "representational technology." Indeed, Patterson then proceeds to discuss Slavoj Zizek's formulation of "interpassivity," in which Zizek lists canned sitcom laughter, the VCR, news reports of massacres, advertising, and (perplexingly) the crucifixion, along with pornography, as "new electronic media" exemplifying the "necessary obverse" of interactivity. By means of these novel technologies, Zizek asserts (though phrased as a question), "it is the object itself that 'enjoys the show' instead of me, relieving me of the superego duty to enjoy myself." Therefore, with laugh-tracks as with pornography, "you think you enjoyed the show, but the Other did it for you . . . no it was NOT YOU who laughed, it was the Other (the TV set) who did it."51 Zizek attributes the "active subjectivity"52 of affective states to the media – the TV set – in place of the actors, producers, writers, and other agents involved in its creation, but also and most critically, in place of the viewer. Enjoying on behalf of the viewer is in fact the very function that pornography, as interpassive technology, is designed to serve: it relieves the audience at once of the unbearable
passivity of his being, and of the Lacanian superego injunction to "Enjoy!" Zizek would have it that pornography operates by dint of this recursive, interpassive mechanism. In his view, it is the pornography that gets off - not the performers getting off in the pornography, not the viewer who gets off watching pornography, but the pornography itself.

Is this odd attribution of agency what we should distill from this attempt to define pornography? The notion of the interpassive agency of media is noteworthy at least for the way it marks a curious return to the positions originally articulated by Dworkin and MacKinnon, who understood pornography as representational technology itself doing harm. That is, the connection between Zizek and anti-pornography activists is not in what pornography consists of, but in their conviction in the agency of pornographic media.

In her illuminating reading of the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon, Frances Ferguson unpacks the tacit correlation between MacKinnon’s arguments about pornography and utilitarian philosophy, tracing this back to the contemporaneous advent of utilitarianism and pornography in the late eighteenth century. As a by-product of the widely influential ideas of relative value and social good forwarded by utilitarian thinkers, pornography became less tied to any particular content and more a matter of how it was used; it became inherently political, but not necessarily sexual. "What is pornographic about pornography," Ferguson maintains, "is less what it presents than the relative actions and relative assessments it offers of the various parties to it. Pornography offers more a social evaluation than an evaluation of an object." Ferguson downplays the necessity of a definition of pornography by
calling attention to how "people actually respond to pornography as offensive or abusive or pleasurable or arousing not because they have a settled view about everything that someone might want to call pornography, but because they are responding to a particular case, to the way in which a representation works within a given social field." Thus, moving backwards from MacKinnon’s claims that pornography ought to constitute legal harm insofar as it hinders equal access to utilitarian social structures such as the workplace and the school, and focusing on the very narrow case of pornography as sexual harassment, Ferguson asserts that "even rather contentless representations ought to be seen as ‘pornographic’ when they become the instruments for debarring individuals from those structures that enable persons to see their value increased through the public objectification of their actions."56

This radically abstract reading of Dworkin and MacKinnon would seem to hold too dearly to the term "pornographic" in order to reach a sympathetic understanding of their position. However it makes way for some very useful observations. Following this formulation, Ferguson posits the fundamental insight of Dworkin and MacKinnon’s take on pornography to be that "pornography is only significant insofar as it involves acts - as it puts representations to use."57 The ordinance they crafted takes aim at representations of women in "subordinate" sex acts because of the threat representations qua representations pose as media agents:

Far from being naive about representation or unable to tell the difference between an act and the representation of that act, the strength of MacKinnon’s position is precisely its focus on the representation as act . . . What MacKinnon most importantly
emphasizes about representations is not their capacity to frame actions for imitation or avoidance but their transitiveness. This is the point at stake when she and Dworkin describe pornography not as a description of sex but as sex...58

With the sexual harassment argument, Ferguson sees MacKinnon to be making the crucial distinction between pornography as innocuous simulation, where MacKinnon believes the actual harm of the sex acts performed in the depiction are mistaken to be harmless due to their mediation by representational technology, and pornography as itself an agent of harm regardless of content. Ferguson puts aside MacKinnon's emphasis on the power of resemblance of a sex act in representation and focuses on how the images are used and deployed: "An action may not become a representation by being watched, but a representation may become an action by being watched...A pornographic image need not be offensive in itself, need not even be sexually explicit, to be used in harassment. It need only be used as an ostensive definition of an individual's difference from the other members of a group."59

For Zizek, the work pornography does as interpassive media is affective and centers on desire. It is accomplished by means of the viewer but also on his behalf, and ultimately displaces the viewer as the sole active subject. By contrast, Ferguson (by way of MacKinnon) invokes no affective or sexual states in her account, instead describing what pornography does as hinging on the social consequence of depictions of inequality. But importantly, where Zizek and Ferguson align is in their commitment to pornography as agentive representation. In both formulations, pornography is distinctive for the way it performs a certain kind of work by being
watched, and for its self-sufficient operation: pornography is not the depiction of sex but sex itself; it does not stimulate the viewer, it stimulates itself for the viewer.

I suggest, following Ferguson and Zizek, that pornography is to be named and evaluated in terms of its multifaceted agency as representation, simultaneously elucidating the dimensions of the self and the social in which it operates. Incorporating both accounts can bring the interpassive to bear on the social, and a reckoning with the social to bear on the agency and desire of the self. Furthermore, we can acknowledge that deeming a text "pornographic" is less a matter of revealing some truth about the text than of its use-value in charging the text with pornography's transgressive connotation. The term's affixation to various other adjectives, affective states or genres ("grief porn," "war porn," "torture porn," "poverty porn," and so on) can never be fully accounted for in a theory of pornography. The Ferguson/Zizek approach allows us to sidestep the "semantic quagmire" of its definition and focus instead on that peculiar rub against the ordering forces of the self and society that characterize pornographic texts.

Moreover, this framing of a discourse on pornography sits well in historical context. As Helen Hester explores in Beyond Explicit, "Pornography has not always been viewed as being limited to erotic titillation or to the depiction of genital mechanics, and "the genre actually has a remarkably rich history when it comes to engaging with the realm of the political." Hester quotes Laurence O'Toole's observation that

throughout early modern European history, 'pornography' was used chiefly to satirize, criticize, to tilt at the Church, the state, the monarchy. This was political porn... Porn was controlled during this
period not because it was obscene but because it was seditious, blasphemous or defamatory.\textsuperscript{61}

Thus, "pornography as a separate cultural category narrowly defined by a particular field of interests is understood here to be a relatively contemporary invention."

Hester goes on to discuss how Marquis de Sade's \textit{120 Days of Sodom} presents genital acts, but "they are also apparently linked to a revolutionary political project, and their frequent segues into politico-philosophical discourse mean that they are perhaps just as likely to frustrate, to irritate, or to bore as they are to arouse."

Within this context, more contemporary developments in censorship, media and technology in our own culture have forced a re-conception of the narrowly sexual pornographic referent. "Certain slippages have become apparent when it comes to the concept of the pornographic. In recent years, popular usage of the word 'porn' has been extended, most noticeably in its deployment as a kind of descriptive suffix," as in the examples mentioned above. "It would appear that the word 'pornography' has become somewhat detached from its etymological roots . . .

Whereas the term \textit{pornography} seems to speak emphatically of sexuality, it has come to be associated with concerns that are not overtly sexual."\textsuperscript{62} Thus as "pornography" (whatever the term is taken to mean) proliferates, complicates, and becomes affixed to new media – or perhaps rather, as scholarship becomes more and more aware of pornography's tendency to do so – the hard boundaries of the pornographic continually erode. Acknowledging this dispersal itself marks a recognition of the perennial inextricability of pornography's contemporary confrontation and elicitation of the senses from its aggressively political origins.
In light of this, we should consider pornography as agentive representation pitted against the ordering of the social and the self. Far from outliving the threat of pornography as first postulated by Dworkin and MacKinnon, the threat, rather, has only become more properly defined, and more inescapably broad in scope. It is perhaps with something like this in mind that Slavoj Zizek flippantly declares, "All literature is pornography, after all."63

We are now in a position to turn our consideration to nihilo-pornography, which I attempt to give full breadth through analysis of Death Row Dick. While thinkers Carolee Schneemann, Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, along with the pornographic films to be discussed (Powertool and the works of Treasure Island Media), all seemingly seek out and submit to the annihilation of self, Death Row Dick reifies the ego. It is not pornography, but "pornography" in quotation marks: over the top, melodramatized, extending the political and psychoanalytic dimensions so far as to empty what it depicts of moral valuation and transgressive charge – de-politicized, de-sexualized, boring.

A camp sensibility of pornography is not conveyed by the mere ironic intensification of porn’s gimmicks and props. Porn is already pure style: a desperate worship of pleasure ritualized around thin plotlines and half-baked characters; or the delicious construction of a “reality” “caught” on camera, and the greedy, hyperbolic lust upheld by such props. More acutely, such a camp must reframe pornography’s conceits that pleasure can be had, that sexual subjects can be typecast, that “sex” is transgressive. That is, it must cast doubt on the coordinates of fantasy. Nihilo-pornography clings to the fiction of the self.
As camp, nihilo-pornography at once neuters the social friction that distinguishes pornography while it adheres to Ferguson’s stipulation that that friction not hinge on content. Nihilo-pornography is all style: a hyperstylization of “homosexuality” writ large, prison life, and capital punishment in the maximum visibility of a high-art context – but having nothing to say about it. Susan Sontag writes of camp that “to emphasize style is to slight content, or to introduce an attitude which is neutral with respect to content. It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical.” Bruce LaBruce paraphrases Sontag as claiming that camp “is an existential condition as much as a sensibility: an enormous and profound frivolity.” Pornography camp must target the myth of pornography’s transgression.

Nihilo-porn resigns sexual desire to a perpetual, assured disappointment, which nonetheless itself perpetuates that desire in its failure to satisfy. As Laura Kipnis asks,

Why is there so much pornography? Why the sheer repetition? It may be that there’s something inherent in human desire that defeats the capacity of anything to satisfy it. For Freud that’s because any sexual object is always a poor substitute for the original one you couldn’t have, with that unfulfillable wish taking the form of a succession of substitute objects. (Freud also related repetition to trauma, to the need to master psychic injury through the compulsive return to the scene of its origin.) It may also be that within consumer capitalism, our desires have to be endlessly activated to keep us tied to the treadmill of the production-consumption cycle: if we ceased having unfulfillable desires and stopped trying to quell them with a succession of consumer durables and unnecessary purchases, instant economic chaos would soon follow.

In this easy conflation of Freudian drive and Marxist historical determinism, Kipnis touches on some insatiable component of the post-industrial psyche which
nihilo-pornography seeks to give fullest expression. In short, "nihilo" refers to a
resignation to the fatalism of the drives, the absence of moral charge in depictions of
sex and so meaninglessness in the absence of valuation, and the extrapolation of
death in representation.

Dick's pathetic "last meal" of fellating the Correctional Officer the night
before his execution is a pantomime of the sex act, its anticlimax a rejection of the
jouissance of submission that threatens the loss of the ego. Instead, the performance
of submission in Dick's fellatio on the Correctional Officer rearticulates the ego; it is
both an accession to and a reclamation of the power that defines Dick's desire. Here,
intimacy is a fantasy against the ever-present strictures that mediate bodies and
personalities, overstated by prison life and jail cells. In Dick's embrace of the
confinement, mundanity, isolation and meaninglessness of the sexual void, ecstasy
and despair are found to be undifferentiated – and states of affective intensity
entirely out of reach besides.

Rather, Dick is irremediably bored. Death Row Dick is a deterministic
portrayal of the sexual subject negotiating its status, whereby the rules of its
existence are duly internalized as the operation of its lust. There is nothing
redemptive of Dick's sexual longing in his thoroughly disappointing last meal, just as
there could never be a last meal that truly satisfies. The closest he could hope to
come to the fulfillment of desire is to suck some dick through the bars of his cell.
The Bored Carceral Body

Our erotics are defined by space. The sexual history of the modern homosexual is equally a history of sites of homosexual encounter. These places of “coming together,” as it were, constitute the geographies the homosexual navigates as a desiring subject. Overt or surreptitious, “proud” or ashamed, to pursue lust is to traverse the social terrain as it is made legible by the various forms of homosexual marking. Commenting on Andre Gide’s *The Immoralist*, Leo Bersani writes that implicit in the character Michel’s “immoralism” is the suspicion that “psychology itself—as an account of what happens between people—assumes the durability and the acceptability of the political spaces in which it plots our complex private stories.”

