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Eroticism, Intersubjectivity, and Dreaming: A Critique of Liberal Consent

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Eroticism, Intersubjectivity, and Dreaming:
A Critique of Liberal Consent

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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For all of the lovers. For anyone who can imagine a new world and place themselves in it.

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Introduction:

A Road Map and a Collective Dream

This project, first and foremost, is about connection. I want to find new ways for you and I to connect linguistically, somatically, enthusiastically. I want to propose a new model for thinking about how sexuality, in particular sexual harm, has been publically arbitrated. The current liberal consent model has failed many, it has failed me. I want to use what I know to find a way to fix this, to prevent further harm, and to provide frameworks for healing and learning to connect again. When this work was first conceived, I found myself trying so hard to be an expert that I forgot to be a lover. What a grave mistake I made. I want to work together with you, with respect guiding this meditation. Hopefully, my dear reader, you and I can find some intimacy and care in our joint endeavor into the topics of eroticism and consent. Perhaps we can even discover new loves within ourselves and one another at once, maybe we can feel the distinctions and divisions slipping away as we work in tandem.

This piece has a few moving parts that I fit together in order to build up a critique of the liberal consent model. Liberal consent, distinct from consent, is a model that operates on an institutional basis. Consent, as I define it, is a term used to interpret the nature or quality of an experience interpersonally. It is a term people can use to express the way situations make them feel. Liberal consent is different, because it operates on a larger scale. It assumes that the codification of rights is enough to protect these rights. I do not think that this liberal presupposition holds water, particularly in cases of sexual violence. In order to think through

new possibilities for how to confront and limit sexual violence outside of a liberal frame, I use Luce Irigaray and Audre Lorde, alongside Friedrich Nietzsche. From Irigaray and Nietzsche, I draw out the central tenets of intersubjectivity and distance. I use intersubjectivity to speak about a type of relation that privileges mutuality, both people are full subjects in each other's eyes. This type of relation is expressed by a rejection of possession, and attempts to use language in crafty ways to prevent the impression of one person's will onto the other. Distance is used in the colloquial sense, but does not have a negative association. Nietzsche considers distance to be necessary for meaningful interrelation, in the sense that attempting to be too close to another can lead to avaritic consumption. Following a more exhaustive outlining of how these two thinkers conceive of connection, I will begin a case study of the reaction to the institution of the Antioch code and the #MeToo movement. Particularly focusing in on #MeToo, I pin down what I conceive of as the failures of the liberal consent model.

With these failures in mind, I begin to pave my way towards a starting place for what I call the intersubjective relational model using Audre Lorde's account of the erotic as a source of power. The erotic is a force, born of chaos, that is a repository of information and knowledge. It is uniquely feminine in nature and has been intentionally devalued in order to prevent women from gaining power through self-knowledge. The opposite of the erotic is pornography, which Lorde argues has been deliberately confused with the erotic in order to disempower feminine people. I indict the liberal consent model as pornographic in nature, as it fails to recognize the importance of feeling and somatic experience as a guide for intimate relation. This begs the question, what would an alternative to the liberal model look like? I would like to be clear that I do not seek to lay out some clear boundaries or prescriptions in regards to my proposed

alternative, the intersubjective relation model. I view it as a starting point, a way to adapt thinking about consent. I am interested in what it might feel like, and what radical directives might be built into a model of consent that draws on erotic power and intersubjectivity to substantiate itself.

I would like to take a moment to recognize that I use the word woman quite a bit in this work, I am aware that sexual violence is not solely a women's issue and that people who are not women can be survivors of sexual violence. I use the word woman more loosely, in the sense that I am using it as a stand-in for a specific experience: the sex based oppression that accompanies being assigned female at birth. This focus is not an attempt to devalue gender-based oppression, or to situate gender based oppression and sex based oppression as diametrically opposed. The two operate in tandem. The next section is a site of calibration. A pit stop, a poetic rumination that may or may not help you get into a mindscape of terror, joy, and deeper feeling in the hopes that you can begin to imagine a new world for yourself as this project comes into view.

Already, A Diversion

Perhaps we should begin with this seemingly simple statement: I am not a puritan, and I find puritanism to be a danger in itself. Though there are no more true 17th century protestants, and new research has revealed that historical accounts of their sexual and intimate lives may have been reductive and inaccurate, as I live and breathe I feel the spectre of the Puritan lurking. This puritanism is Godless, no promises of pearly gates, virgin wives, or eternal life underpin it. It is an impulse to control and restrict intimate life for the sake of itself. The conversations surrounding intimacies and connection in our time have, on my view, become less generous,

generative, and imaginative. This is the crux of what we are setting out to explore together. I hope to convince you that my concerns about sex have broader implications about the ways people connect with and understand one another. Perhaps these are not only a problem for the sexually active or the college student to attend to, maybe they diagnose something sinister about the way relation has been constructed. This is a requiem for the sexual revolution, yet another loving reading of Herr Nietzsche, and an uplifting of the immortal genius of Audre Lorde. This is a poetic project, one that aims at once to speak to the polyphonic nature of connection: the very real fear and anxiety connection provokes. If you are a housewife or a sex fiend or a testo junkie I welcome you. If you are a Puritan I open my arms to you just the same.

To give us a lay of the land, let us all begin together in a dream. Friedrich Nietzsche gives an account in *The Gay Science* that may allow us to orient ourselves in the stupor of the world of slumber.

“I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish -- as a somnambulist must go on dreaming lest he fall. [...] among all these dreamers, I, too, who “know” am dancing my dance; that the knower is a means for prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence; and that the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to *preserve* the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension all of the dreamers and thus also *the continuation of the dream.*” (Nietzsche, 116)

What might this mean for us? How might we untangle the cat's cradle that Nietzsche thrusts upon us in the shared dream?

We wake up, and yet are aware that we are dreaming. Our awareness of the dream does nothing to change the fact of our condition, we are not awake and becoming awake in this moment feels akin to death. Thus we have no choice but to take up the dream as the real, this not

a difficult choice -- if anything it is predetermined. Amongst the other dreamers, those who *appear* to us to be unaware of the dream, we are still part of a broader whole. We are giving ourselves over to the Dionysian folly that is the collective need to dream and be together. There is shared knowledge and pleasure in the mutual understanding that irrespective of whether this is a dream or some other spectre, that is not our chief concern. We are to dream in the face of our own knowledge, our own perceived power of self-awareness. As we dance together we are artfully cultivating mutual preservation. What a beautiful image! What a charge and a call Nietzsche presents. The dance, the embodiment of our emotions and our alterity brings us all into some collective being. To be a dancer has no conditions, it is a fate, and a compulsion, to be in somatic communication with one another. It is unclear whether we are all aware of the state we are in, but that does not make a difference.

You may remark “well I am a terrible dancer” or “dancing in front of others would be my greatest humiliation.” That is fair, and may well be true, but regardless you dance. This image of the dance provokes me, my first introduction to this passage brought me to tears. I think it reflects, for me, what being in the world is about. It is not a matter of knowledge or will or ability, it is a joint compulsion and necessity to *relate*. Reader, you and I are in this world together whether it causes us to tremble or not. However much I try to hide myself away from you or make myself inscrutable, there is still the universal nature of being, of dancing, that tethers us. We may not be able to perceive each other clearly as we are moving and gyrating in ways that clouds our sight. The streaks of color in my peripheral vision, that in my mind constitute you, may be the most I could ever access you. To be clear: being together does not

make us the same, the way we move lays that bare. Our difference is palpable and yet we are tied up in the same ritual, the same dreamscape.

I read so much beauty into this dream, but I am also aware that it is a fearsome place. There is so much that I cannot know about you, I cannot know that perhaps the way you dance the way you do is because *Rhapsody in Blue* is blaring inside of your head. I cannot know if you are imagining your greatest love dancing with you. There are some things we cannot know about one another that in the waking world might strike fear into our heart. Yet, here, with you, it seems that terror escapes me. This does not mean I have no reason to be afraid.

There is an even grander beast lurking and yet we may not hear the echo of its footfalls in the distance, or its heartbeat pounding just below our feet. Sure, you may be a mystery to me, but at least I can speak of you. I can imagine a rough outline of you and sketch it if need be. But what about that which, in the frenzy of our dance, I cannot even begin to imagine, let alone speak of? I have blindspots, I cannot see everyone and perhaps there are people I could not even envision having the necessary faculties to join our dance. Those blindspots terrify me.

When Julia Kristeva speaks of relation, she also speaks of abjection. It “is immediately defined as a revolt of being (as a twisted braid of affects and thoughts), a revolt against a threat from an exorbitant 'something' (not a thing) inside or outside the subject, something close but unassimilable which both fascinates and frightens or disgusts desire.” (Kristeva, 222) That is the terror I feel as we move together. There is something about this beast that I know is at once both like and unlike me, I sense it but I cannot speak to it. Even if I could, I know it would not understand me. It is sublime, and thus I fear it. I cannot tidy it up or perceive its borders and yet I feel its scalding heat at my back. My play and reverie is undergirded by a sense of threat. For all

I know this *thing* could be human. It could be me. It could be everything I hope others could never sense about me. And now I am afraid, I am petrified, though you may not be. You may still be caught up in the dance, and maybe quite bravely, you have found a way to use the beast's heartbeat and heat as a rhythmic guide. If you are afraid too, I cannot guarantee comfort. It seems to be a paralytic state of affairs. The beast will never die, no mythic hero could vanquish it. We must find a way to live with it, to dance with it, lest we perish.

