Todd Reeser (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Affect*

Feminist Aesthetics of Resistance

Sarah Cefai, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK

Abstract

This chapter claims resistance as an aesthetic and affective category that is elementary to feminism. Inspired by Michael Taussig's (2020) definition of the shamanic as "the skilled revelation of skilled concealment," the chapter explores the role of the aesthetic concealment and revelation of affect in examples of heteronormativity from film and TV, writing, and performance art. This provides a new way to link feminist resistance to the institutions of intimacy through which sexuality organizes relations of gender and affect. Feminist cultural theory, media, and cultural studies, differently theorize the aesthetic, the embedding of aesthetics in social and cultural locations such as in discourses of power, and modes of discursive, technological and subjective socialization that situate aesthetics within the conjuncture of the everyday. This chapter's analysis, or "skilled revelation," theorizes feminist resistance as an affective relation to and aesthetic mediation of the still unfolding event of feminism.

> Nonsovereignty is *not* here the dissolution of a boundary. It is the experience of affect, of being receptive, in real time.

> Lauren Berlant, 2016

Introduction: "Arts of Deceit"

Up until the massacre of the women, as the Selk'nam men tell it, men lived in ignorance of the fact that the spirits emerging from the women's house on special occasions were not spirits but masked mortal women who held sway over men who carried out the day-to-day tasks of food preparation and child care.

When the men found out and consequently killed the adult women, they appropriated their initiation rites. Ever since then, the energy motivating the men's rites stipulates that women must be held in ignorance of the massacre and of the powers men feel are inherent to women because otherwise women will resume power.

However, women in the post-matriarchal phase were aware that the spirits were now in fact mortal men wearing masks, but because of threats against their lives if they so much as mentioned this, the women feign ignorance. In other words, what was a secret when the women imitated the spirits became a public secret when the men took over. It became a secret known to all, involving a dizzying cocktail of deceit and counterdeceit: men miming the spirits, women miming ignorance that it was mortal men doing this, and men miming their belief that the women remained ignorant of what they were doing—all in a great circuit of deceit and mimesis, which appears to me to create a great charge, like an electric charge, empowering the spirits themselves. (107-8)

In *Mastery of Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown,* Michael Taussig describes the mythical origin story relayed by the Selk'nam to a handful of early 20th century anthropologists. Taussig engages the anthropological record[1] in search of alternatives to the mastery embedded in the Judeo-Christian story that has patriarchy inaugurated by guilt, transgression and forbidden knowledge. The picture offered by Selk'nam is one of how "how patriarchy emerged and functions through deceit and public secrecy" (2020, 107).

In the "arts of deceit" we find a compelling opening onto feminist resistance: patriarchal power is a defense against a fear (that women will take back what is rightfully theirs); both men and women live in the interdependent knowledge of the stolen property that men must disavow to preserve the illusion of their power (and that women follow suit out of fear for their lives); the mask has no intrinsic meaning or affective relation (mediating both deception and becoming-other); the slide between the different affective worlds of the mask is mediated variously but specifically (by theft and violence; by the ritualistic potential of shamanic transformation—and, of shame; by imposed and willing belief); and deception is dispersed throughout social relationships by the public secret. Inspired by Taussig's description, this chapter examines how "the skilled revelation of skilled concealment" (34) gives rise to a certain theorization of feminist resistance. My analysis is split in two. First, I illustrate descriptions of the yoking of gendered power to the axis of in/visibility via the interleaving of aesthetics and affect. Secondly, I hone my description of aesthetic and affective resistance within the frames of revelatory concealment organized by intimacy through examples from feminist film and TV, writing, and performance art. The chapter concludes by suggesting that a feminist analytics of revealing/concealing opens onto questions of receptivity that better serve the theorization of feminist resistance than the "ontologization of vulnerability" (Vishmidt 2020, 44).