Public bathrooms, truck stops, parks or alleys; bars, clubs, bathhouses, parties or retreats; theaters, porn shops, cheap motels; precious places like the bedroom; abject places like the prison; the places most exposed or most private, overlooked or unpoliced, secret or sanctioned, these become the sites of our fantasies and the architectures of sexual possibility.

In a detailed reading of the ’70’s porno *Night at the Adonis*, Richard Cante and Angelo Restivo point to space as the definitive feature of homosexual porn film aesthetics. *Night at the Adonis* functions in their analysis of “The Cultural-Aesthetic Specificities of All-male Moving-Image Pornography” as an archetype of sexual encounter in spaces of abjection:

Certainly it is a truism that, by the 1970’s, the movie palaces of the old urban centers had become economically unviable. This situation was itself overdetermined by declining and/or demographically changing movie audiences since the 1950’s, the abandonment of urban centers by the middle class, the social antagonisms made visible in the 1960s, and so on. For instance, a film like Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*
(1976) vividly paints a hallucinatory picture of a Manhattan in ruins. In that film, pornography seems to have invaded all of the "useless" and abandoned spaces of postmodern urban capitalism not yet ready to be made residential or legitimately commercial. In retrospect, we can see this uneven development as having been governed by a large-scale reorganization of capitalism toward dispersed, transnational modes of production and consumption.68

Recalling Laura Kipnis’ suggestion that our culture’s surfeit of porn is partly a symptom of late-stage capitalism, we should note how the “homosexual” is itself a modern invention of our scientia sexualis from amidst the throes of the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism,69 perhaps making homos the classic sexuality of the late modern era: in the circumstances of its invention, its actualization throughout the foregone wastelands of global capitalist development, and of course more contemporarily as a vanguard of economic elitism.

In fact, one of the plotlines of Night at the Adonis follows the training of a young new hire, a recent graduate majoring in “gay business” – an effective wisecrack even in 1978. Aloof from the countless sexual allures the scene of the theater offers,

The new employee sublimes sex for something better: getting ahead in a new world order. As such, he anticipates the central role the newly constructed gay male subject will (unwittingly) play in the coming gentrification of the ruins, a process integrally connected to the political programs of Thatcherism/Reaganism he now represents. This character anticipates a "representation" of the male homosexual that will be continually embodied by porn in the video era, and which is perhaps even more important to the workings of dominant, heterosexual capitalism than any larger thing we might delineate, believe in, and optimistically call gay subculture (let alone gay history).70

In this prophetic vision of homosexual representation in video pornography, gay men can hardly be said to stand in resistance to the workings of late-stage
capitalism, but instead are deeply complicit in them by dint of their lust for each other – and most presciently, lust for representations of each other. The reproduction of the homosexual image in pornography serves its role in a feedback system of desire, in which the socioeconomic order that shapes the very possibilities for gay desire is itself reinforced by the forms those desires assume through pornography and its distribution.

_Death Row Dick_ is a pornographic staging of the prison, that iconic space of homosexual fantasy and homophobic terror, and as such re-signifies the domination fantasy John Mercer describes as “actively contributing to the construction of a gay mythology”\(^{71}\) into a bland depiction of the all-too-real state-sanctioned violence against the carceral body by means of insuperable boredom and sterilized death. Mercer dismisses the prevalence of prison settings in porn “as metaphors for the alienated and marginalized position of gay men within culture” or as suggestive of “an underlying masochism or homophobia enshrined within pornographic representation,” but stops short of claiming exactly how they should be interpreted other than as “mythological.”\(^{72}\) _Death Row Dick_, in its diminishment of the “mythological” status of “the fuck” and sexual fantasy, portrays the prison as an all-too-familiar zone of post-industrial homosexual encounter.

Perhaps the prison occupies the prominent role it does in gay pornography because it of its very real role in shaping homosexual consciousness. As recently as 2013, thirteen states still outlaw sodomy, and three states outlaw consensual sex between people of the same sex.\(^{73}\) Even in places where the law is not bizarrely anachronistic, the police are not unlikely to harass, assault, or arrest gay men on
overblown or empty charges. This is hardly to remark upon the much more horrifying, albeit more distant past, in which homosexual policing and incarceration was as explicit as the FBI compiling lists of “homosexual bars and gathering places” which were shared with police departments who in turn supplied arrests records on morals charges. The notorious pornographer Paul Morris, in an interview with Porn Studies scholar Susanna Paasonen, has stated that the spaces portrayed in porn must be “accessible” to the viewer, involving places or situations in which the viewer can actually envision himself:

> I took care to situate the sex in specific spaces—a cheap hotel room, a San Francisco porn booth store, and so forth—all of which would be open and available to the viewer if they had been physically present. Come to this place, open this unlocked door, and these men will be there, waiting for you. There was nothing ideal about the places, which translated into general availability.

*Death Row Dick* aligns itself with this vision, but is distanced from the utopianism Morris espouses. Often, the prison setting depicts a sexuality defined by abjection, oppression, starvation of touch, and threat of harm. *Death Row Dick* chooses to emphasize that understated but pervasive condition of prison life, boredom. After all, “the relation between boredom and Camp taste cannot be overestimated.”

As criminologist Jeff Ferrell reflects, “Looking back at the long maturation of the modern world, we can actually see collective boredom institutionalized within the practice of everyday life . . . Following and reinforcing this trajectory, public schools emerge as training centers for the new boredom, rehearsal halls for the sublimation of individuality to disciplined efficiency; and for those insufficiently socialized to the new order, the mental hospital, the prison, the juvenile lockup offer
entire institutions dedicated to the enforcement of tedium.” More prominently, in *Time* magazine, Tania Luna and LeeAnn Renninger describe how boredom is “one of the toughest aspects of doing time,” compelling inmates to “swallow things, mutilate their skin, refuse to eat, and sometimes throw or eat their feces just so they could be moved to another facility,” all simply in order to be “a little less bored.” Boredom, moreover, poses more than mental harm to prisoners, having been found in research to lead to increased violence.

Boredom serves as a catalyst in one of the most well-known gay porn films ever made, *Powertool* (1986). The film follows an unnamed character, played by Jeff Stryker, through the ordeals of prison life. We first see him in a courtroom, where the judge has just found him guilty of some unspecified crime. Asking the newfound criminal if he has “anything to say for himself” before sentencing, Stryker's character asks coolly, “Would it do me any good if I did?”

“It might,” the judge responds.

“I don't think so,” the defendant responds, folding his muscly arms as a bluesy slide guitar soundtrack already bemoans his imminent incarceration. “I ain’t got nothing to say.” It’s as if in his defeatist, apathetic reply, Stryker’s character merely concedes that he has always expected to end up where he is now being sent. Given the film’s pornographic context, we are intended to assume that this defeatism is somehow connected to his sexual life, is perhaps even a consequence of homosexuality itself.

Following a thorough strip search upon his arrival at the jail, the next scene in which the protagonist is sexually provoked is preceded by clear, theatricalized boredom. Alone in his cell, in the dark, all this beautiful man can do is sit pretty. In
the cell across from his, however, another inmate receives a breakup letter from his girlfriend. The inmate turns his anger and sadness on his bottom bunker, an eagerly submissive twink who is forced to “take his cock” by various means. The fucking, a recourse of despair and rejection, rouses Stryker’s character from his boredom: we see his rigid jaw and sumptuous gaze fixed on the spectacle of the rape through the bars of his cell.

Contrast this narrativization and exaggeration of boredom with the oscillation of states of boredom, interest and arousal evident in Schneemann’s *Fuses*. The footage is often fixated on Tenney’s alternately flaccid and erect penis, exploring a fascination with its shape-shifting abilities. *Fuses* takes places entirely in the 18th-century farmhouse inherited by Schneemann, the home that she and Tenney made for themselves over many years, a domestic dream. Describing their lovemaking in *Fuses*, Schneemann has said, “The fuck was inseparable from an intimacy, an erotic generosity that was evident. Jim Tenney and I were together for thirteen years—an extraordinary and rapturous loving life together.” The boredom in *Fuses* is thus the result of an engorgement of pleasures, stability, reassurance, love. That is, it is a boredom grown from a kind of love that promises futurity: it is not a hasty fuck egged on by dejection and marginalization, that urgent lust which characterizes the above prison scene and countless other iterations of homosexual encounter. Schneemann and Tenney’s variously aroused and reposed bodies depict a lazy, adoring boredom, where the object of carnal desire remains for extensive filmic scrutiny over the course of seasons changing, growing older, young lives taking shape. Here, a moment of titillation or rest is just a moment in a complex
and continuous sexual-emotional-intellectual connection. Their genitals, their bodies, remain for each other throughout and beyond “the fuck.” As an emblem of the relationship between Schneemann and Tenney, Fuses is really so much more than “the fuck,” the abstracted, sterilized phenomenon this linguistic formation suggests.

We might fruitfully compare the quality of boredom in Fuses to that conveyed in Andy Warhol’s Blowjob (1964), where a single, extended shot is restricted to a face in various states of affective response. During the course of the unseen “blowjob,” we witness the face in pleasure, interest, distraction, and more inscrutable expressions. As with Fuses, boredom as a facet of sexuality is almost a sort of indulgence, even privilege. Writing on Blowjob, Ara Osterweil goes so far as to distinguish between the boredom of pornography’s “uninterrupted and sustained fullness” and the seemingly rambling explorations of image definitive of “the ennui of the avant-garde.” Pornographic “boredom” is actually a fervent, unrelenting obsession, but in Blowjob and Fuses, boredom marks leisure, a sense of freedom, and even a sense of class.

The boredom of prison, as it is dramatized in Powertool and as the definitive tone of Death Row Dick, is not a passing state but a perpetual, irremediable condition, not an undulation in attitudes of desire but an unraveling of sanity that prompts the subject to sexual intensities. This is the state Dick is in when he solicits the Correctional Officer’s dick, the intellectual stupor to which he must conform and which the inmate seeks to rupture through his lust. Death Row Dick is an attempt at “prison porn” situated in the “accessible” existential mode of incarceration, an over-
earnest, desperate, wretched sexualization of the monotonous structures of domination and confinement.

If we should consider pornography as social fantasy as much as erotic fantasy, then gay porn cannot proscribe the abject: if anything, abjection is essentially constitutive of gay desire. If gay erotics are shaped by the landscape etched out of a society’s affordances of homosexuality – those places and contexts where it is permitted, unseen, celebrated, submerged – then the possibilities for fulfilling homosexual desire follow from the positive and negative spaces of society in which homosexuality can exist. As such, pornography can be thought to consist necessarily of some fantasy of social organization. To watch – or more strongly, to be aroused – by prison porn, and participate interpassively in its fantasy, is perhaps to imagine, albeit cartoonishly, life in prison.

Outlandish as it may seem in American culture today, such a possibility is never far removed from homosexual self-awareness. Contemporary homos are the descendants and survivors of a not-too-distant history of outright social and political subjugation. This is a heritage in which both major social advancement and inconceivable tragedy for gay men pose a crisis of visibility. The Normal Heart, Larry Kramer’s roman a clef about his formation and later rejection of the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, features the hysterical breakdown of one character, Mickey, in the wake of endless AIDS-related deaths and strife within the organization:

I used to love my country. The Native received an anonymous letter describing top secret Defense Department experiments at Fort Detrick, Maryland, that have produced a virus that can destroy the immune system. Its code name is Firm Hand. They started testing in 1978 — on a group of gays. I never used to believe shit like this before. They are going to persecute us! Cancel our health insurance.
Test our blood to see if we’re pure. Lock us up. Stone us in the streets.83

The journalist-turned-conspiracy theorist might have been relieved to learn that the Fort Dietrick story turned out to be false, but perhaps could not have been assuaged in any case living in an environment where William F. Buckley, Jr. was able to float the idea in a New York Times op-ed that all AIDS carriers be tattooed for identification.84 Through the AIDS crisis, homosexuals rose to public consciousness as, at once, a victim of public neglect and a villain of public health. Homosexuals always remain available to the vicissitudes of the state in this manner. For these variously construed “villians,” the fantasy of the prison is not entirely fantastical.

The Homosexual Threat

Leo Bersani seizes on the homosexual as a subject of the state in order to deploy a theory of homosexuality as a particular kind of social ineptitude suggestive of a path of resistance to forms of power. In his view, HIV/AIDS should be seen as a crucial catalyzing force for homosexual social organizing spurred by the homophobia that could at last give name to the “homosexual threat.”85

“Nothing has made gay men more visible than AIDS,” and it is as if the devastation AIDS wrought has re-energized political consciousness: assuming an exaggerated triumphant tone, he writes, “Rather than make us shameful about who we are and how we desire, AIDS has helped more of us to come out than ever before—as if to help you, straight America, fight the terrifying fantasies 'legitimated' by AIDS with the knowledge that we are already your neighbors . . .”86 But for Bersani, the ever-
increasing visibility of homosexuals in 1990’s America actually had deeply
ambivalent consequences, summed up pithily by the observation that “Once we
agreed to be seen, we also agreed to being policed.”

