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Sticky Aesthetics, Sticky Affect: Connecting through Queer Art

Abstract

This paper explores how the creative nonfiction writer, T Fleischmann, exemplifies a “queer sense of belonging” throughout the author’s description of encountering a work of art and how it transmits this feeling to the reader. This sense of belonging is an affective feeling co-created through the intertwining elements of queer aesthetics and the encountering subject’s contingent affective history.

Keywords

Queer Aesthetics Forms, Affect, Queer Temporalities, Embodiment, Autotheory

On a short trip to New York City, my companion and I perused a queer activist bookstore. As a queer scholar researching time and embodiment, the title *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*, a book by T. Fleischmann (2019), caught my attention immediately. The book’s contents reflect a growing trend of ‘autotheory’ (Weigman 2020). Written in a similar vein as Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, Fleischmann’s book narrates personal encounters with art and art production through both a creative and theoretical lens. Autotheory combines the terms “autobiography” and “theory” while acknowledging the instability of both of these categories (2020, 3). Autotheoretical work can take on many forms: the nature of its instability makes it difficult, or impossible, to pin it down (2020, 7). Unlike autobiography, many commentators discuss autotheoretical work’s ability to value and produce scholarly and theoretical knowledge through personal experience while being playful in its presentation, illuminating creative writing’s aesthetic value (2020, 6).

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While reading Fleischmann's book, my engagement became imbued with affective belonging, impressing itself upon me as I read. This paper explores how Fleischmann's work illustrates a "queer sense of belonging" throughout the description of encountering a work of art created by the late queer artist, Félix González-Torres. This sense of belonging is an *affective* feeling co-created by intertwining elements of queer aesthetics and the contingent affective history of the encountering subject. I further contend that this queer affect can be transmitted in and through other queer bodies, particularly bodies marginalized by the ever-present constrictions of heteronormativity in the North American context. Borrowing from Sarah Ahmed's analysis of emotions and affect in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, I argue that a "queer sense of belonging" can "stick" and "be sticky." The stickiness of the affect depends on the non-neutral histories of the proximate subjects. Specifically, I focus expressly upon the queer subject: a reader, knowingly or otherwise, searching for belonging. By analyzing the dialogical interplay between queer embodiment, affect, and aesthetics, I show that the queer reader can encounter and *feel* this sense of belonging alongside Fleischmann.

Fleischmann's "Queer Sense of Belonging"

Fleischmann—who uses the pronoun "they"—details personal encounters with the "candy spill" sculpture, *Untitled (A Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, by the late González-Torres, within the first ten pages of the book. The sculpture, displayed posthumously, consists of a pile of colorfully wrapped candy in an art gallery corner. The sculpture's mass was weighed out to equal the weight of González-Torres' long-term partner, Ross Laycock, who died from AIDS in the nineties. Arriving to work with this knowledge, Fleischmann describes picking up a piece of candy with yellow foil:

I placed it in my mouth./I sucked at the candy as I continued to look at the pile, slightly diminished./I felt for a moment an acute sense of loss and beauty, each indistinguishable from the other./The candy was very sweet, and it was melting (2019, 4).

Gallery staff replenish the pile of hard candies, so the sculpture's mass always equals 79 kg (175 lbs), Ross Laycock's weight. Before the visit and after it, Fleischmann follows the motif of hard candies throughout this section of the book, for example, by describing a pile of candies wrapped in blue foil lying by a lamp in a room Fleischmann shared with their friend and complicated lover, Simon. Simon throws a couple of these candies into Fleischmann's purse, "little shards that will begin to melt in the heat of the

subway" (2019, 6). While lamenting their recent longing to live for a summer in New York City, Fleischmann also reflects upon personal connections with González-Torres. This draw was nostalgic "because of what [New York] had been" (2019, 6), says Fleischmann. The author reflects on the city's queer contours throughout the prose in the book, in which glimmers of a queer past and present are incited by noting the spaces in which the author and the city intersect.