Bargaining with a Bad Image: Resistance in the Arts of Deceit

The idiom "looks can be deceiving" rings true to experience, but also to affective structures. Humiliation, for example, is the painful and imposed "unmasking of pretensions" (Saurette 2005, 12), often by someone who themselves comes to be revealed as masked. By the time we realize that we've been duped, we've already fallen—betrayed by the terms of status and investment that command intimacy's end game (Cefai 2020). In mainstream culture, earlier feminist calls *for* visibility have been superseded by a digital cultural economy in which

"visibility is an end in itself" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 68). The overdetermination of the appearance of feminine bodies by public shaming and its avoidance can hardly be understood as "progress." For girls and young women in particular, there is little room to move beyond the self-beratement that conducts the unending competitiveness of life under neoliberalism (McRobbie 2020). Ideology is deceptively good looking, but people mostly remain tethered to their situation despite learning its ugly truth. It is, as Lauren Berlant endeavored to show us, in the affective register of attachment that we fail to change things up or move on.[2] We rest upon what we are able to conceal: fiction depends upon a "suspension of disbelief" to convey its truths, while human stories are replete with misrecognition. Deception makes for a great script as a drama of discontinuity, instability and multiplicity consistent with the everyday.

The deceptive appearance of things has yielded wide-ranging critical reflection within feminist theory. Feminist scholars have examined the basis of visibility in the biases of patriarchy, as per formative accounts from Donna Haraway or Teresa de Lauretis for example. Perception precedes deception; it is certain presuppositions that lead us to bargain with a bad image. We should note two considerations here. Firstly, belief in the way that things are or appear to be is for the most part *tacit*; assumed in how things are said and done, rather than expressly given or consciously thought through. Tacit belief, or consent to the ordinary, is concurrent with perception in the everyday, and is affectively secured by the aesthetic: impressions of things allow for affective expression but also reciprocity in the form of give and take—we make something available to one another. Secondly and relatedly, the ontology and epistemology that is implied in the way we go about the everyday, assumed in the appearance of things, imbues the apparent *coherence* of things. Less an ocularcentrism, the privileged place of visibility in feminist theory mediates the slipperiness between appearing and cohering, or what we could call the *aesthetic vector of social convention*.

Deception as both an event and structure of "ontological communicativity"[3] offers critical purchase on the vested interests in lopsided perception. Deception in its very inception turns perception inside out; many a feminist counterpoint has been excavated through the perception of deception. Take the appearance of coherence as feminist problematics in Judith Butler's influential *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, for example. Butler synthesizes and emboldens critiques of the apparent "unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire" (1990, 22) that coheres through the "*regulatory practices* of gender" (16, italics in original) and the fiction of "sex," as well as the assumed coherence of heterosexuality, "woman" and the "'unity' necessary for effective political action" (15). Pointedly: "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (141, italics in original). Gender, however, is "a norm that can never be fully internalized; 'the internal' is a surface signification" (141). In tune with this formulation, decades of feminist research have unmasked the appearance of the coherence of gender as a social category.

In contrast to performativity, Berlant makes a distinctive plea to refrain from collapsing affective structures into subjective experiences (another manifestation, perhaps, of the slippage from appearance to coherence). In analytic terms, this means steering away from predicating politics on particular experiences or bodies (even analytically defined), instead placing questions of mediation front and center (also see Vishmidt 2020). In "Sex in Public," (with Michael Warner) they describe the hegemony of heterosexuality as a cluster of "elastic alliances," a "provisional unity" that bolsters and traffics in "the ordinary rightness of the world" (1998, 552). The "metacultural work of the very category of heterosexuality" gives the appearance of coherence in so far as it "consolidates as *a sexuality* widely differing

practices, norms, and institutions" (552, italics in original). What this produces and is sustained by, however, is an affective sociality, felt as the ordinary rightness of genres of heterosexuality. What it feels like to live in a particular historical moment is not coextensive with a norm or the critical language we have to explicate it. The surfaces of things are not only significatory; recessive affect, for example, bears out through a presentation whose processes of expression and diffusion cannot be read by "any preferred norm of encountering a surface as though it actually expresses all of the intensities it mediates in its aspiration to make something available for an encounter" (Berlant 2015, 209).