Bersani is not identifying a paradox so much as calling for skepticism around the newfound exuberance of gay
visibility, manifesting optimistically in gay-themed Broadway shows, sympathetic
features in national news publications, and the beginnings of Gay and Lesbian
Studies departments in universities around the country. At the same time as this
boon to the acknowledged presence of gay men as a community, hate speech was
symmetrically amplified, while AIDS research remained as stalled as it had been
nearly ten years ago. AIDS had become the galvanizing political force of gay
Americans while it served, even without implementing William F. Buckley Jr.’s
sinister suggestion, as a “scarlet letter” taken to signify both one’s sexuality and
one’s life expectancy.

The pornographer Paul Morris goes so far as to declare that “a gay man who
doesn't have a virus in his blood is no longer a complete gay man. Without the sense
of separateness the virus enables, he lacks entirety and becomes all too easily a
social ancillary to heterosexuality and straight society.”

This astonishing claim leaves the reader dumbfounded until she considers that, at another time in
American history, this was perhaps already the case. Morris is the founder of
Treasure Island Media, a “documentary porn” company that creates and distributes
bareback gay porn. Tim Dean defines barebacking as “gay men’s deliberate
abandonment of prophylaxis during sex.”

Morris is a controversial figure who has been banned from adult industry events, sued, and received death threats. He has
also been the subject of extensive scholarly treatments at the hands of Lee Edelman, Susanna Paasonen, Tim Dean and others. Viewed to be actively promoting the transmission of HIV, the hell Treasure Island Media’s porn has raised strikes at the heart of pornography as representation with agency: it is more than the idea or depiction of risky sex, it is also the sex itself, a deliberate flouting of countless public health dicta posing a reckless “threat” to unwitting gays, if not constituting murderous intent. His pornography is imbued with a political vision in which he views Treasure Island Media as a “genetic laboratory exploring the vital sexual symbiosis of human and viral DNA,” documenting the “real sex” of “real men” who have taken “what conservative gays deem ‘the ultimate risk’ and lost.” Porn is “utopian, argues for better conditions for the body, argues for the ease and infinite availability of “pleasure” and, more important, ‘fun,’ which I read as social creative chaos, almost manageable chaos—the necessary chaos of queerness.” In this utopia of self-asserted outcasts, the depiction – and celebration – of inequality is not just what makes Treasure Island Media’s output pornographic according to our theoretical framework, but is the very telos of the pornography.

It harkens strangely back to what Foucault calls “sanguinity,” a “procedure of power” that preceded our more recent era of “biopolitics.” Previously, power maintained its status through the control of death, but in our current era of biopolitics, the highest function of power became “no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through.” It is from within this regime that scientia sexualis arose, constantly aroused as an excitement and a fear, through insistence on “the norm, knowledge, life, meaning, the disciplines, and regulations.” Biopolitics exercises
control over the “moving target” of the living body, whereas before, “power spoke through blood . . . blood was a reality with a symbolic function . . . nothing was more on the side of the law, death, transgression, the symbolic, and sovereignty than blood.” The rise of scientia sexualis is thus understood as the transition from “a symbolics of blood to an analytics of sexuality.”92 In attempting to apprehend Morris’ worldview, the barebacking subculture that he “documents” would seem to have made an odd return to the reign of blood as a “reality with a symbolic function.” For Foucault, however, biopolitics centers on a construal of sex – “the fuck” – as the centerpiece of the regulation of the private sphere. Does Treasure Island Media thus pose a resistance to biopolitics, or merely a reconfiguration of “the fuck” that has re-incorporated “sanguinity”?

We can begin to answer that by casting off the regulatory mandates of health and “clean” blood status, Morris’ work is certainly one form of opposition to the mechanisms of biopolitical control. However, it can hardly be said that “sanguinity” would be a preferable system of power to biopolitics, and we are forced to question how liberatory a revolution of “real mean” having “real sex” could ever truly be. Moreover, it must be noted that the development of more advanced antiretroviral therapies in the late ’90’s dramatically changed the significance of HIV-positive status. People with HIV were no longer condemned to imminent death, but could hope to live for decades as long-term nonprogressors (for whom HIV does not lead to AIDS). Thus, “antiretroviral therapies’ transformation of HIV infection from an immediate death sentence into a manageable chronic illness made it possible for gay men to begin thinking differently about their bodily fluids.”93 It became possible,
with the advent of improved medical treatment, for HIV to signify something more than a faggot marked for death, in a body that could live to serve as a signifying agent.

Susan Sontag, in her work *Illness As Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, provides case after case of figurative colorings, comparisons, and analyses of disease that lead the public and even the medical profession astray, vilifying the ill and amplifying a biological circumstance into a condition of moral, and thus social, consequence - often, in her examples, on the scale of crisis. Sontag insists against interpretation of illness as anything beyond the conceptual realm of the medical in its most straightforward terms, as a coincidence of factors without the valence of ethics, judgment, or fate. Through metaphor, infectious epidemics become "plagues," casting all social life as victim to some human evil pervasive enough to warrant the destruction of entire populations. "The plague" takes on its own life apart from the biological reality of a disease.

When Sontag was writing in the late ‘80’s, there was a life-or-death need to resist the powerful exploitation of the AIDS epidemic as a vehicle for agendas of repression against sexual and racial minorities, especially of lower class. AIDS was simultaneously proclaimed to be "worse than the Black Plague" and yet safely isolated from "the general population," which might be read as heterosexual whites. This equivocation was likely instrumental to the use of AIDS for the reinforcement of hypocritical bourgeois values in mainstream society.

One set of messages of the society we live in is: Consume, Grow. Do what you want. Amuse yourselves. The very working of this economic system . . . depends on encouraging people to defy limits. Appetite is *supposed* to be immoderate. The ideology of capitalism makes us all
into connoisseurs of liberty - of the indefinite expansion of possibility. . . AIDS magnifies the force of the quite different yet complementary messages increasingly heard by people in this society accustomed to being able to provide pleasure for themselves . . . Watch your appetites. Take care of yourself. Don’t let yourself go . . . The [concomitant] sexual realism goes with the rediscovery of the joys of tonal music, Bouguereau, a career in investment banking, and church weddings.94

By Sontag’s account, AIDS served far beyond the purpose of keeping the sexual and economic minorities whom it afflicted in check. For those "accustomed to being able to provide pleasure for themselves," the epidemic was a force of aesthetic mollification, tuning consumers to the depressive underside of American capitalism’s manic lifestyle dictates.

In addition to resisting the moralizing of AIDS victims through metaphorical portrayals of the disease, Sontag’s project of writing "against interpretation" of illness and the body also serves to destigmatize illness by casting light on the internal contradictions of "health" and the political values attributed to the "healthy" social and corporeal body. "The purpose of my book was to calm the imagination, not to incite it," writes Sontag. "The metaphors and myths, I was convinced, kill."

If Sontag is correct about the appropriation of AIDS as a force of aesthetic and hedonistic moderation, it would seem that among the most implicated populations it had the opposite effect. Just a few years after *AIDS and Its Metaphors* was published, two changes in the handling of the epidemic, as a public health issue and as a cultural issue, provoked a multitude of shifts in gay men’s attitudes towards HIV and AIDS. Decades of struggle against these regimes of metaphor in the United
States, however, opened up a new space for metaphor and AIDS unforeseen by Sontag.

The term "barebacking" barely existed prior to 1997, when AIDS had "rendered inconceivable the idea that gay men would intentionally relinquish protection when fucking."95 Tim Dean's work on "bug chasers," men who fetishize HIV infection and for whom the microbe is "central to their erotic lives,"96 offers analysis of the various spaces and institutions that enable their diverse practices and fantasies, particularly the numerous porn films and companies catering to the bareback community. His research and reflection on various cultures of sexual risk among men further suggests that this "abatement of terror" represented "part of the so-called normalization of AIDS and owes much to a growing recognition that the epidemic's crisis mode cannot be sustained indefinitely. Although HIV may persist forever in human populations around the globe, nobody can live permanently under conditions of siege."97 Echoing Sontag, Dean describes how the AIDS epidemic "led to the promotion of a more socially conservative gay political agenda" helping to bring homosexuality "from the social margins into the mainstream," leading it to become, according to some, "virtually normal" by the mid-'90's. Enter barebacking, a subculture invented "to help keep their sex outside the pale of bourgeois respectability."98

However the unsustainability of moralizing and militarizing the disease is just a part of a larger transformation that included medicine and masculine identity. Being HIV positive "is like having a war wound or a battle scar," but "the fact that HIV-positive North American gay men are living far longer than they did in the
1980's is partly what allows this view of the disease to exist.” Additionally, barebacking and HIV transmission became multiply construed by members of the subculture as "breeding," "gift giving," "keeping the torch lit," "brotherhood," "having a baby" and even "exchanging wedding rings." HIV thus became coded as an instrument of vitality, generation, and kinship, despite how its force to draw men together is derived from its mortal threat. Even its biological status as a virus, a non-living entity, "facilitates [barebackers'] immortality and enables them to be imagined not only as the offspring of a human mating but also the bearers of an imperishable connection. The virus itself permits unlimited intimacy...”99 This spiritual/communal edifice surrounding HIV is built with a reinvention of masculinity. Bug chasers and men who bottom (men assuming receptive and/or submissive roles) are celebrated and honored in this subculture, with the transformation of HIV as a "basis of authority and pride rather than of merely stigma and shame."100 In other words, contra Sontag, barebacking subculture has constructed a massive metaphorical complex for AIDS as a tactic of dignity and survival, a recuperation of metaphor in the service of contending with disease.

Queerness itself, following Paul Morris and Leo Bersani, might therefore be thought of as a signifying apparatus that was dramatically amplified through the AIDS crisis. In their related views, HIV/AIDS is a vicious demonstration of queerness as a kind of social mark, but with the capacity for resistance and subversion. Similarly, Death Row Dick should be considered in light of this conception of queerness as a “marked” character. Dick’s mysterious past allows the audience to imagine any possible “crime” leading to his death sentence. As pornography, this
sexual-social fantasy need not adhere to historical precedent in order to be plausible or “accessible” as Morris imagines. Could Dick be an AIDS victim, deemed unfit for society, the embodiment of Larry Kramer’s frantic journalist’s fears of being blood tested and locked up?

“Camp,” Sontag writes, “is the glorification of character,” where character is understood as “a state of continual incandescence – a person being one, very intense thing.” As a camp character, Dick is the overwrought embodiment of queer abjection. Although his character in performance was abstracted by use of the body suit and limited movement in order to make room for symbolic resonances, Dick must be read as a flesh-and-blood human, a living sexual subject. Yet as a reification of ego and the conscious constructions around unconscious desire, “Dick” sits squarely in what Lacan terms the “Imaginary” register, the realm of senses, ego-construction, and “signifieds” (that to which a signifier is “attached,” or to which it refers). The realm of the Imaginary is illusory, as is the construction of one’s ego. Therefore Dick, as much as he should be interpreted as an actual human, is also necessarily a phallic symbol. As Lionel Bailly writes, "The whole point of the word phallus is that it refers to an entirely imaginary object invested with an entirely imaginary and undefined power: it is the imaginary-ness that is important." However against its common mythological overtones of power, and its function in what Lacan calls the “castration” stage, Dick, as phallus, is a figure of feebleness and insignificance, his incandescence derived from the perpetual degradation and vulnerability of the queer figure at the hands of authority: a convolution of the power of generation and “the pathos and impotence of a doomed species."
For Bersani, “homo-ness itself necessitates a massive redefining of relationality. More fundamental than a resistance to normalizing methodologies is a potentially revolutionary inaptitude—perhaps inherent in gay desire—for sociality as it is known.”