Fleischmann's narration of these experiences exemplifies how the sculpture's aesthetics affectively impact their embodiment. Readers of Fleischmann's essay share in the author's reflections of the work. As I can only conjecture the author's experience through my interpretation of these reflections, I take the following excerpt to be especially poignant:

I experienced the act of removing the piece of candy, with its overt ritualization, as an act that both grounded me and pushed me further into an imaginative space./ The tactility of unwrapping the paper and tasting the melting sugar situated me in my body, while the fact of González-Torres's romance with Ross removed me from my experience./I know, however, that I was only in my own memories./My losses are squarely different than his,/as none of our losses are the same./His work moves between fact and imagination, the object and the memory, to open a new space;/from me, to something that exists beyond that limit./Like I was only a boundary before, and now I can move again—/pushing through a crowd until I come out the other side, and the air opens up and I breathe (2019, 8).

I suggest that this recreation of the aesthetic encounter is indicative of a "queer sense of belonging": a moment of reprieve from a hetero- and chrononormative world. The imagery conjures a sense of freedom made available to Fleischmann through the author's encounter with the piece. The air opening up becomes a moment to "unbind" from the confines of a world hostile to queer bodies. The piece's queer aesthetic forms resignify Fleischmann's relationship with time. Through this relationship, the forms seem to express a level of comfort and freedom unavailable to Fleischmann prior to and outside of the personal encounter with this work.

Queer Phenomenology, Temporality, and Embodied Discordance

My use of the term "queer" follows the work of Annamarie Jagose and Sara Ahmed. They both conceive "queer" as primarily describing a subject, object, or method that is non-normative, departing from the dominant norms and expectations of the relevant context. Jagose uses queerness to denote a chal-

lenge to any notions of gender essentialism and how this might be reflected in an individual's sexuality. The "queer" marker allows for a fluidity depending on cultural and historical contexts (1996, 98). Ahmed's notion, however, invokes queer *embodiment* specifically. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Ahmed uses the term "queer" to indicate a directional movement along with sexual identity. For Ahmed, to move queerly is to move obliquely or become aslant to a "straight" path. Queerness is demonstrative of a "turning away" from straightness in the context of sexual identity, particularly her own lesbian identity (2006, 21). Both Jagose and Ahmed's usage of the term suggests that queerness is irreducible to sexuality alone. Queerness is also a deviation from other compulsory normalities. This deviation recalls Judith Butler's article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1993). Butler purports that gender norms are enacted through repetition and are not a stable indication of a subject's inherent identity. As such, Butler is wary of all supposed stable identities. Queerness, thus, not only proposes a turning away from the normative, often enacted through an expectation of a rigid and fixed gender identity (despite, for Butler, its impossibility), but represents a dynamism that can be historically and contextually contingent. Queerness is itself an elusive term, making it difficult to define its usage and parameters. I expressly limit my uptake of "queer" to an amalgamation of what is offered by these theorists: a turning away from the normative that can mean instability and dynamic identity, particularly concerning gender and sexuality.

As I use Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, I claim that embodiment substantially enacts queerness. If we operate on a queer "slanted" path, a phenomenological account highlights the impact and impressions this might have upon embodiment. In turn, Elizabeth Freeman argues that the constraints of chrononormativity bound bodies (2010, p. 3). Chrononormativity indicates that we value and measure time in a North American context through a standard temporal framework. For Freeman, bodies are subject to expectations of temporal logistics that prioritize capitalist, racist, and heteronormative endeavors (Freeman 2010). Time is measured with productivity level; there are timelines to which a subject must adhere, indicating the correct method of completing life goals, such as marriage, reproduction, and career objectives. Our bodies are bound to the construction of a clock that prioritizes capitalism; simultaneously, according to Freeman, capitalism is neatly upheld by our current framework of heteronormativity. If bodies are bound to the expectations of a specific linear timeline, then deviation is also embodied.

I have argued elsewhere that the attempt to adhere to chrononormativity is an embodied discordance and burden uniquely placed upon queer subjects¹ (Keating, in press). Queer bodies experience discordance when they must maintain the hyperproductive expectations of a heteronormative, capitalist world: a world within which we must exist at the expense of our survival. If this discordance is indeed the case, queer bodies require temporal frameworks and spaces in which they can “unbind” and relax. This space/time would offer a “queer sense of belonging” outside of the world not made for queer subjects. I have suggested that live performance can provide this space/time (Keating, in press). Fleischmann’s experience demonstrates that this occurs through artworks in other forms, as well.