I want to believe that there is something beautiful about not needing to know. To convince myself that there is dignity in floating above, in traipsing through suffering and joy alike with a childlike sensitivity. To be able to affirm that I am in the world with others and that is enough. If I could wholeheartedly believe in this affirmation, why would I insist on collapsing onto my knees and digging and breaking up the topsoil when there is so much breadth in looking out over the flatlands and seeing everything that could approach me from a distance? Perhaps it is a matter of never being satisfied, always being parched and starving and maladjusted. Perhaps there, too, is some dignity in breaking up something that seems so whole and so impenetrable. Regardless of the impulse, I shall continue my jaunt towards the beast. I need to know it, if I cannot kill it. I would be so honored if you were to join up with me in this odyssey. Your difference and disagreement entices me.

I sense there may be a self-sacrificial tinge to my expedition, so let us pause and take up someone whose work sought to get at the problems that may arise between you and I.

“If I put to death or grant death to what I hate, it is not a sacrifice. I must sacrifice what I love. I must come to hate what I love, in the same moment, at the instant of granting death. I must hate and betray my own, that is to say offer them the gift of death by means of the sacrifice, not insofar as I hate them -- that would be too easy -- but insofar as I love them. Hate would not be

hate if it hated only the hateful, that would be too easy. I must hate and betray what is most loveable. Hate cannot be hate, it can only be the sacrifice of love to love.” (Derrida, 65)

Derrida formulates “*tout autre est tout autre*” or “every other is completely other” as an attempt to explain the nature of responsibility that comes about in the confrontation that is connection. The reminder that every other is completely other is a charge to see and appreciate the specificity of each person. I become responsible and tethered to you by way of transcending whatever ire I have for you in order to love that you are miraculously other. You trigger both awe and horror in me by way of your existence. This charges you and me to look at each other no matter how much we might want to turn away. I might suggest we walk side by side in the hope that we might not glimpse one another in the periphery.

I must say, because you are here I love to you. And I hate that you could be here in the first place. This work is an unleashing of the creativity erotic power provides. It is my love letter, and my eulogy for ways of approaching the other that cannot bear the weight of relation. I cannot see myself as you see me and your gaze rests on me nonetheless. I will do my best to treat you as wholly other, not because it pleases either of us but because it is my duty, I am responsible to you by virtue of you being here with me.

Chapter 1: I Love To You

The Language of Love and the Primacy of Intersubjectivity

Introduction

Difference defines the nature of relation and though, so often, the distance that arises as a result can feel repellent, I am interested in how that rupture might be necessary in understanding the nature of love. Nietzsche argues that we conceive of love and avarice as one and the same, but that this possessive love is nothing more than an attempt to rule over the other from the inside out. He makes it clear that an attempt to close this disconcerting rift between you and I can ultimately ruin the particularity of how we came to know and appreciate each other in the first place. Instead of attempting to rule over you, he suggests that I should embrace the distance that allows you and I to be people in our own right. If I recognize that this chasm between you and I is what makes our relationship fruitful, I can focus on our shared goal of deepening our connection. I can come to know you more when I seek to understand you rather than seek to possess you.

Preservation of subjectivity is at the core of the relation Nietzsche advocates for, the French philosopher Luce Irigaray is one of the primary advocates for loving intersubjectivity. She pins language as a potential site of reorienting what types of relations are privileged. The very phrase “I love you” seems to be avaritic, the verb love operates as a vector for me to exert my will and feelings onto you. However, silence is not a viable solution. Language, too, is able to dance and play and birth connection. If language can express avarice, so too, can it express that I cannot force you to connect to me. You must have your own choice in the matter. Irigaray

offers the formulation “I love to you” as a means of recognizing that love is a journey towards mutual understanding in choice. When I love to you, I do not presuppose ownership over you. Instead, I stake my subjectivity as a lover in your direction and allow you to do with it what you will. There is a risk here, perhaps my love will be rebuffed and fall to the bottom of the abyss between us. But risk is necessary to preserve you and I both as subjects with our own will.

An Allegory

There is something important about the difference between you and me. That distance, that separation, rears its ugly head when something about me feels like it is collapsing into you. The interplay is crushing, and yet it seems there is more often than not a space between us that fends off a caving in. The space between us is disgusting, it is a leprotic sore that never quite seems to scab over. I want us to stick our fingers in that sore, to excavate it and feel the gush of it and be repulsed together. With this in mind, I would like you to imagine falling in love. You do not need to be convinced that this is the love to end all loves, or that what you are feeling is the most profound feeling you may ever feel. Merely imagine that you have met someone special in the springtime.

After taking lazy strolls in the sun and drinking cheap iced coffee far too late in the day for a few months, you awake in a dream to the realization that something has shifted. You know that this something cannot yet be revealed, not even to your waking self. There is something incongruous and stilted about the two of you endeavoring to love one another. Whenever I first fall in love, I imagine that I am too imperfect to cast out into something so profound, because I am too imperfect. I miss plastic straws and I smoke cigarettes inside. So often it is the most

superficial things that justify guarding against taking a plunge into something so nebulous as love.

Gradually though, your love starts to bubble up through the cracks of your dreamscape and burst forth and suddenly the two of you are sitting in a nice patch of grass or on a couch or in a restaurant and you confess your love. By some miracle, this love is reciprocated, and they return the “I love you.” This confession, this affirmation, changes things. It introduces new stakes and considerations and shifts the earth’s axis. Perhaps you, my dear reader, have some sense of what you mean and what you owe when you tell a lover that you love them. That is a triumph. I will admit that when I say I love you I have not the faintest idea what I mean. What I do know, is that when I expect the gap between me and the person I love to close, it only deepens. The flesh of our relation gets inflamed and repulsive, more bloody and sick than it had ever been before. Questions I have been taught would be answered by the mere power of love are only complicated. And I am afraid. I have a problem, one that I brought upon myself.

The Things People Call Love

When I am confused about where I might go, I turn to Nietzsche. I pray you will humor me as I venture into *The Gay Science* once again to maybe find a way to begin to get at this lesion of love. In Book One, Section 14 of the text: *The things people call love*, Nietzsche takes to task the aforementioned conflation of love and avarice. He claims that the former is merely an inept attempt at disguising the latter; expressing doubts about the distinction, provoking his reader to wonder if, in fact, they are so different after all. Perhaps, possession is what constitutes most of what people name love. This is partially a problem of language, a problem I will return

to, however Nietzsche primarily focuses on another consequence of the things people call love. He remarks upon the urge for the lover to turn themselves into a despot in the kingdom of their own construction. The lover deludes themselves into believing that if they are truly to be loved, they must conquer the interiority and exteriority of the other. In order to love and be loved in the way they desire, they attempt to efface the interiority of the single person they purport to care for “Sexual love betrays itself most clearly as a lust for possession: the lover desires unconditional and sole possession of the person for whom he longs; he desires equally unconditional power over the soul and over the body of the beloved; he alone wants to be loved as desires to live and rule in the other soul as supreme and supremely desirable” (Nietzsche, 89). Intimacy and closeness can easily mutate into a sort of psychic war, love is strung up between the avaritic lover and their prey.

In *Over the footbridge*, Nietzsche paints the portrait of two friends as close as can be on the emotional level, merely separated by a footbridge “Just as you were about to step on it, I asked you: “Do you want to cross the footbridge to me?” -- Immediately you did not want to anymore; and when I asked you again you remained silent.” (Nietzsche, 90) Their relationship changes radically as a result of this seemingly harmless proposition. How could the mere suggestion of the approach, in effect, do the opposite of its intent? It hinges on the possibility that Nietzsche sees distance to be a necessary fact of intimate connection. Notably, at the end of section 13, we are advised to value friendship above other intimate arrangements “here and there on earth we may encounter a kind of continuation of love in which this possessive craving of two people for each other gives way to a new desire and lust for possession -- a shared high thirst for an ideal above them. [...] Its right name is *friendship*” (Nietzsche, 89). For one friend to propose

to the other that they reside together on the same side of the footbridge is not only to propose the impossible, but it is to disbar the basis on which a good friendship is built. Rather than attending to their shared ideals and the rich conversation that built their brotherhood, I trade friendship for possession by questioning the movements of the companion. This leads to an irreconcilable schism. To treat the other as though they could not choose to cross the footbridge of their own volition, to entreat them to do what would only appear natural, is to attempt to rule over them.

The problem of intimacy that Nietzsche presents in *The Gay Science*, the question of “how close is too close before everything falls apart?” is a common theme in the soul ballads of the post-war America of the 1950s and 60s. Notably, The Royal Jesters wrestle with distance and possession on their track “Take Me For A Little While.” Their refrain “I’ve been trying to make you love me/ But everything I try/ Just takes you further from me” speaks to the difficulty of the interpersonal approach. Yes, love is here and is worth pursuing, however there can be a distance that becomes impossible to bridge between two lovers “Since then, mountains and torrential rivers and whatever separates and alienates has been cast between us, and even if we wanted to get together, we couldn’t” (Nietzsche, 90). The artists seem to think the solution to their problem is to continue to push, to continue to confront the problem of unknowability head on no matter how much it causes their predicament to deteriorate, when they croon “I’ve got to stop it/ There should be a law (baby, I need you)/ But no matter how you put me down/ I love you more/ I feel so helpless (baby, I need you)/ And it ain’t funny (you know that I need you)/ ‘Cause deep down inside I know/ You’re never gonna love me.”