He would have the homo “disappear” from state surveillance through the jouissance of homosexual contact, the cornerstone of the socially inept homo’s potential for resistance. In a similar vein, Lee Edelman sets out to describe the anti-social figure of the sinthomosexual. Edelman appropriates the Lacanian terminology of the sinthome, which is loosely understood as a fourth register that serves to hold together the three registers of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real. The sinthome serves as a sort of prosthesis constituting the foundational aspect of psychoanalytic symptoms – Lacan famously discussed James Joyce’s proclivity for writing as the sinthome of his eccentric personality. Its “removal” or treatment can leave a scar or illness worse than the symptom itself, so it must remain intact in order to preserve the integrity of the psyche. In Edelman’s formulation, queerness is a sinthome “impervious to analysis and beyond interpretation,” hence illegible as a social marker. Instead, sinthomosexuality “insists on access to jouissance in place of access to sense, on identification with one’s sinthome instead of belief in its meaning.”

Even Paul Morris propounds an idealization of jouissance through the transformed sociality of internet porn, in which network technology is a global manifestation of the death drive, an effort of the species to rid itself of the body and mortality completely. And always willing to do its part, the tenacious human body, through porn, is teaching itself to acclimate to inhuman states and durations of unprecedented orgasmic jouissance. The adoration of sustained genital bliss in general and the orgasmic state in particular is a gateway experience for the self-recognition of the future queer.
But Dick's dick-sucking is a far cry from the liberations of jouissance, and he enjoys no self-annihilation through which he might escape the grip of state power. Instead, Dick persists as inextinguishable character, right up until he actually dies.

And while Carolee Schneemann portrays the sexed bodies of *Fuses* dissolving blissfully into each other, *Death Row Dick*, by dint of its overstated queerness as social disfigurement, reaches towards a political desolation far beyond the reach of *Fuses*. Schneemann’s radical egalitarianism, more than being far too sincere for the exaggerated dystopia of nihilo-pornography, is a gesture towards a heterosexual utopia antithetical to the very notion of the homosexual, insofar as the homosexual is understood as an irretreivable outcast. During the performance of *Death Row Dick*, *Fuses* was screened on the ceiling at various intervals, interrupting the onstage action, and then disappearing when the stage action resumed. *Fuses* was merely a prop, an illusory depiction of equality and union utterly foreign to the homosexual subject. It exists elsewhere, in a social arrangement even the fantasy of which is inaccessible in the nihilo-pornographic.

*Fuses* was completed just as feminist discontent with pornography was beginning to surface above ground, and in Schneemann’s words *Fuses* is located as “the farthest point from pornography.” Striving for the opposite extreme, *Death Row Dick* indulges in an extravagant overreach towards the pornographic as a crude confrontation of the "mystery" of sex, an undermining of "the fuck's" transgressive potential by emphasizing its reinforcement of power relations. The same way Schneemann herself scarred the film of *Fuses*, cooking it, painting it, and
bathing it in acids in her ecstatic re-imagining of "the fuck," *Death Row Dick* is an attempt to incarnate a venomous foil to *Fuses*, a histrionic scarring.
III. The Selfie Machine

“Like every mass art form, photography is not practiced by most people as an art. It is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power.”

– Susan Sontag, “On Photography"

Kitch’s Last Meal and the Space Between Two Deaths

In The Plague of Fantasies, Slavoj Zizek notes that the camera has always been closely related to death. Discussing the opposition between movement and image, where "the movement of life itself is conceived as the magic coming-alive of 'dead' images," he observes: "This dialectic of mortification is crucial for our understanding of the underlying phantasmic background of ideological formations. It is deeply significant that photography, the medium of immobilization, was first perceived as involving the mortification of the living body."

By fixing the represented object, photography allows a thing to be seen; through multiple photographs in sequence, cinema produces the illusion of vivification. Zizek relates this process to the mirror stage in Lacan’s schema of psychoanalytic development. In this stage, the self becomes objectified and dissociated from the unconscious subject, and this dissociated, objectified self becomes the ego, a fictive construct that allows one to speak about oneself in stable, coherent terms, unconscious of the internal contradictions of the subject, and enables relation to other people. For Zizek, the Lacanian notion of the mirror-image "freezes motion like a jammed cinema reel."

According to Lacan, the complex concept of the objet petit a, sharing its symbolic denotation with the a of the ego as petit autre, is the impossible "It" of
desire, a stand-in for ineffable unconscious strivings. Ego, as a, and fantasy, with its a, "unconsciously are the subject's fateful answers to, 'What does the Other want?" For both the construction of one's ego and the construction of one's desire are a consequence of the mediation of our needs to (and of) the Other through language and symbolic life, positioning oneself simultaneously as the subject unconsciously desiring of the Other, and as the hopeful, imagined object of the Other's desire. Hence, according to Lacan, "desire is desire of the Other." ''What does the Other want?'' is an impossible question: beginning in the castration stage and remaining eternally mysterious, it is even more unanswerable for us than for the Other him/her/itself.

We can see, then, how the fixed image and its animation parallels the construction of self and desire. Cinema is built upon the same "fixing" process by which the ego is constructed: the image of a "jammed cinema reel" draws attention to a mechanism that should otherwise remain covert in the service of producing the illusion of a "moving image," a living thing. The "immobility that provides a firm visible existence" is necessary to both cinema and ego - and by extension, to desire. The "immobility" of the image is thus the heuristic of desire. It describes the fixing of a subject's objet petit a upon which is projected her ceaseless interpretation of the "desire of the Other," itself nebulous and ineffable. Desire is thus framed by two recursive fictions: the fixity of the ego (as unconscious speculation of the Other's unknowable desire), and of the objet petit a (as a coherent stand-in for one's own unknowable desire).
Zizek makes a further Lacanian comment that "this paradox of moving statues, of dead objects coming alive and/or of petrified living objects, is possible only within the space of the death drive which, according to Lacan, is the space between the two deaths, Symbolic and Real." This "space between two deaths" can be thought of on the one hand as the death of symbolic life as biological life continues (Lacan makes an example of Antigone’s social exile), or as the continuation of symbolic life after biological death, such as in memories or apparitions. We might think of the Real in this schema as what becomes "fixed" by the mortification of the photographic image, and of the Symbolic as what becomes "re-animated" by the moving image or cinema: the ongoing elaboration of a "dead" image, itself becoming a kind of life.

Not only were photography and death commingled in the public imaginary and in psychoanalytic thought, but more literally, easily reproducible images actually gained strongest currency in their representations of massacres, executions, and deathbeds. To indulge in the public’s prurience about death in the 18th and 19th centuries became the greatest calling of such techniques of image-making as woodcuts and daguerrotypes. Over the course of several centuries, death slowly disappeared from everyday life: public torture and executions were banned, life expectancy gradually increased, hospitals improved from the calamitous zones where death was all but assured which served as a last recourse for the dying poor, cemeteries’ once noxious fumes alleged to poison nearby residents were reconceived as places for the bourgeois to stroll. During this period, death resurfaced in everyday life in the form of mass-reproduced images. As Vicki
Goldberg observes, images began their "dance with death" well before the 19th century, but "they hit their stride almost as soon as mass reproduction and a mass audience began to take shape, at the moment that death began to shift from ritual to news and entertainment."¹¹³

The waning and waxing of death and representations of it were not on precisely parallel tracks nor by any means perfectly synchronized, and one cannot be held strictly accountable for the other. Yet there they are, doing a slightly out-of-step minuet across time: as the dead leave the realm of transcendence to become beautiful dreamers and tame objects, as executions retreat behind prison walls, as the mortal coil gets shuffled off in isolation wards and eventually in faraway nursing homes, the new reproductive media offer more and more realistic or exaggerated visions of how we die.¹¹⁴

Mass-reproducible images, both historically and psychoanalytically, are thus perhaps the medium of death par excellence. Carolee Schneemann's experience with cinema as mortification is especially prescient here. Describing the aftermath of her involvement with the medium for Kitch's Last Meal and Fuses, she says,

"...Everything in Kitch's Last Meal was destroyed. I had agreed with the film demon that I would make the film on the premise that Kitch was going to die, so that the film was going to absorb from my life something that was already foretold . . . When I showed Fuses in London, Jo Durden-Smith came up out of the audience and said, "I assume that the relationship in the film is ended"; I felt very put out and bewildered by that and said, "Yes, why would you say so?" He said, "I'm a filmmaker also, and film absorbs life into itself." I've always remembered that. Also Stan Brakhage told me how all the places in his early films had been destroyed, how almost all the people in the early films had disappeared or died. He saw some sinister interchange or imperceptible energy that could get destructive."¹¹⁵ (Macdonald 148-9)

After Kitch's Last Meal, "the cat died in February 1976; Anthony [McCall, her partner] left for his separate life in March; I lost my job in April; and even the freight train behind the house (central to the film) discontinued its twice-a-week run" and
eventually the tracks were taken up. But Schneemann was not naive to the latent supernatural ability of film to "absorb life": *Kitch's Last Meal* is a bold flirtation with death. Schneemann indirectly provides us with the interpretive cue for the recurring role of the train in the film, through a voice-over reading of the text that would eventually become written on the paper extracted from her vagina in her separate work *Interior Scroll*. Explaining the relationship of the train to the film's title, "the train symbolizes death because there is "die" in diet and "di" in digestion." Towards the end of the film, one last meow from Kitch is interleaved with a train whistle.

More literally, the end of the film contains two scenes of the immediate aftermath of Kitch's death: first, shots of Schneemann holding the dead cat and weeping openly; later, a voiceover of Schneemann recounting the process of preserving Kitch to an interlocutor (likely her then-partner Anthony McCall, since the voice is male and British). After taking the cat to a taxidermist, Schneemann goes grocery shopping, placing the stuffed cat in her shopping basket. Momentarily, the basket disappears, and Scheemann tells McCall as if telling a joke that she was desperately asking people in the grocery store if they had seen a basket with a dead cat in it. As with so much of the rest of the film, this scene conflates the domestic with the intimate, and ritual with happenstance, to absurd ends. Other scenes include spontaneous dancing, doing the dishes, doing the laundry, and Kitch's withering body; making love juxtaposed with the passing train; explosions of blisteringly overexposed images of the sky and bomb-like sounds paired with Kitch in the tedious, restless, bored task of licking his fragile body. Simultaneously elevating and debasing the rarefied and the mundane, one of Schneemann's
hallmark techniques, here serves to make of death at once concept, material, and purpose: respectively, through its thematic treatment of death in symbolic elements such as the train, as the motivating force for filming Kitch’s last years, and in the form of the resulting film and even the preserved body of the cat.

Schneemann’s cunning pact with the "film demon" was strategic and thoroughgoing. In one brief shot, we see a diagram of a meal for Kitch; in another, we see Schneemann struggling to feed Kitch with an eyedropper. Knowing as we do from the title that Kitch’s meals are numbered, the glimpse of a necessarily tactical approach to feeding the cat reframes the connotations of the film’s title. "Meal" would sound voluntary; a "last meal" is foreboding, as if Kitch were the subject of a pulp thriller, unwittingly entering some fatal scenario. But in fact Kitch is in intensive hospice during the filming. The film is a document of decay, of life-force seeping out, and of the structures put in place to preserve what remains of it - not just of Kitch’s body but, retrospectively, of Schneemann’s relationship as well. Kitch’s fate is foretold, but belies Schneemann’s strivings to extend it. The whole five-year process of the film, from the originary "pact" to the cinematic product and the cat’s taxidermied corpse, could be thought of as a cynical gleaning of life, an alternately torturous and whimsical traversal of the terrain "between two deaths."

Indeed cinema, as the operation of desire, can only operate in this terrain. We can therefore view Kitch’s Last Meal as an allegory of desire, even producing for us the symbol of Kitch’s preserved body as a totem of that little a with which the subject has so desperately vested the power to be her desire, to be the desire of the Other, to
be the I, the fiction continually uttered as the illusory pole star of an ineffable and endless longing.

**Grindr, the “Image-Maker,” and the Dark Triad**

In 1974 Schneemann wrote of her status as a woman artist and the use of her body in her own and others’ work, “I WAS PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE/BUT NOT AN IMAGE-MAKER CREATING HER OWN SELF-IMAGE.”¹¹⁶ In the context of the transparently misogynistic artistic milieu within and against which she was working, this sentiment was at once self-evident and visionary. Through her work, Schneemann accomplished far more than establishing herself as a woman artist in control of her own image, but as Ara Osterweil claims, she “re-oriented the history of twentieth century Western art towards a radical engagement with the flesh.”¹¹⁷ The breakthroughs her work made as exploration of media and corporeality significantly reshaped the contexts in which her work was made and received.

But as representational media has exploded over the last several decades, the promise of control in the defiant, power-claiming posture of “image-maker” has faded into a much more nebulous field of subjecthood and objectification. In the age of selfies, the faded novelty of “image-maker” has been replaced with the foreboding uncertainty of self-representation in what Beth Coleman calls “X-reality.”