Deceit is most unnerving from within scenes of ordinary rightness. Popular uses of the term gaslighting illustrate how gender and affect come to the fore here. As Sarah Banet-Weiser has noted, the "con" or confidence game "in which a person swindles or robs another person after gaining their confidence" is an archetype of online misogyny (2018, 97). Gaslighting neatly identifies the aesthetics of deceit that constitute a power grab from within an intimate relation. We are not knocked to the floor by the discovery that the politician was self-interested and lied to hide it, but from within the exchange of affective knowledges and behaviors that inform our relational purchase on reality. The double whammy is that a person's confidence in their own judgement and sense of self, and their confidence in the world, are together undermined—to crippling effect. Gaslighting is an effort to conceal a person's reality from them through a corruption of their perception by self-doubt. The gaslit bargain with a bad image—sometimes "knowing what not to know."

Feminist aesthetics riff on the untruths people are compelled to live with, often through material circumstance. Rather than slip into a dialectical interpretation of Foucault's insight "where there is power, there is resistance," I would like to press on the capaciousness of feminist aesthetics according to his immanent view of resistance and "the power of transformation innate to the pure mediality of bodies" (Berry 2018, 261). Earlier critiques

focused alternately on the possible transformations of new expressive content ("American feminism") and the alterity inside and outside of phallocentric discourse ("French feminism"). This feminist dialectic between "affirmation and negativity" (Felski 1989, 22) profoundly influenced the development of feminist epistemological positions, themselves coming to constitute their own aesthetic structure of feeling (Cefai 2022). Different feminist aesthetics differently conceptualize resistance; any feminism lacking in this essential conceptualization—such as the "*faux*-feminism" of postfeminism (McRobbie 2008, 1)— could be quickly claimed as apolitical. At stake in feminism is feminism itself. The term gaslight derives from a film of the same name,[4] in which the audience knows what the victim doesn't: films themselves can proceed as skilled revelations of skilled concealment. Feminist aesthetics might be neither affirmative nor negative, but revelations of generic mediation.

To the concern with the tacit confidence in how things are said and done, visible in the aesthetic vector of social convention through which the everyday coheres, this chapter invites a third consideration: the *nonsovereignty* of the relations by which the terms of a shared reality are negotiated. Even though the image of sovereignty works to advantage the exercise of power, it is nonsovereignty that presents an opportunity for power and resistance. Relationality precedes and is the space of power's interest; in late neoliberalism, power breaks people down because it is efficacious where subjectivities fray, where people are susceptible or strive for agency or, in biopolitical terms, are incapacitated. Rather than think of patriarchy and feminism as dialectically related in a political plurality (as terms only concerned with *pouvoir* and not *puissance*), or as taking effect through the production of a subject, feminist aesthetics can be approached as an event with a relational middle.[5] The "transformation of silence into language and action" (Lorde 1984, 40) is a revelation incompletely conveyed because the truths we "believe and know beyond understanding" (43) anchor the inalienable nonsovereignty of our being. Feminism is here the electric charge that

empowers the being of the middle because we are neither that "subject" of whichever oppressive/productive discourse, nor entirely free from it; neither entirely bound nor free from one another, but wanting to experience freedom and propinquity in equal measure, "bearing each other hoping to breathe in each other's freedom" (Berlant and Stewart 2019, 112).