The Role of Affect Theory in Aesthetic Apprehension

The conceptualization of “affect” and the “affective turn” has invoked a contentious and varied uptake amongst theorists (Siegworth & Gregg 2010, 3; Cvetkovich 2012, 3). Despite its many usages, affect theory generally attends to elements of historically subjugated forms of knowledge production. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth discuss that affect is a feeling that can be relational, comprised of both intimate experience and interrelated bodies, “becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’” (2010, 2). Attention to these feelings that are personal yet interconnected with various bodies, bodies that can be objects or spaces or other people, are *apropos* for uncovering, mapping, and theorizing the *feeling* of belonging to a queer time and/or space through art. Queer bodies feel the discordance; I argue it is something that is, indeed, *felt*. Perhaps it is felt in a way beyond the capability for traditional languages and knowledge structures to capture, an example of an ephemeral knowing as offered by José Esteban Muñoz (2009). As well, in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed argues that objects, locations, feelings, moods, words, *et cetera*, can have an impact and leave an impression on us through our embodied apprehensions. Our movement and bodies concurrently affect other bodies (2010, 23). I use affect to attend to how objects and others influence our embodied feelings and how we influence others. This lens exposes how encounters with artworks and aesthetic forms have an embodied affectivity.

¹ This is most certainly not to suggest that other bodies deviating from a cis-hetero-white-patriarchal-capitalist norm do not embody these burdens. Rather, I am specifically focusing on the queer bodies in the purview of the paper, in that I attend to existing out of gendered and sexuality norms.

Queer fashion theorist Roberto Fillippello upholds a similar notion of embodiment and aesthetics as he writes of photographic fashion images' ability to provide a Spinozian affective return: these photos have the "simultaneous capacity to affect and be affected," which activates the "peripformative field of aesthetic engagement" (2018, 79). Fillippello thus acknowledges the haptic quality of art can affect our bodies. Thus, an aesthetic encounter's material experiences can have an affective impact that can contribute to our embodied knowledge of the object. In his *Ethics in Postulate Two* at II/140, Spinoza writes: "The human body can undergo many changes, and nevertheless retain impressions, or traces, of the objects [...] and consequently, the same images of things" (Curley 1994, 154). The objects I encounter leave an impression upon me, and I impress upon them in turn. If we concede this haptic quality of apprehension through our senses, we can blur the boundaries of bodies by being reciprocally affective. Furthermore, this affective history that we incur reflects Butler's notion of identity as continually shifting and unstable.

Ahmed elaborates this concept by introducing the idea that bodies also do not arrive in neutral: "the acquisition of tendencies is also the acquisition of orientations toward some things and not others as being good" (2010, 34). This acquisition will speak to the nature of contingent subjectivity in apprehending certain aesthetic forms as some art pieces wield more affective power to one subject than another. Moreover, while I speak from the specificity of the queer reader, this opens up possibilities for other ways in which these moments and pieces of art impress others—perhaps differently, perhaps similarly—but very much dependent upon ones' embodied experiences and contextual contingent history. I further invoke Ahmed as she suggests that "what we receive as an impression will depend on our given situation" (2010, 40). Therefore, as I, Fleischmann, or anyone else encounters works of art, we do so with a given history, context, and embodiment that carries the impressions of our experiences with other objects.

Sticky Affect

Affect theory is relevant to Ahmed's discussion of disgust in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014). Ahmed's referencing of "emotions" parallels my own "affect." As she writes: "I explore how emotions work to shape the "surfaces" of individual and collective bodies. Bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" (2014, 1). I have discussed how subjects and objects can interact and impress upon one another under