This track seems to be a convergence of the ideas Nietzsche provokes in the aforementioned sections of the *Gay Science*. The Royal Jesters confuse love and avarice. It

seems their desire to love this unnamed person totally consumes them, to the point that they fail to recognize their lover's interiority as a subject. Disturbingly, their need to receive love unequivocally clouds the possibility that this love is conditional or specific in nature. Further, there is no space for their lover to dance, to blur and remain imperceptible by way of movement. Were this person to twirl, to bend and snap to the rhythm of the drums, of the dream, they would be too far out of reach to even be considered a lover in the sense The Jesters would want them to be. Every other is no longer completely other once they become *mine*, in others words "if one considers, finally, that to the lover himself the whole rest of the world appears indifferent, pale, worthless, and he is prepared to make any sacrifice, to disturb any order, to subordinate all other interests [...] indeed that this love has furnished the concept of love as the opposite of egoism while it actually may be the most ingenious expression of egoism." (Nietzsche, 89) Thus this dream descends into a nightmare, into the eternal tragedy of what one might call unrequited love. I, as a reader of Nietzsche, would be apt to recognize this is nothing like love in the first place. To demand a lover, a friend, a confidant, to cross the footbridge is a fatal mistake; as both subjects come into direct confrontation with being made object, of being soiled by the prescription and the gaze of the other.

We return to the dream, and luckily the festivities have not stopped on account of our absence. Though I have already taken interest in how this dance feels, and what exists outside of it, I have yet to interrogate how this ritual could hang together. As we begin to move together again, something new presents itself. Before, I feared the blindspots of the interiority of the other dreamers, not knowing what inspired or scaffolded their movements but now I come to realize that was the monstrosity of my own avarice. This folly can only sustain itself because I would

never do something so disruptive as *asking* you to dance, asking you to traverse the footbridge and join me on the opposite side, doing so would shatter the dreamscape. This happening only continues to happen because it is not put forth, or arbitrated. It is merely understood “the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to *preserve* the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers and thus also *the continuation of the dream.*” (Nietzsche, 116) The relationship between us as the dreamers has stakes, though the dream is for the sake of itself. It is worth noting that our little jaunt away to talk about love did not startle anyone awake. There is something worth working towards and preserving. Without the dream, the higher purpose, we would not be so fervent in our dancing, in our relation to one another. I do not seek to possess or to prescribe. I would never ask you to dance and instinctively I know you would never ask me. We are bound in this way. And thus the love that all of us dancers share for one another as members of a collective body cannot be subsumed.

A New Language

Nietzsche has gotten me closer to what I would like to mean when I confess my love. I know now that when it comes to my lover, there is such a thing as *too close*. Though my first instinct is to seek to live inside of them and make a home in the soft tissue of their tummy, gorging myself on the already masticated contents of their stomach, I have learned that this is an affront to my affections for them. I should seek something more righteous and complex than consuming or allowing myself to be consumed. Their insides are not mine to colonize and claim as my own. More creatively, more hopefully, I should dance with them. Without imitating them

or anticipating how they might move next. Without taking stock of and categorizing their every movement for later analysis. Moving together captures their subjectivity and their otherness far better than a hostile takeover for the sake of *knowing them* ever could. As an other they are completely other to me, and that is what makes them worth loving. Nietzsche highlights that needing to crack everything open is a tragic farce, it would “barter away intensity for mere representations.” (Deleuze, 146) Something is lost when appearance is devalued and evacuated for the sake of certainty. After all, merely glimpsing a lover or a true friend can be enough.

Nietzsche might feel like a patch of clear sky in the eye of the storm to you, he does to me. If not, that is fine too, there is still much exploration left to be done. Though, now I may have a better sense of what I mean when I confess my love, or at least a better idea of what such a confession should *not* mean. I am sure, by way of my dreams and the warmth of the sun beating against their skin, that my lover is something of their own invention. Something about them escapes me and that is why I find them so beautiful, in some ways they are completely alien to me. However, this knowledge alone does not totally conquer the sparks of terror inside of me. The avaritic monster fights back. But now I know that it is twisted to not wage war against it.

When I do something as egregious as mistake love for avarice or claim to know what my lover says when they proclaim to love me, I do a disservice to them and their subjectivity. I am the Lord and they are the Bondsman, and tragically there is no labor that allows them to come into themselves. My lover stands before me, stripped naked and transparent, waiting for me to project onto them all of the hopes I have for the both of us. They are no longer themselves, they could not even begin to approach subjectivity. It would be hard to argue that they are even

human in my eyes. I have taken on their life as merely an extension of my own. They are my creation, my *deus ex machina*, by way of their existence I know that I have built a world. All of this because *I love them*.

Perhaps mere moments ago when I confessed my love, I should have held my tongue; though I doubt silence could solve a problem so entrenched as this one. Perhaps this authoritarian that lives inside of me took hold while I was dreaming of the mere possibility of love. And now that gash between us, the one that *I* created, will never scab over. This breaks my heart. Even more disturbingly, there is a chance that my lover feels the same. I want the two of us to become subject together in the eyes of one another. I want to be together, to both be forces in the subjective realm “It is there that a meaning is put to the test of the present of presence. That it sets out, progresses, loses its way, changes in order to start again, to return to the crossing where the other can be encountered. And if the other calls out to me, it is certainly not thanks to naming that I will succeed in entering into relation with him, or with her.” (Irigaray, 65) I cannot force my lover’s hand, they must take up being with me of their own volition. Any alternative, would be cataclysmic. Though part of me might dare to ask how I know that they truly love me as they claim to or how I know that any of what has begun to *deroule* between us is anything more than projection, or even worse, delusion, I have no choice but to take a plunge into the risky and unsureness. Otherwise, our love can only wilt.

Earlier I noted that the problem of a confession of love is at once a problem of possession and a problem of language. It seems that language and possession work together, but that does not mean that *new* language cannot provide the chance at disentanglement. *The Way of Love* is a work that is grounded in discussing the viscous and disorienting problems of love that Nietzsche

began to lead us through. In it, Luce Irigaray opens up a way towards the heart of the issue. She takes love as a multipronged problem, not only one of intimacy or sex but one of relation between two others who have something special and worth preserving in themselves. She is adept at highlighting the extent to which every other is completely other, and emphasizes that this difference should not be devalued in relation. However, the knowledge that the other is not me and I am not them is not enough to solve any of the problems of how we might love each other. She operates on the assumption, as do I, that much of the problems of love are not some matter of people not knowing each other well enough, or not caring enough, but perhaps an issue of where I fail to locate subjectivity in my loved one. This problem of subjectivity is familiar now, the possessive love of the soul ballad dies on the doorstep of a failed intersubjectivity.

How could I even speak to a new type of love that privileges difference with only the current language in my repertoire? Might the phrase “I love you” itself, be a reflection of the avaritic impulses that Nietzsche warns his readers against? The difficulty of these questions is at the crux of Irigaray’s work. It would seem that there needs to be a linguistic shift to reflect a conceptual shift about love. It is necessary to find new formulations that recognize the subjectivity of lovers and conceives of distance as fundamental to preserving this type of relation. She senses that language cannot capture the expanses of interiority, but she also does not hold that it should. This is not a limitation to relation, but rather an important feature of what makes it worth pursuing. Irigaray advocates for love and intimacy because she recognizes that a robust knowledge of the other inside and out is not impossible but undesirable to begin with.

In her view, what truly allows me to love you or to love my lover or love my mother is that the rift between us that is teeming with life. It is not a lesion, as I previously diagnosed it,

but a cornucopia. It pours over with fruit that fuels us as we embark out into an exploration of the vastness of our relation. She is acutely aware that there is something disturbing about needing to know everything, about shining a light into every crevasse and peeking over the edge of the abyss as if the bottom was actually perceptible. There is something artistic about the failure of language, because when it is used properly it can pave a path for intersubjectivity

“In what way would the word be more appropriate than music or painting? Because it would escape the objectality of a thing. It would be nothing but an invitation to share. Not yet closed upon some meaning, but opening from the one to the other -- a between-two. Not due to some ambiguity but because of the proposal of a communion or a sharing in the sensible allowing steps toward the transcendental of the difference between.” (Irigaray, 16)

This project is porous and borderless, it is an *attempt*. I would like to invite you into this practice alongside me, I am just as sure that at some point I will fail spectacularly.

The betweenness that language can provide must be taken seriously. There are stakes in an attempt at poetry. Our contemporary language of love constricts me, even prevents me from the possibility of accessing love as such when I speak of my lover as *mine*. Irigaray pinpoints the linguistic cause of this problem as the verb, which “is the world par excellence insofar as it creates a link, a state, a world... is not emphasized. The verb is acting on the world, the other, the subject, is not analyzed in its complexity.” (Irigaray, 39) And so, it seems that the language of love must change in some way to accommodate and recognize the power of verbs in constructing a divide between subject and object. To fail to do so would be to fail to be serious about the autonomy of who I love.

To change the way that I speak about love is powerful, not only insofar as it changes the way I think about the subjects I relate to but because it opens up language as a site of creation. Language is difficult, to be sure, but there are ways it can be arranged anew and make visible

wounds that have not yet been cleaned or inspected. When I change my language, I tend to that which has been left to rot. By no means is this an easy task

“Being on the way is more dark, more subtle, which is not to say that it will not provide beacons for other paths. But there paths will not exist without a descent of each one into oneself, where the body and spirit are still mingled, where the materiality of a breath, of an energy, of a living being is still virgin, free from information which has already made any approach impossible.” (Irigaray, 53)

Shifting my language and allowing it to ring out as something important, something with consequences for how I treat those in my world is an entreatment, an offer, a pilgrimage towards the possibility for something new.