All Will Be Revealed: Resistance and the Arts of Feminist Critique

What Taussig calls "shamanic tropes" feature heavily through the book's preoccupation with "the submerged presence of the re-enchantment of nature" (2020, 34). Taussig defines the shamanic as "the skilled revelation of skilled concealment," of which "mastery of non-mastery" is the prime example. Other tropes include "knowing what not to know" and "the bodily unconscious." The play between revealing and concealing never finally concludes: "Revelation through removing the mask does not destroy the secret but augments it" (112). This is surely one way to describe representations of gender globally in the wake of 20th century feminism. We can think of Foucault's (1976) argument that the "liberation" of sexuality covers over what it claims to reveal (the revealing of the concealing of improper desire that consolidates normal sexuality) whereas the "repressive hypothesis" reveals what it claims to cover (concealment as an incitement to discourse). In the case of race, the cultural history of the mask similarly reveals an assemblage of concealment: affective relations as conduits of power. The "fungibility of the commodity" in 19th Century America, explains Saidiya Harman, "enabled the black body or blackface mask to serve as the vehicle of white self-exploration, renunciation, and enjoyment" (1997, 26). Blackness could be "put on," passing from forms of minstrelsy to melodrama according to the expressive "convergence of violence and pleasure" (27). The affective structure of the female masquerade is equally significant in the discussion of presumptively white femininity. In Joan Riviere's description, the "mask of womanliness" is worn by women who "wish for masculinity" (1929/1986, 35,

cited in Butler 1990, 65), whose transgression poses a threat. Womanliness is put on "to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men." Such transgression marks the masquerade as feminist even if resistance is located in "the bodily unconscious," an example of "knowing what not to know."

Arguing that women are subject to a "postfeminist sexual contract" that tempers the threat of social advancement with the *performance* of conventional femininity, Angela McRobbie draws on Riviere to describe the *postfeminist* masquerade as "a containment strategy adopted on behalf of the (patriarchal) symbolic faced with possible disruption to the stable binaries of sexual difference" (2007, 723). Since Riviere's earlier conceptualization, feminism has become a public, mediatized discourse, now subject to the terms of visibility marshalled by postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, popular feminism, and so on. The masquerade can no longer conceal feminism as a historical threat in so far as the threat has eventuated and been incorporated (into commodity capitalism, the neoliberal *dispositif*, and so on) and depoliticized (e.g. Berry 2018; Hanson 2011). However, precisely in so far as a more fully equitable society did not eventuate as an effect of the historical event of feminism, gender and sexuality continue to be disciplined and contained by "a wide range of biopolitical strategies" against "the possibilities of renewed feminist challenges to patriarchal authority" (McRobbie 2007, 730). Instating "women as sign" is a defense that seeks to "manage the field of sexual antagonisms" (725): it is the antagonism that's the terrain of resistance, in which men turn women into signs.

On McRobbie's argument, the "phallic girl" is one such strategy of containment. The "position of phallic girl bears the superficial marks of boldness, confidence, aggression and even transgression," to which we could add a whole range of motifs that adopt a "licensed and temporary form of phallicism" (732). Virginie Despentes describes the "over-marketing of femininity" in related terms, as "an apology to men for the loss of their prerogatives, a way

of reassuring ourselves by reassuring them. 'We want to be liberated but not too much'"
(2020, 25). The "top" or "phallic" girl assumes an imagined equality and freights it with
"intense and obviously unresolved sexual antagonisms within contemporary heterosexuality"
(McRobbie 2007, 732). Phallic femininity conceals by confusing an already mystified sexual
power with other kinds of power, detracting from the forms of gendered social power to
which the masculine subject retains privileged access. Moreover, as McRobbie later claims,
the elevation of femininity through a toxic nexus of subjectivating refrains, of
perfection/imperfection, self-beratement, assuredness, and more, conceals the feminine
subject's competitive mentality (McRobbie 2020).