X-reality is “a sense of being in two places at once,” an interlacing of virtual and real experiences Coleman advocates as a “multidirectional and multivalent understanding of the nature of pervasive media.”

In this sense, X-reality describes a world that is no longer distinctly virtual or real but, instead, representative of a diversity of network
combinations. With X-reality, I mark a turn toward an engagement of networked media integrated into daily life . . . a mobile, real-time, and pervasively networked landscape.\textsuperscript{118}

In this new media landscape, we participate in a perpetual creation and exchange of images through representational technology significantly distinct from the high-art contexts in which Schneemann developed her media practices. However the difference between Schneemann’s self-image in her artistic practices, and the self-image of a smartphone user today, is perhaps not so vast. In the same way that “avatars” consist of images and other technological trappings as a projection of one’s persona, Schneemann insisted on identification with her body and her image. In a response to Clayton Eshleman questioning the role of her naked body in her work, she declared, “I do not ‘show’ my naked body! I AM BEING MY BODY.”\textsuperscript{119} These two deployments of self-image cannot be totally elided, but both can securely be viewed as the construction and exploration of one’s intersubjectivity through representational technology.

For Schneemann, becoming the “image-maker” of her own “image” held the potential of a political corrective: it was part of the “naiveté and conviction” that “we were going to change things . . . everybody I met was definitely going to change everything—either in art, music, painting, sculpture, politics, economics, or farming.”\textsuperscript{120} But with the expansion of popularly available technology for (re)making one’s own image, this optimism has eroded, and the promise of representational media to transform social inequalities has become dubious. As Coleman writes,

Avatars provoke strong human responses because they send strong human signals. Taller avatars gain greater social power in their
relations. Female avatars are feted and flattered or, conversely, harassed - all in greater degree than male avatars. Avatars that represent ethnicities other than white - black, Asian, Latino, and so on - often are treated by strangers in a stereotypically racist manner. Gender ambiguous avatars are treated with suspicion. Openly gay avatars get gay bashed. These social phenomena carry over from the real world into the virtual because we take our worldviews with us when we go online.

As we discover that in fact the same inequalities, phobias, and prejudices held in reality migrate easily into the virtual, the liberatory promise of the image wanes.

Grindr is a technology that may help us draw out this transfiguration of the power of self-representation as it was conceived by Schneemann. As per its incorporation in the Death Row Dick performance, Grindr can highlight the limits of Schneemann’s representational utopianism in today’s media context.

As we do so, we can continue to acknowledge the material advancements that Schneemann’s artwork obtained for feminists, women, and other artists. How is it, then, that self-representation promotes both the reconfiguration of social oppressions as it somehow sustains them? In regards to Fuses and Grindr, we should ask: how should we distinguish between willing self-representation on the one hand, and submission to various kinds of observation and surveillance on the other?

We might begin by examining how using Grindr involves a careful navigation of shame and narcissism in which users flaunt online personas that make them equally available for praise and pillory. As mentioned in Chapter I, the Grindr platform consists primarily of an image, captioned by a short username and the age of the user. A profile image appears in a grid of other profile images, organized in order of proximity to the user. A user can scroll through the images and select one at a time to reveal a short amount of additional information about the profile,
including their height, weight, race, a brief “About Me” text, and their “tribes” (associations with “kinds” of gay men organized around body type and sexual/romantic roles). Although on Grindr itself users typically adhere to a more or less codified etiquette, a user’s profile or their interactions with other users are not limited to the Grindr platform. Popular websites display user-submitted screenshots and stories of Grindr profiles and conversations, whether to feature their attractiveness (such as on Dudes with iPhones) or their repulsiveness (such as on lolgrindr). As Evangelos Tziallas writes of “Gay Male Social Networking Applications,” “Once one’s image is out there it not only identifies a user and leaves them vulnerable, but also introduces the image into a much broader system of exchange— it can be misused as subterfuge or make its way around the internet.”

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has remarked that shame is a uniquely queer affect:

Shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove . . . Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and – performativity.

As such, “Queer, I’d suggest, might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to . . . those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame.” Schneemann, as a feminist advancing women’s liberation, is very likely familiar with the social condition and the affect of shame, but in other ways is perhaps ignorant of or immune to that pervasive quality of shame that defines the queer subject. On the other hand, as Leo Bersani points out, there is a certain blindness on the part of gay men to feminism as well: “Our feminist sympathies . . . can’t help being complicated by an inevitable narcissistic investment
in the objects of our desire . . . In his desires, the gay man always runs the risk of identifying with culturally dominant images of misogynist maleness . . . A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it the narcissistically gratifying reward of confirming our membership in (and not simply our erotic appetite for) the privileged male society.” For no matter one’s conscious political affiliations, “the cultural constraints under which we operate include not only visible political structures but also the fantasmatic processes by which we eroticize the real.” 124 The “narcissism” of the homosexual to which Bersani refers, the slippage between the desiring subject and the object of desire, can perhaps be elucidated through the culture of selfies that now forms such a large part of homosexual encounter and self-image making generally.

Encompassing the narrower contexts of Grindr, several researchers on selfies in broader popular culture have pointed to the “Dark Triad” of personality traits – narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism – and have found that taking selfies and posting them to social media sites are closely associated with features of the Dark Triad125,126 and even promote narcissistic traits.127 The more figurative narcissism of which Bersani speaks and the clinical narcissism to which these researchers refer are connected by more than superficial terminology, for both conceptions draw upon and reify dominant cultural ideals of self-image. In the case of the gay man, Bersani points out, this feedback process is all the more worrisome for the way it reinforces stereotypical images of masculinity that tacitly or explicitly promote chauvinism.
To participate in the Grindr network is to negotiate one’s legitimacy as a sexual subject. Schneemann might be seen as asserting her sexual, artistic, and intellectual legitimacy all at once, a move explicitly against the grain of misogynist cultural norms. To use Grindr is less politically dogmatic than this, and courts its own sort of emotional vulnerability. More than simply seeking out connections with men one might find attractive, a Grindr user is intentionally submitting his self-image, and soliciting others’, for evaluation, discrimination of compatibility or desirability, thus subject to the anonymous and thus unaccountable, often vicious whims of the other user/spectators.

The negotiation of sexual subjecthood on Grindr is a fixing process: the desirable/desiring self is composed out of the careful curation of an image, the formation of the perfect petit autre in the search of his ideal objet petit a. Communications scholar Yoel Roth, in his doctoral dissertation Gay Data, describes this fixing: “The multifaceted, complex lived experiences of gay male identity and sexuality are translated into an assemblage of data points that can be aggregated, acted upon, managed, and outputted in a variety of forms, to a variety of different ends.” In Grindr, the “richness and messiness of identities and bodies are flattened and rationalized by vertical media; they are made quantifiable, sortable, and machine-readable. This flattening creates what David Lyon has termed an “electronic superpanopticon” — a digitally-enhanced all-seeing eye.” As the neat construction of one’s desirability mortifies the jumbled unconscious of the subject, it makes him visible to both a partially selected and a potentially uncontainable audience.
**Kitch's Other Death**

Carolee Schneemann describes Kitch’s role in *Fuses* as being a disinterested observer, innocently and shamelessly watching Schneemann and Tenney’s intimate, playful lovemaking. Kitch serves as one of several inversions of pornographic scopophilia in *Fuses*: there is no third person observing and filming Schneemann and Tenney, no director other than them to coordinate their behavior and roles. Instead the two take turns filming each other, and rather than the camera objectifying the woman’s body, the camera itself is objectified by being hung from the ceiling and propped in various positions. Kitch’s participation through her guileless gaze calls attention to this self-aware process of representation, replacing the oppression of being filmed with the delight of filming, the shame of being captured on camera with the naïveté of discovering the “neutral” connections between fruit, seashell, cup, keys, and sex organs. Bruce Elder writes of the cat as Schneemann’s externalized “selfobject”:

> Since Kitch observes the action, he sees the two lovers engaging in fellatio and intercourse. We can consider the film as Schneemann’s effort to take back into herself, through dream and identification, what the cat saw when the cat, who is Schneemann’s selfobject, saw her engaging in the acts by which two beings are made one—or, in other words, taking back into herself a perception of herself that, though external, is nonetheless her own.\(^{130}\)

It is perplexing, however, to believe that Kitch “sees” fellatio and intercourse. As Schneemann’s “selfobject,” an externalization of her internal perceptions, Kitch perhaps saw nothing more than the shapes, colors, and energies that Schneemann fancifully draws out of the visual material of her sexual acts with Tenney.
The nihilo-pornographic counterpart to Kitch is the gay man’s smartphone. In *Death Row Dick*, the Selfie Machines insert an extraneous layer of theatricalized, performed automation to the act of taking a selfie, which is then projected as a fake Grindr profile. This additional mediation makes an elaborate intervention into the process of self-othering, self-objectification, self-mortification, and as Tziallas would have it, self-pornification of X-reality “image-making.” The Selfie Machine attempts to draw attention to the self as product, in multiple senses: the Grindr profile image is more than just a manifestation of the *petit autre*, but also a function of the regime of social media which fuels selfie culture: the machine behind the Selfie Machines.

In 2015, Facebook reported making an average of $48.76 on advertising revenue for every American user, generating approximately $7.6 billion in profit from Americans alone.\(^{131,132}\) On this and other social media platforms, the user is the product, not the consumer. Corporations track online behavior in order to “target” a user with ads geared to her interests. This logic of financialization is widespread and includes dating apps: a recent article in *Jacobin* acknowledges that “individual profiles may be constructed but data points far outweigh actual individuals; your interests and proclivities are packaged up and sold as asset streams on yet another marketplace that is increasingly coming to resemble the particularities of financial markets.” However the author’s point is “not to cast aspersion on the love borne from Internet dating or smart phone apps, but to see Internet dating as part of a broader project of the financialized self.”\(^{133}\) Indeed, lively social media culture provides ample evidence of our eagerness to buy in to the “project” of self-construction *vis a vis* market interests.
But the significance of this observation is precisely that the rise of selfie-related narcissism is not a spontaneous cultural phenomenon. The primary business model of social media corporations such as Facebook is to sell users’ obsessive tailoring of their self-image. Selfie culture, and hyper-identitarianism generally, are thus tacitly promoted by major social media platforms for whom ever-increasing narcissism is a growth strategy. In other words, as one colleague put it, selfies and the hyper-identity politics they evince are essentially a cultural side effect of post-industrial capitalist tech companies’ profit margins.

This fervor to be seen and fascination with the ways our image can be crafted, promoted, and captured resonates with more than one compulsion of our market-driven culture. Tziallas forwards a view of Grindr as “gamified pornification” in which GMSNAs such as Grindr have become so successful because they make interaction more legible, enjoyable, and seemingly transparent and controllable to a generation of young men raised with electronics who spend significant amounts of time immersed in virtual environments . . . they’ve simply replaced typical goals and rewards such as achieving a high score and accumulating virtual trophies with the promise of an ever expanding self-cultivated archive of erotic images and chats.134

One of the more profound social implications of Grindr’s flattening and “gamification” of X-reality sexual subjectivity is the concomitant panopticism of GMSNAs, for “in order to play the Grindr game one must submit to the logic of surveillance—screening, monitoring, searching, filtering, questioning, concealing, revealing—and accept the unclear boundary between private and public and the informatic dynamics that mediate our cyber carnalities.”135
Tziallas describes the particular function of "being seen" on Grindr as "participatory surveillance," a "mutual, horizontal practice" rooted in the act of "sharing" one's constructed identity with others. In this conception, though, the identity that is "seen" is the result of an intentional avatar as well as the digital trace of every move one makes in the virtual realm, actually creating a “half-real, but also half-private and half-public” surveillable persona. Roth expands on a similar notion of Grindr's mutual surveillance, taking it to represent a “radically new” model of networked sociability “reliant upon self-surveillance and the reciprocal disclosure of machine-readable data about users’ bodies and identities . . . at its core is a user-friendly implementation of what Oscar Gandy (1993) has called the “panoptic sort,” introduced into the intimate sphere of personal and romantic relationships.”

Optimistically, Roth's purpose in his research is to identify “ways in which users, policymakers, and developers can productively recognize the liveness, vitality, and durability of personal information in the design, implementation, and use of gay-targeted social networking services, with an eye toward making these services safe and representative of their users throughout their data’s lifecycle.”