In an attempt to come up with new ways to express love without leveling or bartering away interiority, Irigaray formulates “I love to you” as a radical reorientation of the language of love. I love to you responds where I love you rebuffs. This formulation succeeds insofar as it recognizes that love is not some transaction nor a mere impression. When I say I love you, I presuppose some ownership over you, my affections are unidirectional as I act on you. I love you does not wait for a response. But to say I love to you is to open up a part of myself, I reveal that I am devoted to you and this devotion is not merely incidental

“In order that the ‘you’ take place in relation with the ‘I,’ the ‘I’ has to secure faithfulness to its Being in which the other can trust. In the elaboration of its temporality, the ‘I’ must be listening both to the ‘you’ and to the self. Co-proprietation in the human necessitates a dialogue in which the elements remain two - speaking oneself and to the other and listening to oneself and to the other.” (Irigaray, 82)

Love is no longer a verb that renders you passive, but rather an act that I direct towards you, a subject in yourself “I love to who you are, to what you do, without reducing you to the object of my love.” (Irigaray, 60) Importantly this includes the body, and all of its faculties. To love someone in good faith is to recognize that their subjectivity includes their corporeality.

I imagine I love to you as a means of preserving the dream that we left not so long ago. The dream is a risky endeavor, it could be shattered in an instant and yet it continues to live on despite its precarity. When I love to you, I love to the way you move, the way that I know your movement is so unlike mine. There is something precarious happening insofar as I cannot know for sure that you love to my own movements in the same way, but at the same time that exposure is able to fruitfully prop up the meat of my own declaration. I love to you is not a transaction, it does not necessarily need to be reciprocated. It is a conscious upholding of “the universality of dreaming” because it does not seek to impress the love upon the lover, but merely to name the love and exalt it as such. I love to you is a miraculous reclamation of both myself and my loved one as subjects, when I love to you we both have a choice. I need not control you to love to you. Loving to you is not merely a matter of impression, it is a linguistic turn that acknowledges that affection should be consensual interrelation rather than forcible reciprocation. Irigaray provides a radical means of thinking through Nietzsche’s problem of conflating love and avarice. She calls attention to the extent to which truly loving another is to articulate love towards their specificity and difference.

When Love Turns to Harm

With all of this discussion of love and relation, I would be remiss to fail to mention that love can turn into something ugly, or that ugliness seems to transform into what we call love. Harm can be an outcropping of giving a part of oneself over to the other. Just because my love is

not avaritic, it does not protect me from the potentially avaritic impulses of my lover. Surviving this type of relation can sometimes require some craftiness, some guile. Preserving our love should not be the chief concern and if I love you, without loving to you, then perhaps our relation must come to a close. None of us should barter ourselves away for the sake of becoming a receptacle for the love of the other. I believe there are better options for you and I. Neither of us should have to become cannibals, gorging ourselves on one another's flesh for the sake of achieving some twisted mockery of loving.

Even still, had we not taken a moment to work through Irigaray together, this would not be so obvious. Dissolution of the self has been taken up as some goal post of love, as soul ballads so often remind us. But, taking Irigaray and the journey we have taken together seriously, lends us to approach the issue of harm in the intimate realm seriously. Just because intersubjectivity is an aim, does not mean that it is a possibility in every case.

Love is not always a romantic whirlwind, nor is it some fairy tale with a clear trajectory. Love does not always appear monogamous or defined. Not all love is predicated on the act of confession. Love can be platonic and familial. I invite you to imagine love in whatever way it appears in your life and to consider how loving to your loved ones rather than impressing love upon them might change the way you all relate. I do not believe that Irigaray's formulation is helpful merely as a guide for romantic love. The tenets of intersubjectivity that she opens up are markers of seriousness and care that can and should be implemented more broadly. Harm is not exclusive to romantic relationships, and so neither should possibilities for guarding against it.

Considering I love to you as a vector for a new way of thinking about love that takes up the lover as a loving subject in their own right rather than a receptacle, has caused me to think

more critically about the result this shift towards subject/subject relation could have for different types of relationships that are not necessarily loving in the romantic sense. The schema of intersubjectivity that she provides could seemingly be extended to intimate life beyond a pre-established relationship. Perhaps thinking about others in a loving way, without necessarily considering them to be a lover, could impact the ways that people interact in a more casual intimate context. People in physically intimate relationships could potentially take up intersubjectivity as a way of shifting how they conceive of sexual contact for the better.

In the next section, I will be moving away from a discussion of romantic love, but bringing along the subject/subject relation that Irigaray opened up for us to think about how it can change the sexual landscape for the better. In an attempt to shed light on the blind spots of my account thus far, I am going to take us down a path that seeks to consider sexuality when it may be divorced from love. On my view, her work allows for a confrontation with sexual violence in a radically new way. Considering that much of the conversation surrounding sex has become focused on consent in recent years, the interjection of mutually subjective relation as guiding principle may be helpful in considering new approaches to instances of sexual violence.

Chapter 2: Liberal Consent

Case Studies and Analysis of the #MeToo Movement and Its Conceptual Foundations

Introduction

With the advent of codified consent, there has been a marked conceptual and social shift surrounding what exactly consent means and how sexual violence should be regulated. Where consent was once defined interpersonally, social movements like #MeToo have transformed it into a broader category that can be publicly arbitrated. The distinction between interpersonal consent, and this new mode, which I dub liberal consent, lies in the differing approaches to subjectivity. Liberal consent holds that rights are unalienable, and that institutions can reckon with any trespassing upon these rights. This is because liberalism conceives of protection of rights as effectively a protection of subjectivity. However, I argue that is not the case, and it is necessary to consider the shortcomings of this approach both in regards to protecting survivors and failing to consider the pre-verbal and corporeal nature of the sexual encounter.

The Antioch code was the first instance of codified consent in the United States, and its institution generated widespread mockery in the media. It was attacked as reductive, useless, and draconian while also being out of touch with how young people approach sex along gendered lines. However, it is now remembered fondly as the founding document in support of affirmative consent. Since Antioch, the #MeToo movement has arisen and become a repository of the ideals first expressed and codified in the 1990s. This chapter is a case study of how the #MeToo movement is a manifestation of the liberal consent model, and the failure of this approach. I hope to open up the possibility for a way forward, away from the liberal consent model and towards a model of erotic intersubjective relation.

A Brief History Lesson

RAINN, America's largest anti-sexual violence organization, defines consent as follows "Consent is an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. Consent should be clearly and freely communicated. A verbal and affirmative expression of consent can help both you and your partner to understand and respect each other's boundaries." I agree wholeheartedly that this description of consent should be the standard for any type of sexual relationship. Consent is categorically virtuous and is a protective measure for the welfare of those involved in an encounter.

This evaluation of consent is useful insofar as it describes something particular about sexual context on an interpersonal basis, people can use this definition to guide the ways that they interact with one another or describe the qualities of a sexual interaction to their friends. To be able describe an encounter as consensual or non-consensual in the personal realm is a helpful faculty. However, consent and questions about its limitations are not merely interpersonal, there are institutional, juridical, and political demands that weigh on a term that cannot carry the weight. To transmute the term "consent" from an interpersonal to a political and institutional tool is to dishonor the intricacies and specificities of what makes an act consensual. This is because institutions are not subjects, they are not capable of sparking the subject/subject relation that is required to gain and enforce a standard of consent. As a result, consent as something that is publically arbitrated takes on a liberal quality in that "liberalism has taken it for granted that protecting rights is a sufficient guarantee for the primacy of individual subjectivity." (Santoro, 2) The use of consent in a liberal institutional framework fails to take into account that there are differences in the subjective experiences and the retention of rights for those within the confines

of an institution that does not seek to protect them is not a given. From here on, I am going to draw on this distinction between consent and liberal consent as a means of teasing out the failures on the liberal consent model.

In 1991, Antioch college was undergoing a serious transition that fundamentally changed the way colleges across America and their students engaged with questions of sexual violence and consent. The student group Womyn of Antioch banded together to draft guidelines about sexual encounters in response to two sexual assaults on the small campus within a single semester. The code was groundbreaking for a number of reasons, not only was it the first of its kind in the history of a modern university but it shifted the focus of conversation around consent entirely. Kristine Herman, a member of the student group remarked in an interview with NPR “You know, it listed the idea that you have to get verbal and willing agreement to engaging in any sexual contact. This was a huge, fundamental shift in defining what consent means. And always, the conversation around consent has focused on, does someone say no. And so at Antioch we really focused on defining consent in a very different way and asking a very different question, which is did somebody say yes?” The concept of orienting consent around willful agreement has since been dubbed affirmative consent. The Antioch code paved the way for what is now the standard for the way colleges and universities speak and teach about consent, though at the time the code was mocked for its perceived utopianism and lack of understanding of the conventions of sexual contact. Nevertheless, codes like the one implemented at Antioch have become the norm:

Consent:

Consent is defined as the act of willingly and verbally agreeing to engage in specific sexual conduct. The following are clarifying points:

- Consent is required each and every time there is sexual activity.
- All parties must have a clear and accurate understanding of the sexual activity.
- The person(s) who initiate(s) the sexual activity is responsible for asking for consent.
- The person(s) who are asked are responsible for verbally responding.
- Each new level of sexual activity requires consent.
- Use of agreed upon forms of communication such as gestures or safe words is acceptable, but must be discussed and verbally agreed to by all parties before sexual activity occurs.
- Consent is required regardless of the parties' relationship, prior sexual history, or current activity (e.g. grinding on the dance floor is not consent for further sexual activity).
- At any and all times when consent is withdrawn or not verbally agreed to, the sexual activity must stop immediately.
- Silence is not consent.
- Body movements and non-verbal responses such as moans are not consent.
- A person can not give consent while sleeping.
- All parties must have unimpaired judgement (examples that may cause impairment include but are not limited to alcohol, drugs, mental health conditions, physical health conditions).
- All parties must use safer sex practices.
- All parties must disclose personal risk factors and any known STIs. Individuals are responsible for maintaining awareness of their sexual health.