That various forms of governmental femininity with distinct aesthetic modes refract a
mimetic masculinity through femininity is shrewd, but it is not as if these constraints go
unnoticed. As Berlant and Warner note in their discussion of heterosexual culture, the
"cruelty" of the "extremely narrow context for living" into which all people must fit "does
not go unregistered" (1998, 556). Media discourses catalogue "the constant failure of
heterosexual ideologies and institutions" (556), although in ways that largely keep intact the
"relations of patterns" that materialize violent bodies (Puar 2012, 57). The "ideologies and
institutions of intimacy" (Berlant and Warner 1998, 553) employ aesthetic modes to conceal,
but revealing concealment is an ineffectual deterrent so long as heteronormative intimacy
offers social belonging. The "social membership" provided by "identification with the
heterosexual life narrative" (557) is a norm worth bargaining with. When this exchange
doesn't pay off, people feel "individually responsible for the rages, instabilities,
ambivalences, and failures they experience in their intimate lives" (557). It is difficult to hold
on to the feelings and affects linked to forms of responsibility that promise different
possibilities living where governmental forms of responsibility shape the personal sphere—a
provision of belonging, however, that is challenged by the new logic of digital capitalism that

"serves to disrupt family life and multiply sexual pleasures" (Hanson 2011, 591), displacing the Reaganite/Thatcherite instrumentalization of "the family" that secured the distinction between public and private life.

Some 10 years prior to the more recent spate of films and series assessing heterosexuality at the scene of its undoing,[6] Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road* (2008) offers a smorgasbord of home truths on the tyranny of heteronormativity.[7] Set in 1950s suburbia, *Revolutionary Road* imagines the pre-feminist moment as a world in which college-educated white women were beset by "the problem that has no name" (Friedan 2001), thematizing the coming Second Wave as background, subtext and submerged perspective. Ten minutes into the film, husband and wife, Frank (Leonardo DiCaprio) and April (Kate Winslet), are hurling impassioned insults: "You don't fool me Frank. Just because you you've got me safely in this little trap you think you can bully me into feeling whatever you want me to feel." Whereas the theorization of the feminine masquerade took as its point of focus the subject of a performance of gendered affect, *Revolutionary Road* examines the emotional toll of heterosexual culture, locating, with Arlie Hochschild, the "feeling rules" that burden the subject with "emotional work" (1979)[8] in the aestheticized, presumptively white, suburbanized sexuality of commodity capitalism. Heterosexual scenes of affective investment are the subject of the film, described as a trap, as April bitterly admits:

> Our whole existence here is based on this great premise that we're special, and superior to the whole thing. But we're not. We're just like everyone else. Look at us. We've bought into the same ridiculous delusion. This idea that you have to resign from life and settle down the moment you have children. And we've been punishing each other for it.

April's consciousness of the delusion is no way out and compounds her sense of entrapment and personal failing. April is desperate to exit the whole way of life organized through the

unparalleled social function of the affective relation within the marital unit. April is the subject of her own skilled revelation of skilled concealment, looking for reinvention of that affective relation.

Emphasis on the plurality of indeterminate intimate possibilities, including in normative accounts such as of the "pure relationship" (Giddens 1992), radically underdescribe the saturation of the social sphere by married life, and vice-versa. "Dimorphic sexuality is a prerequisite for the emergence of gendered divisions of labor, the circumscription of sex and reproduction by power relations, and hence the rise of capitalism tout court" (Berry 2018, 234), secured through the institutions of intimacy, including "free love." The way of life that April and Frank want to leave is the affective structure organized by these terms, geared towards objectification within commodity capitalism. Marriage enters the "escalation of objects" (234), leaching alienation into the personal sphere directly, not only as a symptom of exploitative labor relations. In postmodernity, the "freeing up of sensory-affective capacities from family alliances was simultaneously rebinding desire into new commodified forms" (Hennessy 2000, 104, cited in Berry 2018, 238). There are crevasses in the creases of capitalism: "If being crazy means living life as it if matters then I don't care if we're completely insane," April hopes. But life in the crevasse is unknown, Frank is ultimately persuaded by the security of his own status and salary, and the couple's anguish and resentment quickly snaps back on them. The fantasy itself is not sustaining; images are potential that can be thwarted or exhausted, without conversion into social relations.