The possibilities of Grindr’s panoptic nature, especially regarding structures of political power larger than our culture of petty internet shaming, have been considered in generally more sanguine terms than one might expect queer scholars to be about a user-created, photographic archive of distance-related homosexuals. Are there further ways in which gay men might be concerned about the “crisis of visibility” (and in other ways, invisibility) that Grindr poses, which attend to “being seen” in senses closer to what Leo Bersani suggests?
Perhaps it is erring on the paranoiac, for example, to point out how Google essentially dominates the flow of information passing through most of the networked world, including the smartphone platforms on which most men use Grindr. In *Death Row Dick*, audience members who took selfies with the Selfie Machines had their images unwittingly projected onstage in a Grindr layout, a parody of a coerced “outing”: it is as if the audience were forced to imagine, risibly, life as the kind of sexual subject who might cruise the internet, life as a gay man; and, to imagine, if only for a second, the people sitting next to them as viable objects of desire. But also in the performance, one of the internet DJs was tasked with googling the names of people in the audience, and projecting the search process and any information or images she found onstage. The pairing of these two depictions of the internet-visible self juxtaposes a tongue-in-cheek imagined world in which one “is” a surveillable gay man, on the one hand, and the actually invasive maneuver of projecting any searchable information about the audience one can find on the internet – a very real violation of sorts.

The decision to project a patently fake grid of Grindr profiles was informed by wariness about the serious harm such a move could have for the people whom were publicly revealed to have Grindr profiles. However, does combining this in performance with publicly googling names raise just as troubling questions, if not more? To participate in Grindr is to entirely willingly construct a social media avatar, but whatever turns up from a google search of one’s name is simply the publicly accessible, often uncontrollable residue of one’s private and public life. Moreover, to project a fake Grindr grid is to exhibit an artifice, but googling audience
members’ names is in fact a two-part project, a re-projection of whatever has already been projected about you on the internet. And while the former is a mere suggestion of the rarefied, mysterious valences of codified gay culture, the other is a depiction of a common, everyday, albeit often secretive, act. Perhaps more than as an invasion upon public identity of private or uncontrollable information, then, the act of publicly googling someone’s name is a transgression of social etiquette: it points to the unspoken fact that we know certain information exists, and one *can* and *does* google the names of others, but it remains unacceptable to parade the publicity of that information.

However, the prohibitions of social etiquette do not prevent any interested viewer, in more private settings, from finding the information she seeks on Grindr, Google, or elsewhere. In navigating double X-reality lives of a sort, through Grindr on the one hand and through the more public internet on the other, gay men are uniquely vulnerable to the exposures of participatory, public, and corporate surveillance. In *Death Row Dick*, the very real dangers of displaying one form of surveillance were eschewed, while another, questionable but far less immediately harmful, means of surveillance was enacted to question the distinctions of visibility between our (semi-)public and (semi-)private avatarisms on the internet.

The iconography of Kitch’s benign, disinterested observation of Schneemann and Tenney’s private romance made public, Schneemann’s idealism of a neutral spectator and inversion of the camera’s objectifying gaze, have today been replaced by the knowledge of the ever-present smartphone, itself increasingly a symbol of corporate power and the locus of obsessive attention for the self-absorbed “image-
maker.” There is no ideal of a disinterested third party in our fraught X-reality – there is only product, producer and consumer: The “image-maker” has become the selfie-taker. In the media landscape sinisterly transfigured from the one in which *Fuses* was conceived, the symbol of Kitch in *Fuses* is dead. She is supplanted by the smartphone, Kitch’s nihilo-pornographic analog, an especially dubious and prurient observer of the contemporary homosexual.

As a carceral sexual subject, *Death Row Dick* is the unsubtle embodiment of “being seen” and “being policed.” Melodramatizing his confinement, constant scrutiny, and putative evil, Dick is the perverse homosexual figure inadaptable to social life. In this condition, his identity is not merely the apparatus of unconscious desire, it utterly defines the realization of his lust: he is an overblown, exaggerated depiction of what Anne Schwan describes as Foucault’s belief in desire “as socially conditioned and contaminated by social divisions and economic inequality.”

Or, in Leo Bersani’s words, “Perhaps nowhere are we manipulated more effectively and more insidiously than in our most personal choices or tastes in the objects of our desires.” *Death Row Dick* is a literalization of these forces shaping the self, using as props the representational technologies by which the gay man’s ego and desire are articulated as the operation of public surveillance and financial logics.

The “pornification” of gay male culture, which Tziallas sees to be accelerated by Grindr, has been “a centripetal force throughout 20th century Western gay male culture, acting as popular memory, social organizer, and collective heritage.” In the increasingly networked world of homosexual desire through “pornified” self-representation, gay culture, at heart, is pornography. The Grindr user is thus
metonymic of the homosexual subject. He is akin to the pornographic viewer who, blankly regarding whichever glowing screen offering titillation, social fantasy, connectivity, and maybe even “the fuck,” becomes, in David Greven’s words, “an emergent queer subject and the postmodern male who sees all sexuality as simulacra: a series of citations, an unceasing procession of rote cultural tropes.”

As a commentary on this “pornification” and its parallel self-surveillance, nihilo-pornography insists on the mundanity of being seen, the lack of possible mystery in sexual encounter, the impossibility of escape from identity and visibility promised in the jouissance of fulfilled lust. Dick is merely an objectified “image,” with no pretension of an “image-maker.” Miserable as the blowjob he performs, Dick assumes the figure of a sexual subject with the life sucked out of him.
Endnotes

1 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, p. 159.
3 Ibid., p. 101.
5 Comments from screening of *Fuses* in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, May 2015.
6 Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body*, chapter 2 (no pagination).
9 Ara Osterweil, “‘Fuses,’” in *Carolee Schneemann: Unforgivable*, p. 139.
10 Ibid. p. 139.
11 Ibid.
13 Schneemann 1998, p. 3.
14 Ibid. p. 12.
15 Ibid. p. 7.
18 Ibid. p. 138.
20 Osterweil 2015, p. 151.
24 Osterweil 2015 p. 151.
26 Elder, p. 168.
27 Ibid. p. 144.
29 Ibid. p. 31
33 Battista, ch. 2.
phenomenon of interpassivity to be, grandly, constitutive of the fundamental signification. Derived from the Other and also connects the self to the Other, through a chain of language, and all symbolic creation. The subject is the unconscious self, which is the subject, from which the subjected is constituted.

At the same time, a "perennial problem" and film and media studies, uninhibited by "Pornography studies is a thriving subfield of history, ethnography, queer studies, already overcame such binarism, at least or especially in regards to gay male porn: "Pornography studies is a thriving subfield of history, ethnography, queer studies, and film and media studies, uninhibited by seemingly irrelevant feminist debates." At the same time, a "perennial problem" continues to be, "to write about pornography with any detail or interest is not to automatically advocate its virtues." "Pornography, porno porn: thoughts on a weedy field", in Porn Archives, ed. Tim Dean, pp. 31-33.


Williams,Hard Core,p. 3.

Ibid. p. 5.

Helen Hester, Beyond Explicit, pp. 3-5.

It must be noted, however, that Williams herself considers the field to have already overcome such binarism, at least or especially in regards to gay male porn: "Pornography studies is a thriving subfield of history, ethnography, queer studies, and film and media studies, uninhibited by seemingly irrelevant feminist debates." At the same time, a "perennial problem" continues to be, "to write about pornography with any detail or interest is not to automatically advocate its virtues." "Pornography, porno porn: thoughts on a weedy field", in Porn Archives, ed. Tim Dean, pp. 31-33.

condition of the psychoanalytic subject. He writes in *The Plague of Fantasies*, "Far from being an excessive phenomenon which occurs only in extreme ‘pathological’ situations, interpassivity, in its opposition to interactivity (not in the standard sense of interacting with the medium, but in the sense of another doing it for me, in my place), is thus the feature which defines the most elementary level, the necessary minimum, of subjectivity: in order to be an active subject, I have to get rid of - and transpose on to the other - the inert passivity which contains the density of my substantial being . . . In contrast to the notion that we are dealing with a subject the moment an entity displays signs of a phantasmic ‘inner life’ which cannot be reduced to external behaviour, one should claim that what characterizes subjectivity is rather the gap which separates the two: fantasy, at its most elementary, is inaccessible to the subject, and it is this inaccessibility which makes the subject 'empty'. We thus obtain a relationship which totally subverts the standard notion of the subject who directly experiences himself, his 'inner states': an 'impossible' relationship between the empty, non-phenomenal subject and the phenomena which forever remain 'desubjectivized', inaccessible to the subject - the very relationship registered by Lacan’s formula of fantasy, $\langle \rangle$" pp. 151-60. It should be noted, then, that Zizek’s formulation of subjectivity stands in opposition to Schneemann’s view of the subject as possessing a vital “inner life” that can indeed be successfully rendered externally and in concrete visual form. This would suggest that the experience of subjectivity, as interpassivity is closer to the pornographic than to Schneemann’s anti-pornographic conceptualization.

54 I attribute this view to Zizek but not to Patterson. It seems Patterson is employing a subtle but critical misreading of Zizek - although as a misreading it is perhaps more sensible than what Zizek intends. In her discussion of a feature from the internet porn site *Kara’s Amateurs* in which one woman masturbates while another films her, Patterson is correct to note that the multi-functionality of the computer as camera and screen, and of performers doubling as spectators, results in a certain slippage of subject/object or active/passive roles. But she unnecessarily posits that the slippage results in a dilemma of identification for the viewer. By this reading, the viewer thus partakes in an "initial identification" of "cross-gendered" pleasure vis. the woman being filmed, and later of the additional woman who spectates for him. Identification with the desired object, by a Lacanian reading pace Zizek, is not a straightforward matter, but it seems that some distance between the subject and objet a must be maintained in any desiring subjectivity - hence Zizek’s terminology of the "Big Other" who does the work of enjoying for the viewer. Moreover, Patterson posits that the woman performing actions for the viewer is in fact performing "in the place of the viewer," and claims that this is the relationship Zizek deems interpassive (p. 117). We have seen that this is not quite correct. Interpassivity names the transference of the work of enjoyment not onto the performers represented by media, but onto the media itself: it describes a relationship to media itself, not to the content of the media.

55 Frances Ferguson, *Pornography: The Theory*, p. 9. Notice that the (perhaps tongue in cheek) title of Ferguson’s work is an allusion to Robin Morgan’s infamous declaration, “Pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice.”
56 Ibid. p. 35.
57 Ibid. p. 36.
58 Ibid. p. 44.
59 Ibid. p. 52.
60 Hester, p. 70.
61 Ibid. p. 69.
64 Sontag, p. 227.
65 LaBruce, p. 4.
67 Bersani, p. 124.
69 Pickett, Brent, "Homosexuality", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2015 Edition). In fact, the term “homosexual” was coined by Karoly Maria Benkert just one year after Marx published the first volume of Capital.
70 Cante and Restivo, p. 163.
71 Mercer, p. 154.
72 Ibid. p. 166.
76 Morris’ version of “accessibility” is not without its own ideological cast. Remarkling on his frequent reliance on motels for his scenes, Morris says, “A cheap hotel room is the spatial analogue of a whore. And the whore is the basic identity unit of any pornographic utopia. There is nothing more politically transcendent than a cheap whore. The body of the true whore is the flint that makes a spark of revolution possible.” p. 216.
81 Schneemann 1998, p. 3.
In fact, Bersani writes of the imagined “threat” of AIDS, “In February 1993 the National Research Council made public a study asserting that the AIDS epidemic will have little impact on the life of most Americans. Since AIDS is concentrated among homosexuals, drug users, the poor, and the undereducated—what the council calls ‘socially marginalized groups’ with ‘little economic, political, and social power’—the epidemic will have minimal effect on ‘the structures and directions of [American] social institutions.’” p. 21.

86 Ibid. p. 19-21.
87 Ibid. p. 12.
88 Morris, p. 218.
90 Morris and Paasonen, p. 236.
91 Foucault, p. 139.
92 Foucault, p. 148.
93 Dean, p. 102.
95 Dean, p. 2. However, Dean also acknowledges that sexual practices eroticizing risk among gay men, such as cruising, extended well before and throughout the AIDS crisis.
96 Ibid. p. 17.
97 Ibid. p. 54. This framing highlights the constructed nature of the "siege," implying that it could have been halted at any point, and rendering needless its fatality, proven tens of thousands of times over before its "normalization." One of the backlashes of throwing off these "conditions of siege" was skepticism of the threat of the disease at all, for example in slogans such as "Don’t Buy the HIV Lie" sounded by HEAL (Health Education AIDS Liaison), which questioned the connection between HIV and AIDS. The reality of illness itself is here made malleable by the availability of a wider metaphorical range to the affected populations, in contrast to the stranglehold of metaphor on illness that exacerbates its alarm, as supposed by Sontag.
98 Ibid. p. 84.
99 Ibid. p. 88.
100 Ibid. p. 89.
103 Bersani, p. 21.
104 Ibid. p. 76.
106 Morris, p. 231.
107 Osterweil 2015, p. 146.
108 Schneemann 1979, p. 156.
110 Ibid. p. 109.
111 Bailly, ch. 2 (no pagination).
112 Ibid. p. 112.