These requirements for consent do not restrict with whom the sexual activity may occur, the type of sexual activity that occurs, the props/toys/tools that are used, the number of persons involved, the gender(s) or gender expressions of persons involved.

The model developed by the Womyn of Antioch in the 1990s is one that privileges the safety of sexual subjects by creating conditions wherein they are able to create frameworks of interpersonal responsibility within the sexual realm. It is not a puritan statement about what types of sex can take place, but instead an approach that seeks to shed light on the blindspots that lead to nonconsensual interactions.

The Antioch code was broadly mocked and criticized by the media at the time of its inception. There was uproar about the perceived lack of realism, as well as the consequences that could accompany a breach of the code. Saturday Night Live, of course, weighed in running a skit on the subject. The stage was made up as a set for the fictional game show “Is It Date Rape,” featuring two contestants in the form of a stereotypical fraternity brother and a demure young woman. The fraternity brother, Mark, is a collage of all of the traits one thinks of when they think of controversies that have spawned out of fraternities in recent years, having “been charged in three hazing deaths...with two counts of hate speech, and one instance of sexual harassment when you referred to the women’s field hockey teams as, “a bunch of lezbos.”” While the young woman, Ariel, “is our defending champion, she’s a Junior **and** a major in Victimization Studies.” She is the stand-in for the cultural imagination of who would be interested in making a code on consent in the 1990s, coded as a no-nonsense feminist type who is detached from sexual reality. The game is premised on making each of the contestants decide whether specific instances constitute date rape. The joke being that the young man always said “no” while the young woman always said “yes,” highlighting at once the boorishness of young men in fraternities and their notorious culture of date rape while at once mocking the prudishness of the professional managerial minded young women that are their peers.

This skit brings something interesting into view, it is as though the two young people competing are operating in totally different sexual realms without any unifying logic for demarcating the limits of what can be consensual sex. The frat boy serves as a vessel for the “boys will be boys” model, that assumes men are incapable of understanding the intricacies of consensual sex and rely on their basest instincts to guide them. More broadly, his lack of care for

the changing societal norms of the 90s is obvious, and manifests in harmful ways. He argues at one point during the skit that spending \$40 on a date's dinner is grounds for her to reciprocate his sexual advances. Inversely, the young woman is presented as hyper aware of the nuances of consent, to the extent that she qualifies most things as date rape, divorced from context

“ [curtain parts to reveal the two players in a scene together]

Male Date Rape Player #2: I sure had a nice time at that ragin' kegger. May I kiss you on the mouth.

Female Date Rape Player #2: Yes. Kissing me on the mouth.. is something I feel.. com-fort-a-ble with. [they kiss on the mouth] Mmmm.. that.. was nice!

Male Date Rape Player #2: Would you mind if we had sexual intercourse?

Female Date Rape Player #2: No... [Ariel buzzes in]

Dean Frederick Whitcomb: Helpern-Strauss?

Ariel Helpern-Strauss: Date Rape! No always means no!

Dean Frederick Whitcomb: That's correct! Good job, Ariel! A bit of a trick question there!”

The anxiety and hypervigilance of the young woman opposes the permissiveness and insensitivity of the young man, which in the end exposes them both as inept sexual subjects. Ariel Halpern-Strauss is operating on the basis of hard and fast rules. The contextual and linguistic cues that define the nature of a sexual encounter are lost on her. Mark Stobel's character is framed as unaware and stupid, but fundamentally his character represents the insidious nature of conceiving of sex as a transactional site. Neither could possibly understand

the plethora of cues (both physical and linguistic) than can arise and confirm or deny that sexual contact is consensual.

The conceptual schism that is highlighted here, though exaggerated, is not fictional. The mocking bit does expose something interesting, in that cultural moment it may have felt like there was no alternative between the sexual ideology of the frat bro and the bookish young woman. There is a clear need to strike some type of balance between these two points of view, in a way that takes seriously the potential for sexual violence that women very acutely feel while simultaneously not projecting puritanical rites into sexual exploits. The New York Times coverage of the institution of the Antioch code and the cultural response ‘Ask First’ At Antioch rightfully points out that the codification of consent “is fertile ground for misunderstandings galore. One person's mutuality, even simultaneity, can often be another person's submission.” (Times, 1993) The confusing and risky nature of sex itself can not be totally governed, and even in cases where the code is followed to a T, there is the possibility for people to feel wronged and violated. The Times coverage emphasizes that despite all efforts, young people can still cause lasting harm to one another, by way of their own lack of experience and immaturity “Adolescents will always make mistakes -- sometimes serious ones. Telling them what's unacceptable, in no uncertain terms, is fine. But legislating kisses won't save them from themselves.” (Times, 1993)

This sentiment is still alive and well, particularly amongst older feminists who are suspicious of the agential repercussions that inadvertently crop up as a result of the broad institution of codes of consent. Initially, the Antioch code was a student-led initiative that sought to implement preventative measures to lessen instances of date rape on their campus. This is

markedly different from the now-ubiquitous student pledges and trainings surround sexual violence prevention. Importantly, as these harm-reduction efforts have become commonplace, rates of sexual assault on college campuses have not decreased in turn. Why? Notably, Camille Paglia the art historian, cultural critic, and antifeminist has been concerned with questions about campus culture and sexual assault. She espouses that the predominant force of liberal feminism has sanitized sexual relation rather than cracking it open, and fails to teach young people about what she understands to be the reality of sex, that “aggression and eroticism, in fact, deeply intertwined.” (Paglia, 2014) She is unconvinced by the predominant narratives liberal feminists have built about sexuality since the sexual revolution, as am I.

Much of her work regarding sex is based in her charge that as a society we have abandoned “sizzle,” the ineffable passion and heat that makes sex an ecstatic experience, for the sake of propping up safe sex

“Neither militant feminism, which is obsessed with politically correct language, nor academic feminism, which believes that knowledge and experience are “constituted by” language, can understand pre-verbal or nonverbal communication. Feminism, focusing on sexual politics, cannot see that exists in and through the body. Sexual arousal and desire cannot be fully translated into verbal terms.” (Paglia, 2014)

Her notion of sizzle is inherently tied to risk. There cannot be sizzle without the possibility of danger, the spectre of uncanniness that lurks in the background of sexual interaction is what makes sex what it is.

Further, sexuality is a site of play and acts can remain inscrutable despite communication. Slavoj Žižek’s employs a scene from *Sex and the City* to get at this limitation.

“Although I am not a fan of *Sex and the City*, there is an interesting point made in one of the episodes where Miranda gets involved with a guy who likes to talk dirty all the time during sex. Since she prefers to keep silent while making love, he solicits her to also say whatever dirty

things pop up in her mind, with no restraint. At first, she resists, but then she also gets caught in this game, and things work well: their sex is intense and passionate, until... until she says something that really disturbs her lover, makes him totally withdraw into himself, and leads to the break of their relationship. In the middle of her babble, she mentions that she noticed how he enjoys it when, while he makes love to her, she pushes her finger into his ass. Unknowingly, she thereby touches the exception: yes, talk about anything you want, spill out all the dirty images that pop up in your head, *except that*. The lesson of this incident is important: even the universality of talking freely is based on some exception, not on the sense of extreme brutality. The prohibited detail is in itself a minor and rather innocent thing, and we can only guess why the guy is so sensitive about it. In all probability, the passive experience it involved (anal penetration) disturbs his masculine identification. Sexual interplay is full of such exceptions where a silent understanding and tact offer the only way to proceed when one wants things done but not explicitly spoken about, when extreme emotional brutality can be enacted in the guise of politeness, and when moderate violence itself can get sexualized.” (Zizek, 2018)

There is a trap in believing that merely communicating verbally can capture all of the psychic and unconscious baggage that accompanies sexual contact. People’s sexual modes are not unidirectionally constituted, and violence does not look one way. This is not to say that no good has come from the movement, or that there are not many cases that genuinely should be treated as sexually violent. But that #MeToo’s ethos can also be a vehicle for erasure

“The problem is not that #MeToo goes too far, sometimes approaching a witch hunt, and that more moderation and understanding are needed, but the way #MeToo addresses the issue. In downplaying the complexity of sexual interactions, it not only blurs the line between lewd misconduct and criminal violence but also masks invisible forms of extreme psychological violence as politeness and respect.” (Zizek, 2018)

Sexual harm should not be taken as a fact of life and evacuated from discourse, there is an importance in recognizing that to be in an intimate relation as sexual subjects is to take up the responsibility that consent requires. The belief that sexual safety can be adjudicated and agreed upon by society at large is not only unrealistic, but makes it hard for young people to conceptualize themselves as sexual subjects who are responsible for one another. Paglia is right,

on my view, to question if mythologies about safe sex and the constant emphasis on liberal consent might be doing is pushing sexual subjects away from one another.