Revolutionary Road stages the impasse of hopelessness from within scenes of optimism. "Plenty of people are onto the emptiness, but, it takes real guts to see the hopelessness," observes an oddball acquaintance (Michael Shannon). In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant links the way people stay attached to lives that don't work, or to ideals or objects that impede their flourishing, to attrition and a downturn in social mobility that structurally eclipses the

possibility of things working out. Institutions of intimacy bear the brunt of economic and social crisis; less safety net than the way we fall, but where else shall we turn? The affective relations that render personal life claustrophobic do so not only for the coupled subject. For Berlant, all attachments are optimistic, a hope for something to turn out. Surely enough, in the film hopelessness signals the end of attachment, but the structure holds fast despite the characters' detachment perhaps because the concealment of hopelessness is also a defense against a flawed expression. Feminist consciousness emanates from the affective configuration of the unfolding event of feminism within life worlds.

Writing in her semi-autobiographical feminist manifesto *King Kong Theory*, Despentes also attends to what the normative fantasy of heterosexuality conceals. Despentes describes the fear of retribution that saturates the everyday. Also reading Riviere, she writes: "Access to traditionally male powers is mingled with fear of punishment … It is not so much the notion of our own inferiority that we women have internalized … It is the idea that our independence is destructive that has penetrated to the marrow of our bones" (2020, 25). Reflecting on being raped, Despentes recalls how she did not attempt to flea her rapist because she feared for her life—there were three men and a gun. But she also questions whether women are socialized to fear male sexual violence in particular, whether she might have been more inclined to fight back had the men been attempting to steel her purse. The intensities of violence transmogrify the event-space of the male body and reveal the definition of what it means to be a woman as "someone who can be taken by force and who should not resist" (41). Through reflexive narration, Despentes shifts the affect-trap of gender from the subject's attachment to an ideal, or the difficulty of imagining life otherwise, to the materiality of violence and the fear of this violence in the "bodily unconscious." Feigning a lack of knowledge keeps this trauma concealed: "It is extraordinary that, as women, we don't pass on our knowledge to girls, not survival tactics, not even practical advice. Nothing" (41).

Yet another concealment is vital to this structure: the concealment of rape by the bad image of "consent" shared among those who condone or participate in rape: "there was no rape, just some prick-tease who needed a little reminding that she was a slut" (37). This recalls the condescension of gaslighting; the instantiation of objectification that eclipses from view the reciprocity of that violence.

Unlike TV, film and books, whose aesthetic refinement is shaped by production technologies and processes, feminist performance art relies upon the event of an encounter to produce its event-space. Examples of feminist performance art transform our perception of resistance. In *Art and (Bare) Life*, Josephine Berry observes how feminist performances that sought to reverse, challenge or otherwise redeploy the male gaze, unwittingly evoked violence. Berry reminds us that *during* Marina Abramovic's performance of *Rhythm 0* (1974) in Naples, someone placed a gun in the artist's hand and "pointed at her temple" (2018, 227). Other examples cited by Berry, including Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965), Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964), Valie Export's *TAP and TOUCH CINEMA* (1968/89) and the British art collective COUM Transmissions, foreground the body as the locus of affect, and the affective body as the locus of sex, i.e. the body precisely as that which is mediated. Is it the sex or the feminism of the female body that stages what a body can do? Feminist performance art reflects neither the negative nor the affirmative position characterizing feminist aesthetics (Felski 1989), but an intensification of affect as an effect of "exploring and inhabiting the affective force of taboo desires and their social effects in antagonistic relation to sex's general banalization within the commodity form" (Berry 2018, 249). The performance of feminist resistance, itself an intensification of affect harbored by "the unconsciously racist and sexist hostility of audiences," skillfully reveals the "reflex readiness to violence" of the male body (Massumi 2002, 81, cited in Puar 2012, 60). The "fragile, isolated and suffering body" routinely assumed to underpin feminist ontologies (Vishmidt 2020, 34) could not

materialize such a convergence of forces. Feminism is also at issue in the theory of resistance we take. Returning to the origin story with which this chapter begun, the transgression of the female body, in relation to its own ecology, the "endless becoming" (Taussig 2020, 109) of the female shape-shifter, exposes the concealed propensity for violence among men. Violence is less hidden behind closed doors as within the affective atmosphere or bodily unconscious that art, as transversal shape-shifting potential, can transgress.