Ibid. p. 29.


Schneemann 1979, p. 194.

Osterweil 2015, p. 136.

Beth Coleman, Hello Avatar, pp. 19-20.


Eve Sedgwick, Touching Feeling, pp. 38.

Ibid. p. 63.


Daniel Halpern et al., “The Online Ideal Persona vs. the jealousy effect: Two explanations of why selfies are associated with lower-quality romantic relationships.” Telematics and Informatics, 2016.


Yoel Roth, Gay Data, University of Pennsylvania, 2016, p. 2.

Ibid. p. 105.

Elder, p. 276.

Alex Hern, “Facebook is making more and more money from you. Should you be paid for it?” The Guardian, 25 September 2015.


Barnaby Lewer, “To Fall In Love, Click Here.” Jacobin, 14 February 2016.

Tziallas, p. 761.

Ibid. p. 768.

Tziallas, p. 767.

Roth, p. 104.

Ibid. p. 8. This is not to disparage Roth’s pragmatic confrontation of the subjects he addresses. Certain of his suggestions for rethinking Grindr and the privacy issues involved are worth noting: for example replacing the concept of “privacy” as an absence of visibility, with “data sovereignty,” which “prioritizes individual control over the privateness or publicness of their information” in order to enable “interested individuals to make appropriate choices for themselves about the risks they want to take when sharing their personal information.” p. 156.


See, for example, coverage of Dries Verhoeven’s exhibition “Wanna Play?” in Berlin, 2014: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/oct/09/grindr-dick-pics-privacy-invasion-contemporary-art-dries-verhoeven>. His response to the backlash his work received is both prescient and simplistic: “I find the opposition exemplary in a time in which we, as homosexuals, are once again hiding and choosing to express our sexual feelings in (apparent) anonymity. That anonymity is, I believe, a myth, [and] I find it interesting to examine how we function when we consider ourselves invisible... I saw other users as the consumers and competitors of my sexual potential. If these types of apps become part of our daily lives I think we will eventually be more concerned with comparing ourselves to each other, trying to impress and judging rather than the apps actually making genuine connections possible. Since flirting is made that much easier it could mean the end of the homosexual nightlife (a new development already underway in cities like Amsterdam and London) and put us back in a new ‘closet’. Perhaps not one where we cower behind the norms of the heteronormative world, as we did before the homosexual emancipation of the 70s but, this time, behind a pre-defined, pornographic alter ego.”

143 Bersani, p. 64.
Appendices

These appendices are intended to offer the reader a sense of the iconography and performance history of the Cult of the Illuminated Orifice as a further point of reference for her engagement with Death Row Dick.

The Cult, formed at Wesleyan University, is dedicated to opening orifices in the space-time continuum on the university campus. The Cult became a method of processing an autoimmune disease with which I was diagnosed during my master’s studies. Our performances were inquiries into the issues of health as process, permeability and boundaries, internality and externality, and mediation. We sought to reveal something, in each performance, of the moments of ingress and egress between the divisions upon which our lives depend, the regulated places where one substance, one attitude, is granted permit to invade or escape another reality: the seams where our beliefs and intentions self-segregate for the sake of a superficial coherence.
Appendix 1: Images from Select Performances of the Cult of the Illuminated Orifice

The Adult Playground

An outdoor installation arranged into several play areas:

• the Check Your Email station, a cubicle built with a chair and table enclosed by cardboard walls, featuring a computer built out of a typewriter, a crayon-drawn “screen,” and a real computer mouse. The walls were decorated with inspirational posters drawn in scraggly sharpie and pinned up with steak knives that the player could also use to stab himself.

• the Nihilist Dice game, two cubes covered with pages torn from calendar planners, with a different inspirational quote about meaninglessness on every side.

• the Live the American Dream game, a one to three player game featuring two boxes labeled “SPOUSE” and “CHILD” that players can enter to become a member of the FAMILY. Players can argue with the Spouse, discipline the Child, or repress secret desires.

• the Disaffected Ennui Look At Your Phone Cell Phone Charging Station, where you can plug directly into the internet through your bellybutton; and

• the Infantile Regression Center, where players can lie in fetal position and insert their heads into a box lined with plush blue fabric, softly lit from the inside, containing a teddy bear, a glockenspiel, a hanging mobile, a pair of large scissors stabbed into the side, and a salt shaker labeled “For Wounds.”
Stills from documentation of the Adult Playground. Top: portion of the Check Your Email cubicle. Bottom: the Infantile Regression Center. Previous page: a non-Cult participant enjoys the Live the American Dream game, with Nihilist Dice and Disaffected Ennui Look At Your Phone Cell Phone Charging Station visible in background.
**The Mobile Colonoscopy Clinic**

A free, five-minute, non-penetrative procedure, open to anyone curious to learn more about their health. Unlike most colonoscopies, with our technology the patient would be able to watch their intestines as they were being inspected.

I served as the doctor and two Cult members served as nurse technicians, all of us dressed head to toe in clean, clinical white. The colonoscopic device was built on a three-tiered cart. The top level held the various utensils required for the procedure, and, for reference, anatomical charts of the lower intestines. The second level supported an iPhone whose camera was pointed out from the cart, to a space alongside it where the Cult nurses were stationed. The third, bottom level held a cardboard box with a computer inside. For the procedure, patients got on their knees and placed their heads inside the box, with a privacy curtain draped over their body. On the screen they would behold a Livestream of the Cult nurses.

The clinic’s boundaries were designated with tarps laid neatly on the ground. Shoes had to be removed before entering the clinic. A cardboard sign advertised “Free Colonoscopies” and we eventually had a queue. Incoming patients were first given an intake interview by one of the nurses, where they were asked for their name, age, whether they had any history of intestinal issues, and whether there were any surfacing personal troubles they wished to address.

When I was ready to receive a patient, I would seat them down and briefly explain the procedure, then help guide them into the box and arrange the privacy curtain. During the procedure I would explain out loud to the patient what I was doing and seeing as I traversed their intestines, calling out the various colors, movements, textures, and medical-biological features of their internal anatomy. This was
enhanced with the shaking of a tambourine to convey that a high energy spiritual revelation was underway. The Cult, meanwhile, interpreted my verbal narrative through movement for the benefit of the patient, who was watching them on the computer screen. The nurses were instructed to manifest intestinal convulsions with their entire bodies and to respond to the features that I observed in the patient’s colon.

Afterwards, they were seated in an outpatient area while I consulted with the nurses, and then I had a post-op conversation with the patient in which we discussed the medical significance of what I saw and I asked follow-up questions about their stresses, romantic life, average hours of sleep per night, and general welfare. Along with being broadcast during the Colonoscopy Clinic, the Livestream footage of the nurses’ intestinal interpretations was saved and later used as part of the media for Death Row Dick.

Above: stills from the Mobile Colonoscopy LiveStream, footage that was later projected on stage as part of Death Row Dick. Previous: The Mobile Colonoscopy Clinic ready for action.
**Death Row Dick**

The original performance of *Death Row Dick* was not visually documented. Instead, a recreation of the piece was realized in February 2016. A short film highlighting various sections of the recreation, which also features an excerpt of the audio from the live performance can be accessed online here: <https://vimeo.com/157392929>. The below images are taken from this film. For further details, see Chapter II and the score in Appendix 2.

Top: Dick is wrapped in the plastic wrap used to serve the prisoner’s “meal.” Bottom: Group orifice-making with Internet DJ’s projections of Google Image Search for “panopticon.”
The Correctional Officer prodding Dick, superimposed with alternate states of phallic activity from Schneemann's *Fuses* (1966).
The Orifices Of Time

A lecture-demonstration involving a living mise-en-scene of “organologist” musicians, Cult members, and an animated, 200-foot scroll depicting a LiveStreamed colonoscopy, in which I attempted to provide an ethnomusicological account of the Cult of the Illuminated Orifice. The performance was conceived as both a “live colonoscopy” and an “inverted panopticon,” in which the audience was LiveStreamed by Selfie Machines as the performance space underwent a progressive transformation.

At the conclusion of the performance, the audience was invited to partake in Selfie Communion by processing to the stage to look a Selfie Machine in the “eye” and then to be served ritual drink. If they preferred, they could instead enter the Veil of Ignorance, which provides one an idealistically impartial social positionality: deep, internalized anonymity, making one a morally perfect being with no biases of selfhood and no political liabilities, preventing the user from being surveilled. I lectured throughout the performance, affecting my voice at various intervals with amplitude modulation, providing a mostly monotonous undertone to the slow transformations taking place. During Selfie Communion, I played the organ.

For further details, see the score in Appendix 2.
Stills from the Selfie Machine LiveStream of audience members processing for Selfie Communion.
Top: Still from a Selfie Machine LiveStream as the Cult crawls onstage in the dark. Bottom: Selfie Machine and Organologist, with animated colonoscopy scroll unfurled behind them.
The Cult of the Illuminated Orifice Goes to the Beach

Scenes from an in-progress film, including a soundtrack featuring a composition for WesleyPan steel band and ARP synthesizer.
Appendix 2: Scores for *Death Row Dick* and *The Orifices of Time*
DEATH ROW DICK

1. GLOBAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
2. INTERNET DJS SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
3. INTERNET DJ1 SCORE
4. INTERNET DJ2 SCORE
5. FLESH HORDE SCORE/SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
6. MUSICIANS SCORE/SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
GLOBAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

00:00-01:25  (DARK) "I'm A Hole" audio plays.

01:25-02:59  (DARK) Music starts when audio stops. FH crawl onto stage.

03:00-06:50  (LIGHT) DJ2 projects livestream colonoscopy. Music starts. FH solo orifices.

06:50-09:50  (DARK) DJ2 stop. Fuses on ceiling.

10:00-13:55  (LIGHT) DJ1 projects. Music starts. FH solo/group/herding.

14:00-17:50  (DARK) DJ1 stop. Music continues. Fuses on ceiling. FH crawl offstage, Dick + CO take places.

18:00-20:00  (LIGHT) DJ1 projects. Music stops. Dick + CO soli.

20:00-23:00  (LIGHT) Music begins with audio.

23:00-25:00  (DARK) DJ1 stop. Music stop. Fuses. FH crawls onstage to dinner table. CO fetches meat basket.

25:00-30:00  (LIGHT) DJ2 projects Meat Joy. Music starts without audio. CO sets table and distributes meat.

30:00-32:00  (DARK) DJ2 stop. Music continue. FH, Dick + CO remain onstage.

32:00-36:00  (LIGHT) DJ2 project Grindr images. Music continues. FH wraps Dick in plastic, plays with meat.

36:00-38:00  (DARK) DJ2 stop. Music stop. Fuses. FH crawls offstage.

38:00-40:00  (LIGHT) DJ1 projects. Dick + CO soli. Dick move head towards CO. No music.

40:00  (BLACKOUT) DJ1 stops. End.

House lights. CO + Dick stay in place for as long as possible.
INTERNET DJS SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

00:00-01:25 (DARK) "I'm A Hole" audio plays.
01:25-02:59 (DARK) Audio stops, music starts. FH crawl onto stage.
03:00-06:50 (LIGHT) DJ2 projects livestream colonoscopy.
06:50-09:50 (DARK) DJ2 stop. Fuses.
10:00-13:55 (LIGHT) DJ1 projects.
14:00-17:50 (DARK) DJ1 stop. Fuses.
18:00-23:00 (LIGHT) DJ1 projects.
23:00-25:00 (DARK) DJ1 stop. Fuses.
25:00-30:00 (LIGHT) DJ2 projects Meat Joy.
30:00-32:00 (DARK) DJ2 stop.
32:00-36:00 (LIGHT) DJ2 project Grindr images.
36:00-38:00 (DARK) DJ2 stop. Fuses.
38:00-40:00 (LIGHT) DJ1 projects.
40:00 (BLACKOUT) DJ1 stops. End.
INTERNET DJ1 SCORE

Follow the SEQUENCE OF EVENTS for cues.

DO NOT PROJECT THIS SCORE.

The following actions are arranged by application type and should not be performed in this order.

All actions and preparations for actions should be projected for the audience to see.

TEXT EDIT

Type the following live, including quotation marks.