The implementation of liberal sexual codification has been treated as the only necessary safe-guard against sexual violence. This is not sufficient, and relies on the liberal imagination that merely naming a problem could destroy it. By teaching young people about consent as an institutional expectation that can be arbitrated and punished rather than an interpersonal standard that makes sex better, our society is inadvertently orienting sexual violence as another societal norm that can be transgressed so long as the event is not exposed. Importantly, sexual assault training and drug and alcohol trainings are lumped together, sending the message that experimenting with drugs and alcohol as an adolescent could be equated with violating another person sexually. Our institutions must move beyond legislating kisses, and towards a focus on bridging the linguistic and phenomenological gaps that have been established along gendered lines in the post-Antioch era.

Taking seriously the problem of sexual violence requires a shift away from liberal consent which is more concerned with language than materiality. Funnily enough, second wave feminist and notorious transphobe Germaine Greer's argument that "rape is a hate crime, not a sex crime" (Greer, 69) does a better job at acutely diagnosing the underlying problem of sexual violence on campuses than conventional liberal feminist slogans do. So long as the frat boy ideology that SNL diagnoses persists, that women and other gender minorities are a means to an end rather than fully rounded people with interiority and feelings, sexual violence will persist. And the law and institutions will continue to fail survivors of sexual violence, despite the establishment of rules that are meant to operate as protective measures. The examination of

another, more recent, case of uproar surrounding sexual violence could allow another point of incision into understanding and deconstructing the fundamentally liberal impulses that govern the current discourse on sexuality and violence.

#MeToo's Bourgeois Feminism

The #MeToo movement of the late 2010s was globally heralded as turning point in how issues of sexual assault were confronted. Sparked by people sharing their stories of abuse on the internet, tagged with #MeToo, the movement shifted the public discourse towards the recognition that sexual violence is not some rarity but an all too common fact of life for a vast swath of the population. With this reality laid bare for the general population to contend with, celebrities and common people alike began to expose their abusers in a public forum in an attempt to hold them accountable for the harms they perpetrated. Consent shifted from a conceptual framework about how sexual partners might interact but instead a rallying call for a broader upheaval against a culture that fails to protect victims and protects abusers on all levels of society. However, this moment was polyphonic in nature, not everyone was convinced of the movement's good faith and its efficacy in achieving its goal of exposing and punishing those who committed sexually violent acts.

Critics of #MeToo often have multipronged critiques, but for the most part there are a few dominant narratives on the left about why the public arbitration model of the #MeToo era is not helpful in helping those most vulnerable to sexual and interpartner violence. The first critique was in regards to the lack of recognition of the origins of the movement. MeToo was first coined in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, as a slogan for a campaign to raise awareness about violence

against black, working class women. The term was reappropriated in the late 2010s in a way that expanded the realm of concern beyond the original subjects and rebranded as a universal rallying cry. For some black feminist scholars, the highjacking of Burke's expression was representative of broader failures of the #MeToo movement, insofar as it is an expression of "Bourgeois feminisms [that] go to significant trouble to construct a critique of workplace abuse that keeps raced and classed hierarchy intact." (Berg, 261)

The material considerations that color instances of workplace violence fell by the wayside as media zeroed in on celebrity accounts of sexual assault and harassment as the main concern of the movement. Working class women are most vulnerable to workplace abuse, and sexual abuse in general, and yet the #MeToo movement was by and large focused on wealthy white women and their experiences. Heather Berg argues in her work *Left of #MeToo* that this focus was not accidental or merely the result of media maneuvering, but rather a calculated choice by the figureheads of the movement "To make this possible, bourgeois feminism advocates an exceptionalizing approach, one that imagines sexuality as the only vulnerability worth protecting." (Berg, 262) Exploitation, in this model, has only one dimension. To be exploited or victimized at work becomes a direct result of patriarchal control of women and the sexual violence that results from it. #MeToo never sought to consider whether the true problem at hand was one of capitalist exploitation of the workplace being extended to the bodies of the workers themselves. Instead of using the movement to highlight the racial and class dimensions of sexual violence and abuse, they weaponized their own experiences to obfuscate how power determines availability for abuse. The movement took the approach that implied sexual violence

can equally effect everyone regardless of class or race, when in actuality the experiences of abuse by those most vulnerable to it fell on deaf ears.

The sexual politics of the movement seem to undermine women's sexual autonomy. In the bourgeois feminist schema, to be thrust into the sexual realm at the workplace is the most fundamental violation of personhood possible regardless of whether this sexual experience is negative or not. #MeToo seeks to interpret all workplace sexual activity as exploitative without taking into account that "the frame that "sees women as objects of sexualized male domination"— encourages conservative policing of sexuality "Sometimes what we want is not fully known to us in advance," she warns, and suggests that sexuality's radical potential lies at least in part in that liminality." (Berg, 265) The focus of the #MeToo movement became power imbalances in the workplace in a way that assumes there could never be something to be gained from entering in sexual relationships with colleagues or superiors, it was merely cast as coercion for the sake of itself "Not all seemingly consensual transactions are free of coercion, of course. A common mistake of philosophical liberalism (and some sex positive feminism) is to presume that any exchange arises out of, and generates, symmetry between two actors. But transacting in sex, or getting something in exchange for sex, does not mean that coercion is absent. In fact, coercion can also work in seemingly consensual ways." (Tambe, 200) This leaves out the possibility for choice and sexual autonomy, there is a long history of women using sex as a means of gaining security, and this fact is erased in the context of #MeToo because the bourgeois feminists who the movement best serve are already secure. "To make this possible, bourgeois feminism mobilizes the specter of sex work as the threat awaiting all working women — to be sexualized at work is to be rendered a prostitute, and legitimate working women need protection from this

category error.” (Berg, 262) For working class women, sexual exchange can be the only means of advancement. This is not merely the result of some amorphous patriarchy. In actuality, it is the byproduct of a hierarchical capitalist system that produces precarious conditions for workers, who in turn must creatively interpolate sexuality in order to either maintain or improve their material realities.

Paradoxically, many of the women who became the public face of #MeToo admitted that they acquiesced to sexual interactions that they later felt were coerced, in order to advance their careers. Only after they came to enjoy the status, wealth, and protection that their ascension afforded were they able to reframe these instances as sexually violent. Without the protection and inalienability that class privilege affords, these women would not have been able to openly tell their stories. Nor would they have been able to seek punishment for the men they came to recognize as their abusers. With the reinsertion of class into the reading of #MeToo, one can come to understand that “the realities of workplace sexuality demand a dialectical frame that understands it as something we struggle with and over, not a point of vulnerability for which we need protection or a point of pleasure we need the liberty to pursue. This stands in sharp contrast to dominance feminist thinking on sexual harassment at work.” (Berg, 266)

Daniel Loick’s work “...as if there were such a thing.” *A Feminist Critique of Consent* employs a watershed moment in the #MeToo movement in order to reflect on the limitations of liberal consent to account for the messiness of sexual encounters. In 2018, during arguably the most explosive moment of powerful people being exposed for predatory behavior, an anomaly appeared. Up to this moment, those being deplatformed by the movement were commensurable to the public standard of a rapist or abuser. However, when an anonymous account was published

online about an uncomfortable encounter that took place between a woman using the pseudonym “Grace” and Aziz Ansari the well-known comedian, it sparked concerns and critiques about what genuinely constituted a non-consensual sexual experience. This case was not so cut and dry as that of the serial rapist and Hollywood executive Harvey Weinstein. Instead, it led to serious concerns about how far the cultural movement would extend the conventional definitions of sexual assault and consent.

Based on Grace’s own account, she went on a date with Ansari and later went home with him. At one point she voiced her discomfort which, in effect, ended the encounter and Grace returned home upset. The next day the two texted and Ansari apologized for making her uncomfortable. For some in the media, this was merely an unfortunate instance of miscommunication while others scorned the comedian as an assaulter. This case reflects the tricky problem that is consent, on one hand Grace’s discomfort should not be dismissed but neither should Ansari’s retraction in the moment and later apology. Loick uses this controversy as a jumping off point for his critique of consent as such a thing in public imagination

“What both sides of the debate have in common is that they juxtapose violence and consent: the sexual encounter between Grace and Ansari was either consensual or violent. The problem with this dichotomy, however, is that cases like this one prove that social interactions can be consensual and still be violent; in other words; that the category of (non-)consent is not adequate to describe the wrong that has been done here. The Ansari case indicates there are at least five initial problems with the concept of consent:

1. Temporality: sometimes we initially agree to something only to realize later that we were uncomfortable with or that a boundary was crossed.
2. Inconsistency: sometimes we want different or contradictory things at once and thus have to suppress parts of our own subjectivity in order to represent one single unified will.
3. Opacity: sometimes we don’t have access to our desires or don’t know what we do (and don’t) want.

4. Asymmetry: agreements take place under unequal conditions, where one party might accept a proposal out of admiration (as a fan), pressure, or fear of negative consequences.
5. Partiality: agreement often means accepting a given yes-or-no option, without being able to shape or co-determine the larger context of the interaction.