Conclusion: Make Wormholes Not Homes

> The worm creates a space of movement that becomes form. If it is form it is social, that is of the world; as form it is movement and singular. In the wormhole the worm creates an infrastructure to hold itself in the world: the hole fits the worm, but only as it moves. It reveals an ontological flatness of all matter but more vitally such recognition induces movement into new proximities. (Berlant 2016, 401)

Berlant is here describing the wormholes that inspired Ralph Waldo Emerson. Wormholes as structures of intimacy provide safe passage for alterity. The track of the "becoming-man of the worm" is an "infrastructure of continuity across the surface of things" (402). It is of the wormholes as affective infrastructures that Berlant writes: "Nonsovereignty is *not* here the dissolution of a boundary. It is the experience of affect, of being receptive, in real time" (402). In Taussig's discussion of the Selk'nam origin story, the mask of becoming-other entails no instrumentalized violence. Rather, in the mythical time of women's domination "there was a great capacity for flux in identities, involving manifold identifications and metamorphoses between humans and nonhumans" (2020, 108–9). Flux in the form of "transitivity" (Berry 2018, 247) has been key to feminist philosophy precisely as an incarnation of resistance with a relational middle, affective infrastructure, inheritance of a

15

wormhole. How to allow this middle to flourish from within the affective relation of the marital coupling?

Feminist theorists rarely link affect to concealment, instead favoring the language of the boundary. Notable here is Sara Ahmed's pathbreaking work in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, in which she claims that "emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside" (2004, 10), that intensities in feeling shape the impression of a surface, such as "the skin surface itself … where others *impress* upon us" (25). This links affective surfaces very closely to the formation of a subject whose reality exceeds the affective sociality that is mediated to it. The switch from the "dissolution of a boundary" to the receptivity of a body to affect can be made through the skilled revelation of skilled concealment. Ideas of feminist resistance "could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience" (Merleau-Ponty 1992, 150, cited in Berry 2018, 249). Boundaries are not the same thing analytically or otherwise as concealment. Affect does not discern between the categories of gender and sexuality, even though affective sociality is mediated by the organization of sexuality through dyadic gendered identities. This is why gender proceeds largely as a matter of aesthetics and the aesthetic remains a site of feminist resistance.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Berlant, Lauren. 2015. "Structures of Unfeeling: *Mysterious Skin*." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 28: 191–213. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-014-9190-y.

Berlant, Lauren 2016. "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3: 393–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816645989.

Berlant, Lauren and Kathleen **Stewart.** 2019. *The Hundreds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael **Warner.** 1998. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2: 547–566. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1344178.

Berry, Josephine. 2018. *Art and (Bare) Life: A Biopolitical Inquiry*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cefai, Sarah. 2020. "Humiliation's Media Cultures: On the Power of the Social to Oblige Us." *New Media & Society* 22, vol. 7: 1287–1304. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820912543.

Cefai, Sarah. 2022. "Exit Wounds of Feminist Theory." In *The Future of Media*, edited by Joanna Zylinska with Goldsmiths Media. London: Goldsmiths Press and The MIT Press.

Despentes, Virginie. (2006) 2020. *King Kong Theory*. Translated by Frank Wynne. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Felski, Rita. 1989. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change.* UK: Hutchinson Radius.

Foucault, Michel. 1976. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge.* Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Penguin Books.

Friedan, Betty. (1973) 2001. *The Feminine Mystique*. London and New York: Norton.