the heading of “affect.” Thus, I use Ahmed’s “emotions” similarly, mainly as she explores the nature of “disgust” and “sticky” emotions. Ahmed explores the affective nature of disgust as it is applied to and sticks to particular objects and spreads throughout interrelating bodies. As one object elicits a level of disgust by encountering our bodies, we attach “disgust” to the object itself. Other objects that encounter the disgusting object risk having that disgust then stick. I cautiously take up this idea through a notion of a queer sense of belonging that can stick to queer aesthetic forms. Despite not referring to the emotion of disgust, I suggest that affect can stick to queer art similarly to how disgust can stick to objects. According to Ahmed, “stickiness involves a form of relationality, or a ‘withness,’ in which the elements that are ‘with’ get bound together” (2014, 91). This “withness” depends upon our orientations to particular objects, which depends upon a body’s affective history (2014, 87). I recognize there is risk in using a theory developed through a *normatively* negative emotion; queerness, as I have shown, works to renounce the normative. Ahmed suggests that the more something gets associated with disgust, the more likely it becomes associated with that emotion of disgust. Similarly, as the reader of *Time is the Thing* is sharing in Fleischmann’s interpretation of art and imbuing it with a particular affect, this affect might stick to the art.

The reader then can feel this affect when encountering the art through the words offered by Fleischmann. Through the author’s encounter of the González-Torres piece, the blurring of boundaries between the work of art and Fleischmann then brings this sticky affect into the proximity of the queer reader. To explore this messy and dialogical relationship that blurs boundaries of objects, I first consider the ways the sculpture fosters the affect of a queer sense of belonging through its aesthetic forms. Why does this affect stick to such a piece and then become transferred upon the page? I suggest this is in large part due to the nature of queer aesthetic encounters.

“Reading into It:” Queer Aesthetics

To name certain aesthetic forms as queer and others not-queer is antithetical to the fluidity of queer theory. Therefore, my analysis of the Felix González-Torres piece and Fleischmann’s writing highlights the importance of relating-to and relating-with artistic forms in an ever-shifting identity. I situate my position through David Getsy’s and Jennifer Doyle’s work as they espouse their perspectives on queer relations as queer form (2013). The interlocuter’s context and history are deeply relevant to the aesthetic

experience, dovetailing with affect theory. I interpret the aesthetic forms through Fleischmann's interaction with them. As Fleischmann encounters the work of González-Torres as a trans and queer person,² it is evident that the author's identity plays a role in the subjective interpretation and apprehension of the González-Torres work. I must account for the impact and affect this can have on one's interaction with an artwork. Getsy also writes: "any queer formal reading must itself be relational, particular, and contingent on its situation and context" (2017, 255). As such, my uptake of these forms depends upon particular circumstances. It depends on a body's encounter and retelling, both of which are unstable as they detail their shifting identity and embodiment over time throughout the text. Therefore, I suggest a queer reading of aesthetics incorporates an analysis that is contingent upon the bodies involved and the very nature of these shifting subjectivities that occurs over time and space. This analysis accounts for my focus on a "queer sense of belonging" and the queer reader.

Similar to Getsy, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics offer the possibility for a queer aesthetic to focus more on how an encountering subject apprehends and relates to the piece (Palmer, 2001). Our situated histories reflect how our bodies perceive these elements, even before reflecting on the aesthetic's features and the artworks in their contexts. Phenomenologist Helen Fielding writes that our bodies may interact with "phenomenologically strong artworks," allowing us to attend to the immediacy of our worlds before reflection and beyond the background, to which we often relegate them, through repetition and familiarity (2015). Fielding argues that our social locations and experiences not only ground our reflection of further encounters but imply the need to "recognize the primacy of embodied perception that underlies cognition" (2015, 281). My analysis does not suggest any specific techniques, materials, and artistic methods that are inherently "queer." Instead, it is a matter of the interaction between the subjects and objects that allow queerness to become pertinent. This interaction includes, but is not limited to, the objects, forms, and techniques of the art piece.

² It is important to note here that Fleischmann writes of their hesitance to use the term "queer" when denoting their sexual identity as its uptake, at the time of the book's publishing in 2019, has come to mean something beyond the fluidity they embrace. Therefore, I apply this category to Fleischmann rather carefully for the purposes of this paper. I simply intend for it to indicate a lack of adherence to 'normative' sexual and gender identities as they are contained at the context of the writing, and acknowledge that this might be ever-shifting.