None of these five problems curtails the juridical validity of a consent given, yet they can lead to a situation where even consensual interaction can still be experienced as violent.” (Loick, 2)

The Ansari affair highlights that there are limitations to how to approach questions of consent, in so far as it departs from conventions of what is generally considered sexual violence. Further it highlights that liberal consent is focused on subjects in a binary structure wherein they are either aggressed or aggressor, the victim or the perpetrator “this general dynamic has highly gender-specific effects: It requires women to abandon habitual dispositions formed through their everyday life experiences and to inhabit the domain of contractual reason (Brown, 1995, p.184), while it contributes to the creation of a sense of entitlement in men, encouraging them to reject all forms of responsibilities towards other that they have not voluntarily agreed to, thus denying any form of pre-established dependency and interconnectedness.” (Loick, 6) The simplifying and binarizing effects of liberal consent are only helpful insofar as it allows for simple mythologies to be constructed about what sexual harm looks like and what type of person does such a thing. As a result, any experiences that fail to fit into this normative story are rendered abject along with the intricacies of the reality of sexual harm. Rather than conceiving of adults as by in large people capable of taking on responsibility for one another as sexual agents, men are once more granted total subjectivity while women are merely granted the possibility to acquiesce. This dichotomy not only leaves out gender minorities but also effectively reifies gendered norms of activity and passivity.

“the contractualist notion of consent as a cultural norm creates individualized realms of actions that are mutually repellent. It requires people engaging in sexual activities to abstract from their concrete, often contradictory or ambivalent emotions and affects and to reinterpret them in light of a disembodied proto-juridical normative framework. It thereby fosters a solipsistic pursuit of one’s own sexual interests and thus a merely strategic relationship towards the other, rather than a dynamic communication about desires, needs, and fears. This individualization not only undermines the communicative substance of intimate relationships, it also tends to depoliticize sexuality by treating it as the result of private worlds who voluntarily exchange goods.” (Loick, 7)

This capitalist system of exchange has no choice but to self-cannibalize. The lack of critical thinking on the part of liberal feminists creates an accidental feedback loop that is antithetical to their purported goal of attaining gender equity. Sex positivity, a radical feminist movement that seeks to redistribute sexual power to those who have been disempowered by legacies of white supremacist patriarchy, has been coopted by liberal feminists as a reincarnation of the Free Love and women’s movements of the 1970s. The originators of the sex positive movement sought to emphasize the extent to which sexual disempowerment was a problem grounded in lack of agency and prescriptive sexual mythologies. However, the liberal feminist framework fundamentally cannot bear the weight of such a radical prescription. Instead, in an attempt to free women from the structures which inflict sexual harm on them and remove their agency, they reconstruct these same norms and adorn them with a pussy hat. Despite conversations about sexual violence and interpersonal consent becoming more common, sexual assault rates have not been decreasing in turn. There is a definitive gap between the liberal imaginary that simply naming a problem and instituting juridical framework will eventually solve it and the actuality that sex remains something like unspeakable.

There is something insidiously puritanical about the account of sexuality that is built into the liberal feminism of the #MeToo movement. Rather than focusing on the structural nature of sexual violence, the use of individual narratives builds up an account that levels the possibility for women to recognize they can use their sexual power for their own advancement. For those without institutional backing or wealth, there are relatively few ways for women to advance themselves. #MeToo conflates this bartering within a system which confines women and limits their opportunities with sexual violence for the sake of itself.

Consent must be reconceptualized. The failure of the liberal institutional model to protect those most vulnerable to sexual violence is not a flaw but rather a feature of its construction. Privileging the bourgeois feminist account of sexual assault falls short, there must be more creative solutions that center the autonomy of sexual subjects. Language must play a part in this restructuring, alongside a more robust understanding of what consensual sex means and what it might look like. If we hold that risk is inherent to sexual relation, we must create frameworks and privilege sex education that does not treat sexual harm as the organizing feature of sexual life while simultaneously not treating survivors as collateral.

Reflecting on specific instances that define the discourse surrounding sexual violence in the post-Antioch era highlights a number of problems that I would like to take a moment to clearly define.

1. Liberalism conceives of legal and institutional recognition of the problem of sexual violence as adequate to limit further instances of this violence. Codes of consent, which have become ubiquitous, do not inherently prevent people from

being sexually harmed, even if they are adhered to down to the letter. Feelings of violation cannot always be captured or processed in a given moment.

2. Consensual sex, as imagined by the liberal, does not always constitute good sex but must appear to be a non-transactional sexual relation. Capitalism can put women and gender minorities in positions where sexual exchange can be a means to an end without necessarily feeling violating. Allowing liberal consent to govern sexual interaction alone depoliticizes the power imbalances that are implicit in sexual relation.
3. Liberal consent takes sexual dogma as a given, rather than attempting to deconstruct sexual mythologies it relies on them to justify itself. This can serve to reduce sex to either a successful contractual exchange or a ravaging, reinforcing masculinity as the primary site of subjectivity.

Approaching the obstacles of liberal consent in an attempt to remedy them is no simple task. The difficulty with human sexuality lies in the complexity of the nature of interpersonal relation. However, these are not problems that can be set aside or ignored. To do so would be to fall into the same trap as the liberal feminists, naming the problems is not enough. I would like to provide opportunities for looking at sex in a way that may allow for genuine negotiation between sexual actors, that can allow for a way towards perhaps suturing the experiential divide between subjects that operate along gendered lines. Further, I would like to spend time thinking critically about how Irigaray's framework of intersubjective relation could serve to prevent sexual violence and provide greater opportunities for a new type of relation that privileges subjectivity.

Chapter 3: The Great Eros

Confronting Liberal Consent and Deploying the Intersubjective Relational Model

Introduction

Shifting conversations about sexual exploitation away from liberal feminist dogma requires a conceptual relocation of power. I rebuke any feminism that relies on individualization and binaries to substantiate itself. I rebuke any feminism that takes people being rendered abject and left behind as a feature of society that cannot be changed. I take seriously the possibility for a better world, and I dare to imagine myself in it. I pray that you may be able to imagine yourself in a new world too. In this section, I would like to continue to think about liberal consent critically but through the conceptual lens that is eroticism.

Audre Lorde defines eroticism as a uniquely feminine force, born of chaos, which affirms life and subjectivity and can be harnessed to political ends. This lifeblood has been suppressed for patriarchal ends, and has been purposefully discursively reconstructed as indistinguishable from pornography. Lorde holds that, in fact, pornography and eroticism are oppugnant. Where eroticism can be used to cultivate knowledge and sensation, pornography is suppressive and deterministic. Deploying this distinction, I argue that the liberal consent that #MeToo explicates, is a pornographic conceptual framework which fails to account for the feeling and agency of women. Further, I would like to position eroticism as the lynchpin of new possibilities for addressing sexual vulnerability in a polyphonic way. Irigaray's intersubjectivity returns as a means of thinking through the prescriptions of erotic power. In order to meaningfully confront

the worries I have with the liberal consent model, I take up the intersubjective charges of erotic power as a means of forging a path forward.

Eroticism vs. Pornification

Audre Lorde, the black feminist thinker and poet, brilliantly constructs a materialist feminist critique that hinges on her notion of the erotic. For Lorde, eroticism is a site of power that is distinctly feminine in nature, it “is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.” (Lorde, 1) The erotic is a conceptual framework that allows women, particularly black lesbian women (as they are Lorde’s primary audience across her body of work), to reclaim power on both a political and sensual level. She argues that the erotic has been disempowered in western society, “we have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued” (Lorde, 1) because this force is fully actualized it has the potential to challenge the oppressive frameworks that are required in order for heteropatriarchal capitalism to continue to perpetuate itself. When women are alienated from their eroticism, they are rendered more available for exploitation and “are maintained at a distant/inferior positions to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters.” (Lorde, 1) However, the erotic is a renewable resource, despite the way society seeks to repress it, it is the lifeblood of feminine life.

Lorde distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic, though the two are often colloquially treated as interchangeable. Lorde describes the pornographic as the opposite of the erotic, it is “a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true

feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.” (Lorde, 2) Pornification’s confusion with the erotic does not come as an accident. Lorde argues that it is a purposeful move by patriarchal forces to denigrate and obscure the source of power that is the erotic. Pornography has implications, and is situated in the masculine realm. Recently, more and more pornography depicts the abuse and objectification of women. Patriarchy brilliantly conceals the erotic and its potential under the sign of ultimate conquering and control of women.

The erotic represents a radical depth of feeling and a taking up of self-responsibility, but when it is subsumed under pornification there are serious sexual consequences as a result

“On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence. It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power.” (Lorde, 1)

The pornographic is a sterilizing force that fails to do the important work of extrapolating the act of sex and its possibilities beyond itself. It is not aspirational or reflexive and instead is a means of weaponizing sexuality and investigation of erotic power against women “The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women.” (Lorde, 2) The patriarchal move of intentionally constructing eroticism as pornography has, in effect, stigmatized any taking-up of sexual power and autonomy by women and gender minorities. In effect, for a non-man to take up the erotic as a source of their power and wield it as a site of knowledge and self-assurance has been constructed as “the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation.” (Lorde, 2) Without the ability to access the erotic, agency and subjectivity cannot be actualized to its fullest extent. In order to begin to think about sex outside of the binary structures built into liberal

consent, I find it necessary to privilege the erotic as an organizing force that should be tapped back into to find new ways of approaching sexuality.

Liberal Consent as Pornification

The issues I map out with liberal consent, I believe, are reducible as modalities of the pornification that Lorde indicts as an affront to erotic power. Approaching the points that I made at the end of the last chapter through a Lordeian lens that defines pornification as the opposite of the erotic, I will demonstrate the extent to which the results of liberal consent are a direct result of erotic repression.