- RAW ANON
- "Once we agreed to be seen, we also agreed to being policed."
- "A certain tenderness or empathy is pervasive even for the most violent actions."

GOOGLE

Search for the following and click on one or two or three links (follow your heart):

- panopticon
- gaydar
- (the names of people in the audience)
- hartford craigslist personals (follow m4m links)

PREVIEW

Open any images in the folder "craigslist images" (audience can see the folder) and type the names of the images in TextEdit next to the Preview window.
INTERNET DJ 2 SCORE

Before the show starts, prepare the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw_wW2v45eI
Begin loading the video from 00:22.

Also prepare:
- the Colonoscopy movie (from Ron usb). Begin playing the video (on cue) from 14:45.
- the Grindr images (in your email from Chris Chenier from the last performance).

Follow the DJS SCORE for all cues.
FLESH HORDE SCORE/SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

1. DARK: While musicians are playing and after the "I'm a hole" audio ends, crawl onstage to a semi-isolated space in front half of stage and begin solo orifice-making. Projectors will turn on. Stop moving when they are turned off.

2. LIGHT: Recommence orifice-making, solo and group orifices. Begin herding.

3. DARK: Crawl offstage (front). In the dark, Dick and CO take places on stage.

4. LIGHT: Dick and CO soli.

5. DARK: Flesh Horde crawls back onto stage, assume places at "dinner table". CO fetches meat basket.

6. LIGHT: Orifice-making solos. CO lays down plastic wrap and distributes meat.

7. DARK: Stillness.

8. LIGHT: Solo and group orifices and herding throughout whole stage. Handle the meat. Wrap Dick in plastic wrap.

9. DARK: Horde crawls offstage (back). Dick and CO take places on stage.

10. LIGHT: Dick and CO soli. Dick slowly turns head to face CO, face positioned directly at crotch. CO moves closer. (2 minutes)

11. DARK: Dick and CO stay in position.

12. LIGHT: Flesh Horde and musicians come onstage for bows. Dick and CO stay in position for as long as possible.

END
MUSICIANS SCORE/SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Musicians are tasked with open soundmaking according to the GLOBAL SCORE and with the following considerations and images in mind:

- Dark, dense chords, close in pitch to each other, twirling tremolos, trills, distortions and sudden swells.
- Mimic the audio in a higher pitch spectrum.
- Offer a counterpoint to the audio. Consider gaps in pitch and time.
- High, piercing, relentless drones
- Bathroom sounds - dripping, squeaking, squelching, flushing.
- Hiss, electrical whine, indifferent mechanical sounds.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

00:00-01:25  (DARK) "I'm A Hole" audio plays.
01:25-02:59  (DARK) Start when audio stops.
03:00-06:50  (LIGHT) Music starts.
06:50-09:50  (DARK) Stop.
10:00-13:55  (LIGHT) Start.
14:00-17:50  (DARK) Continue.
18:00-20:00  (LIGHT) Stop.
20:00-23:00  (LIGHT) Start with audio.
23:00-25:00  (DARK) Stop.
25:00-30:00  (LIGHT) Start.
30:00-32:00  (DARK) Continue.
32:00-36:00  (LIGHT) Continue.
36:00-38:00  (DARK) Stop.
38:00-40:00  (LIGHT) No music.
40:00        (BLACKOUT) End.
The Orifices Of Time

Informational Packet

1. Overview
2. Stage Plan
3. Global score
4. For the Cult
5. For Austin, Cleek, Cecilia and Hallie
6. For Omar and Tomek
7. For Warren
8. For Susannah
1. Overview

This performance is a lecture-demonstration providing an ethnomusicological account of the Cult of the Illuminated Orifice. Over the course of approximately 30 minutes a series of events will unfold while I give a talk.

With one exception, all events are coordinated by six gong strikes. The exception is the Cult's first entrance onstage to the Cult Ready Zone, which will be cued by Susannah.

This document contains personalized scores as well as the overall plan in the form of a global score, for reference.

Below is written everything that happens, in condensed, roughly chronological form:

- Four organologists (Austin, Cecilia, Cleek and Hallie) are led one at a time by two Cult members (Luke and Sophie) to performance sites in the chapel where they summon the inner lives of their instruments.

- Two Cult members (Cat and Justin) remain facing the audience as Selfie Machines, LiveStreaming the event, and then later perform on no-input mixers.

- Two of the organologists are illuminated by lamps (Austin and Cleek) and two by projection (Cecilia and Hallie). The projectors (Omar and Tomek) broadcast the two LiveStreams of the event, provided by the Selfie Machines, onto the organologists, and diffuse the image throughout the chapel.

- Meanwhile, an animation reel (Warren) is unfurled around the pews, encircling the audience.

- The performance ends with the audience approaching the stage to take Selfie Communion with the Selfie Machines, who have returned to the stage. For this service, I will play organ.

- Afterwards, the recital will be "over" and Austin and I perform some music. The Cult hovers leeringly in Dick Pose.
3. Global score

This is for reference only, to provide more exact information on the total performance. It is not necessary for every performer to learn their part from this score.

Timings are approximate.

[Pre-performance] All instruments are set in place. Cult, organologists and Susannah are readied in the Staging Area. Omar and Tomek are at their projectors.

[00'00"] Lights dim. Ron walks onstage, turns on lamp and begins talk.

[02'00"] Cult crawls from Staging Area to Cult Ready Zone.

[05'00"] **First gong.** Cult fetches Austin, turns on lamp. Warren proceeds from Staging Area to reel once Austin begins to make sound.

[08'00"] **Second gong.** Susannah activates pew lights. Warren begins pulling animation reel.

[12'00"] **Third gong.** Cult fetches Cleek, turns on lamp.

[18'00"] **Fourth gong.** Cult fetches Cecilia. Cat crawls to NIM 1. Omar begins projecting when Cecilia is in place.

[23'00"] **Fifth gong.** Cult fetches Hallie. Justin crawls to NIM 2. Tomek begins projecting when Hallie is in place.

[28'00"] **Sixth gong.** All sound stops. Cat and Justin return to Cult Ready Zone. Susannah activates stage lights. Ron begins playing organ. Audience approaches Selfie Machines for Selfie Communion. Organologists witness.

[35'00"] Recital is over. Organologists are retrieved. Drinks are had, maybe. Austin and Ron set up for post-performance. Cult leers and hovers.

[END]
4. For the Cult

The Cult is tasked with two roles to which members are assigned for the entirety of the performance:

**Cat and Justin**: Selfie Machines / performing on the no-input mixers (NIMs)

**Luke and Sophie**: Leading organologists to their performance locations

During the introduction of Ron's talk, all Cult members will be prompted by Susannah to crawl out from the Staging Area to the Cult Ready Zone and stand facing the audience in Dick Pose. This is the default stance for the Cult between tasks. From this point on, there will often be at least one pair, and sometimes both pairs, facing the audience and awaiting tasks at the Cult Ready Zone.

Luke and Sophie fetch the organologists from the Staging Area and lead them to their locations upon these cues:
- The **first gong** is for Austin.
- The **third gong** is for Cleek (use the South Stairs).
- The **fourth gong** is for Cecilia (use the South Stairs).
- The **fifth gong** is for Hallie (use the North Stairs).
One person should lead from the front by the hand, and the other should support from the back. Squeeze the organologist's arm when stairs are ahead, and at the rear of the chapel whisper to them the number of steps to ascend. Ensure that they are properly stationed with instruments, ready to play and with their lamp on before returning to the Cult Ready Zone and awaiting the next cue.

Cat and Justin will remain in the Cult Ready Zone as Selfie Machines, facing the audience. At the **fourth gong** Cat will crawl under the pews to NIM 1 and begin playing. At the **fifth gong** Justin will crawl to NIM 2. The NIMS will be stationed at the ends of their respective pews, with dangling cloth for you to feel when you reach it.

The **sixth gong** is the ending cue. Cat and Justin will stop playing and crawl along the aisles to the Cult Ready Zone. Once returned, the audience will approach Cat and Justin to take Selfie Communion. At the end of Communion, the Cult will hover and leer at Austin and Ron while they perform.
5. For Austin, Cleek, Cecilia and Hallie

You are the evening's organologists, of the Sidrax, Daxophone, RED net, and steel pan, respectively. Your task is to follow this score:

Depriving oneself of sight, use touch to summon the inner life of the instrument.

Austin and Cleek will wear body suits underneath their clothes. Cecilia and Hallie will be given blindfolds. You should each dress in all white, or as close to all white as possible. From the beginning of the performance, you will not be able to see.

*Before the performance begins, please have your instruments installed and ready to sound at their respective performance locations.* You will all wait in the Staging Area to be taken to your instruments at the appropriate time. The Cult will come for each of you at the sounding of a gong.

The first gong is for Austin, the third gong is for Cleek, the fourth gong is for Cecilia, and the fifth gong is for Hallie. When the Cult comes for you, they will lead you through the chapel to your performance space, one holding your hand from the front, and another supporting your back. When stairs are immediately ahead, they will squeeze your arm. When Cleek, Cecilia and Hallie ascend the stairs at the rear of the chapel, the Cult will tell you exactly how many stairs are ahead at a given time. As soon as you are in your performance space with your instrument ready, begin to make sound. Your playing must be audible for the audience, but quiet enough that all other sounds can be heard clearly.

At the sixth (final) gong, all sound should stop. Then, in preparation for the audience's Selfie Communion, the performers will stand in place and "watch" the audience. Remain in place until the end of the performance. You will be retrieved shortly.
6. For Omar and Tomek

Your task is to operate the projectors and mirrors. The projectors will be installed where your names are located in the Stage Plan, at the edges of the pews.

The arrows indicate the direction you should project - upwards at Hallie and Cecilia, respectively. The projectors you operate serve as their lighting. While projecting, you may use mirrors to distort and redirect the image around the space.

The video to be projected will be the LiveStreams coming from the two Selfie Machines. Thus, you will both need to bring your laptops. Immediately before the performance you will receive your respective links to the LiveStream broadcasts.

The performance will begin with the projectors on and their lenses covered with cloth, already connected to the LiveStream videos. You will be seated with them before the performance begins.

After the sounding of the fourth gong Cecilia will be taken to her performance space. Omar should then watch Cecilia for when she begins to make sound. Then, uncover the projector from the cloth.

After the sounding of the fifth gong Hallie will be taken to her performance space. Tomek should then watch Hallie for when she begins to make sound. Then, uncover the projector from the cloth.

Stop projecting at the closing (sixth) gong by re-covering the projector with the cloth. Remain in place until the end of Communion.
7. For Warren

Your task is to pull the animation reel. This is diagrammed in the Stage Plan as the dotted line that begins in front of the stage and moves counterclockwise, encircling the pews. The reel is designed as a scroll, with one end fixed at the starting point and the other end to be taken in your hand. Including the starting point, there will be four spools installed throughout the chapel. As you proceed along your route, you will wrap the reel around the outside of each spool so that the reel forms a rectangle that encloses the audience.

After the sounding of the first gong, and once Austin has begun to play, you will walk at a normal pace from the staging area to the starting point.

At the sounding of the second gong, you will begin to pull the reel.

It should take you approximately twenty minutes to complete your route.

At the end of your route, use the string to tie the scroll to the railing of the stage ramp (or whatever is nearest). Then, you may remain standing at the endpoint until the end of Communion or return to the staging area by walking at a normal pace.
8. For Susannah

As the stage manager you are the source of logistical reassurance and stability for the performers, remaining in the Staging Area to help coordinate events and confirm timings for the performers. You will help feed the correct organologist to the Cult upon each sounding of the gong, and you will dim or activate the lights at the appropriate time. Please rely on the global score (page 3) to help coordinate performers. You will also be given a copy of my talk, just as an extra guide to our location in the performance, which will also have cues embedded in it (though I may deviate from these).

When the performance is about to begin, you will hit Light Button #5 to turn off all the lights in the chapel.

After about two minutes have passed, you will tell the Cult members to begin crawling to the Cult Ready Zone.

You will help to feed the following organologists to the Cult according to these cues:

- The **first gong** is for Austin to be taken by the Cult. Remind the Cult to turn on his lamp.
- After Austin begins to play, you will prompt Warren to proceed to the animation reel.
- At the **second gong**, activate Light Button #12 to illuminate the pews.
- The **third gong** is for Cleek to be taken by the Cult, who also has a lamp.
- The **fourth gong** is for Cecilia to be taken by the Cult.
- The **fifth gong** is for Hallie to be taken by the Cult.
- At the **sixth gong**, activate Light Button #5 to illuminate the stage for Communion Selfies.

That is all.
Bibliography


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