Giddens, Antony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love & Eroticism in Modern Societies.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hanson, Ellis. 2011. "The History of Digital Desire, vol. 1: An Introduction." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 3: 583–599. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1275743.

Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie R. 1979. "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure." *The American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3: 551–575. https://doi.org/10.1086/227049.

Knudson, Cory Austin. 2020. "This Book … of Traces and Tremors, if Book it Be: A Review of Michael Taussig, *Mastery of Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown*." *Postmodern Culture* 30, no. 3. https://doi:10.1353/pmc.2020.0015.

Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

McRobbie, Angela. 2007. "Top Girls? Young Women and the Post-Feminist Sexual Contract." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 4–5: 718–737. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380701279044.

McRobbie, Angela. 2008. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: SAGE.

McRobbie, Angela. 2020. *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience: Essays on Gender, Media and the End of Welfare*. Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity.

Mendes, Sam., dir. *Revolutionary Road*. 2008. USA/UK. Film.

Puar, Jasbir K. 2012. "'I Would Rather be a Cyborg than a Goddess': Becoming-
Intersectional in Assemblage Theory." *philoSOPHIA*, 2(1): 49–66. Project MUSE
muse.jhu.edu/article/486621.

Saurette, Paul. 2005. *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics*.
Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press.

Taussig, Michael. 2020. *Mastery of Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown.* The University of
Chicago Press.

Vishmidt, Marina. 2020. "Bodies in Space: On the Ends of Vulnerability." *Radical
Philosophy* 2, no. 8: 33–46.

Notes

[1] Selk'nam were indigenous to the Tierra del Fuego archipelago across Chile and Argentina, and were massacred by Europeans. On the Selk'nam origin story, Taussig cites the following sources: Martin Gusinde, Lucas Bridges and Anne Chapman (107). For Taussig, the shamanic is rooted in mimesis*,* viewed as a "metaphysical axis of art, technology, religion, language, politics and nature itself" (Knudson 2020). Major predicaments, from climate change to Trumpism, are examined by way of Taussig's longstanding commitment to mimesis, sympathetic magic and the shamanic, that elaborate the exercise of power through affective and unconscious bodily processes. In terms of resistance, the shamanic engenders "creative refiguration [that] has the capacity to turn back and affect its original" (Knudson 2020). This chapter does not representationally or indexically engage the anthropological record, but works with the conceptual space that is enacted by Taussig, besides scholarly modes of analysis that exercise disciplinary and definitional mastery.

[2] Across their work Berlant draws on object relations, attachment theory, psychoanalysis, historical materialism, Foucault and queer theory among others.

[3] I adapt this phrasing from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Giorgio Agamben as discussed by Josephine Berry (2018).

[4] Here I am relying on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting.

[5] I am drawing on a Deleuzian concept of affect, as illustrated in Jasbir Puar's (2012) reading of Massumi (2002) to theorize the unstable relationship between the body and identity. Paur highlights the Deleuzian concept of "the event as the effect of the conversion of surface distance into intensity [which] is also the conversion of the materiality of the body into an event" (Massumi 2002, 14, cited in Puar 2012, 60). In brief, the intensification of the body is a key aspect of the way that dominant identities maintain themselves.

[6] Such as Netflix's *Marriage Story* (2019), *Malcom & Marie* (2021), and the adaptation of Ingar Bergmann's original series, *Scenes from a Marriage* (2021).

[7] I was first drawn to the film by McRobbie, for whom the film suggests that "female mental health and well-being can depend on being able to exit a marriage, and gain independence—a life of one's own" (2020, 19).

[8] By distinguishing between "primary emotions" occurring as an effect of social factors and "*secondary acts* performed upon the ongoing nonreflective stream of primary emotion experience" (552, italics in original), Hochschild offers a key reference for a social theory of feminist aesthetics. For Hochschild, emotion work involves both social impressions and intra-psychic process in the "act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" (561). It is this "work" that we are observing in the skilled revelation of skilled concealment.