Liberal consent relies on legal and structural frameworks as the safeguards for the sexual realm. Sexual violence is named, and then recognized as a specifically legal concern. Justice is served when an abuser is indicted (which happens so rarely), how naive it is to assume that this could do something like allow for a survivor of sexual violence to begin to heal or be restored in this model. Further, institutional protection is afforded to few among us as is distributed along classed, raced, and gendered lines. Lorde's work is clear about how the institution is primarily interested in erotic repression, but how is the liberal privileging of legal frameworks demonstrative of a pornified culture?

Keeping in mind that the pornographic, for Lorde, is the opposite of the erotic, I propose that the insitutional model of approaching sexual violence is tantamount to what Lorde describes as "living outwards." This phenomena is a direct result of erotic repression that serves to estrange women from understanding their own needs for the sake of conforming to dogmatic forms of emotional expression

“When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's.” (Lorde, 3)

The emphasis on naming instances of sexual violence is reflective of a conceptual framework which does not seek to attend to human need.

The Ansari affair attests to the serious repercussions that can accompany a culture which privileges living outward. The media's obsessive belaboring on whether the sexual contact between Ansari and Grace was consensual or not totally failed to consider the extent to which naming and shaming the events accordingly would not change what happened between the two of them. The night that Ansari and Grace spent together was uncomfortable for her, and she should not have been turned into a figure in a broader culture war. Many people accused her of seeking attention or clout by sharing her story, when fundamentally

“The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the European-American tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed erotic comings-together. These occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away, a pretense of calling them something else, whether a religion, a fit, mob violence, or even playing doctor. And this misnaming of the need and the deed give rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity—the abuse of feeling.” (Lorde, 7)

In effect, the pornified nature of this facet of liberal consent lies in the underlying assumption

that feeling is not central to human life, “it represents the suppression of true feeling.”(Lorde, 1).

The legal system does not seek to approach the emotional reality of the survivors it so often fails.

Nor can the mere naming of an event as sexually violent atone for that violence.

In the liberal consent model, consensual sex does not always mean good sex, and good sex is not an aim or an end goal. This is inherent pornified because not uplifting good sex and the feelings it generates as a goal conceptually alienates sex from its somatic nature, therefore

downplaying the fundamentally erotic nature of feeling. The pornographic nature of the liberal emphasis on non-coercive sex (...as if there were such a thing) lies in the notion that sex could ever be entirely symmetrical in a society which is intrinsically hierarchical. Asymmetry is a feature of sexual life because it is a feature of life in general, but the liberal feminist imaginary that sex is the chief site of coercion fails to understand the world for what it is.

Bourgeois feminism is propagated by women who view sexuality as their only vulnerability, but for so many other subjects sexuality is one of the only realms where they have power and agency. This agency is built into the erotic model, which demands that women truly evaluate their actions on the basis of their own positions and place in the world “Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of the irrelative meaning within our lives.” (Lorde, 5) The creative negotiation that sometimes happen in sex, is not necessarily always unconsensual so much as it is an expression of erotic power, an “assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.” (Lorde, 6)

The contractual nature of liberal consent reinforces masculine subjectivity by reinforcing the taught notions that some never unlearn. Our society constructs women as prey, people readily available for domination, and the codes of consent that have become all too common fail to recognize that so much of sexual life hinges on that false pretense. A pledge in a school handbook or a virtual work training cannot change the mythology that determines the boundaries of sexual imagination. Rather than attempting to beat back underlying assumptions that govern who can be granted full sexual subjectivity, liberal consent leaves these dogmas uninterrogated.

While the erotic advocates for an exploration of sexual roles in an attempt to find a mode of operation that feels right, the pornographic nature of liberal consent builds a shrine at the feet of the plasticized body of woman. All ye that trespass against her must sign a contract to that effect. We are all independent contractors after all.

Hello Again

I have not forgotten about you, my dear reader. I have missed you immensely. I apologize for my digression away from our tête-à-tête. This whole work is about the interplay between you and me, after all. Our time together is drawing to a close, though I have no doubt we will see each other soon enough. Now is the part where I can tie all of what we have done here together, bring it all to bear. I have framed the model of liberal consent as pornographic, but I have not made it explicitly clear why that is dangerous. The hazard of the pornographic is that it creates a framework of subject/object relation, one that incentivizes subjects to

“use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connection with our similarities and our differences. To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at the time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused and the absurd.” (Lorde, 8)

When I turn away from the erotic, I turn away from the deepest parts of myself. The parts of me that are teeming with illogical, unbridled power. Diagnosing the liberal model of consent as a pornographic conceptual framework shines a light on broader implications. I cannot live with a framework that trades intersubjectivity for harm reduction. I believe that both should be able to work together. We should be able to be safe, joyous, and orgasmic. Nietzsche, Irigaray, and Lorde have each provided their accounts of intimate relation, and the stakes involved. As a

reminder, Nietzsche warns against confusing love and avarice, though possession of a lover may come easily it is not advisable. Ruling over a lover devalues the distance that is necessary for a fruitful intimate relation. Allowing the other to be their own person opens up the possibility for more creative maneuvering and play.

Irigaray emphasizes that language plays an important role in the possessive faculty that Nietzsche endicts. She claims that the verb implies the impression of control, and that the language of love much change to accommodate the assumptions that are built into semantics. She offers the formulation “I love to you” as an alternative to the covetous “I love you.” I love to you operates differently, the verb love is not impressed upon the lover, and the lover is no longer the object of the sentence. The insertion of the modifier “to” changes everything, both I and you are subjects of the phrase and whatever love is being sent out is merely directed toward the lover rather than etched into them. The guidance that these two theorists provide opens up a new way for thinking about sexuality, insofar as they provide the possibility for intersubjectivity. A way towards a new sexual politics should be predicated on the preservation of distance as a means of becoming closer, alongside a recognition that the language of sex should not privilege a subject/object relation. The intersubjective relational model that I have been advocating for seeks to reframe sex as a space for creativity. The liberal consent model I have been critiquing is rife with blindspots that fail to deal with the material concerns that determine sexual encounter and availability for sexual victimization.

Intersubjectivity, loving distance, and the recognition of difference should not be lost in an attempt to deal with sexual harm. A new sexual ethics, one that seeks to guard against harm as much as it advocates for pleasure, should be birthed out of the empowerment of women and

gender minorities. People should not *own* their sexuality so much as be in touch with the erotic power that can come to *inform* that sexuality. Enter Lorde, a true poet, who senses the urgent need to stir up a trust in deep knowledge and feeling. Her work contains multitudes. Her uplifting of the erotic is a starting place, she is interested in empowering her fellow black lesbians in order to help them access the repressed life force that is the erotic. The erotic builds in the tenants of distance and intersubjectivity that Nietzsche and Irigaray advocate for. Her work is not interested in providing ways of doing, so much as ways of being. A sexual model based on Lorde's work, and the accounts of the other authors I laid out in Chapter 1, would be guided by an attention to feeling

““It feels right to me,” acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means and feels is the first and most powerful guiding light towards understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.” (Lorde, 4)

This attention to feeling does not rule out consent as an important feature of sexual life, in fact it privileges the comfort and care that interpersonal consent is centered around. A model of consent inspired by Lorde's eroticism would simply deemphasize liberal consent, and the need for institutional validation of painful and violating experiences. In the intersubjective relation model of consent, there is no one story, no one survivor, no one way of atonement. In this model the primary guide could be something like “that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy [that] comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called marriage, nor god, nor an afterlife” (Lorde, 5) Gone is that Godless puritanism. Subjectivity is the guide, the responsabilizing feature, and the judge.

Lorde's prescription is radical, for liberal feminism has failed to think about what conditions of empowerment might *feel* like. She makes it explicitly clear that the erotic cannot be accessed by those who operate solely to make their lives easier under heteropatriarchy. Using the erotic as a source of power is not some simple order, it requires serious divestment and risktaking. The erotic provides a means for those who can access it to trust themselves more deeply, and to demand more of themselves and others "this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe." (Lorde, 5) I see this as a chance at more sizzle, more hope, more worldmaking. Again, the erotic is a starting point, but I genuinely believe it is life affirming. Not only for me, but for you, for all of those who I direct my love out to.

Conclusion: A Love Letter

Dear Reader,

We have come to the end of our exploration together, our boots are muddy and we are covered with a pleasant sheen of sweat. I have enjoyed our time together, I hope that everything has come to hang together for you. I wanted to write about sexuality and intimacy because I believe it has stakes, and I want to cause others to think deeply about those stakes in a way that can preserve difference. You and I are not the same, thank God for that. However, by some miracle, we share a world. A world that I believe can and should change for the better. I think you and I should find some way to speak the same language, to be able to take a walk on a nice spring day and fall in love. I pray that you can take this model of intersubjectivity and extend it, stretch it, hang it up on the wall, or gift it to the people who matter most in your life.

In making this work I have hit roadblocks that feel like dead ends that feel like the end of the line. I have felt the beast encroaching. Nonetheless, I feel I have found a way to play around and pave new roads in spite of my failures. Philosophy is a practice, and this work has allowed me to meditate on new ways of explaining, writing, and reading. I have started to look for love in every chapter, care on every dog eared page. Writing this work to you has been an act of reclaiming my erotic powers. I wanted to write to you because I see you as something of your own, you are not the receptacle for my ideas, rather a recipient. You could throw this copy in the trash as long as it feels right. This is not a magnum opus, so much as it is a love letter. Many lovers before me have had their letters torn to shreds or used as kindling. I think it touching your hands, even for a mere moment, is a victory. I hope I will see you again in our dream.

Yours Faithfully.

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