Getsy and Doyle both discuss the value of queer formalisms of art as “reading into” a history of art that has often negated queer forms of knowledge: The idea that art can evoke sexuality or eroticism, or suggest:

Anything other than the obvious is “Reading into” or hopeful projective fantasy [...] That complaint about “reading into” [...] mistakes the effort to expand on how pleasure works for a taxonomical project, turning the queer reading into the abject shadow of art history’s most conservative projects (2019, 59).

This idea of “reading into” artworks is elicited continually throughout our aesthetic experience as we account for embodiment, pleasure, and what Freeman calls “erotohistoriography,” as ways of reading into the piece a queerness that might be available to encountering subjects.

Queer aesthetics, then, cannot be named neatly. Indeed, the messiness partially or wholly blurs the boundaries implicated between the subject viewer and the object of observation. This implication calls for a need to attend to affect. In other words, my aesthetic interpretation is dependent on my personal history. I name forms that occur both in the piece and in Fleischmann’s account and use them in a way that could be interpreted as a “reading into.” It might then seem that there are no queer aesthetics proper, rather a queer interpretation, queer interaction, a queer infusion, or a “queer sensibility,” as Matthew Isherwood suggests (2020). Thus, I situate my analysis as taking seriously the “reading into” so often eschewed as projection and wishful thinking for embodied and affective feeling invoked by materials, taste, or proliferating texture, rather than as an undertaking of strictly technical analysis. My analysis assumes a contingent perspective that relies upon Fleischmann’s embodiment.

Further, I take my subjective embodiment seriously as a knower and participant in meaningful art as I read Fleischmann’s account as a piece of literature. To insist on co-creation of artistic meaning the way queer and hermeneutical aesthetics do is to implicate me by necessity when reading the book. Thus, I am only capable of interpreting it through my partial lens of experience.

Ingesting Art: An Erotohistoriographic Encounter

As Fleischmann describes ingesting the piece of candy from the González-Torres sculpture, the author arouses a particular manifestation of Freeman’s notion of *erotohistoriography*. Freeman describes erotohistoriography to reconceive historical moments while inserting bodily sensations through

“seepages” and pleasure. As attention to the body has often been ignored or “written out” of history, the past’s sensate experience can be present. Eroto-historiography does not necessitate a historical turn to the past, but “[treats] the present itself as hybrid. It uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter” (2010, 95-96). Freeman argues that a queer time could be different from a chrononormative time as it can provide a counter-historiography in feeling history with an embodied complexity. Whereas traditional historiography has evaded the sensual, the embodied, and the pleasure of the past, “queer social practices” invoke an experience of a “history” that “is not only what hurts but what arouses, kindles, whets, or itches” (2010, 117). This experience reflects a queer “reading into” of artworks. Likewise, the hard-candy ingestion through the González-Torres sculpture challenges the boundaries of a past and present embodiment by requiring a contemporary subject’s participation. The candy, as representing the body of González-Torres’s lover, then becomes incorporated into the participants’ lives and bodies, spreading and moving as they continue to move through their respective worlds. The candy’s sugar quite literally seeps onto the subjects’ tongues through their digestive systems and provides caloric energy for their movements. Indeed, Freeman’s erotohistoriography also brings forth “Torok’s notion of incorporation, of literally consuming an object that partakes of the lost body and thereby preserving it” (2010, 120).

In utilizing Freeman’s erotohistoriography, Jaclyn Pryor argues that live performance can summon these moments of “insemination” (2017). This moment connects the audience and performer in a queer ‘time slip’ that, in Pryor’s view, also challenges chrononormativity. In conjuring affective moments, queer performance artist Peggy Shaw transmits a connection outside of a traditional notion of temporality. Pryor writes:

To touch, transmit, and inseminate without making contact is not only ontologically performative, as Taylor asserts, it is quintessentially queer. As nonbiological reproduction, it subverts the heterocapitalist mandate that situates the production of surplus capital and nuclear families as the nationalist project (2017, 70).

Like Shaw, González-Torres has physically given the embodiment of his partner, Ross, into future generations through a queer seepage beyond a chrononormative temporal expectation dependent upon heterosexual reproduction. The context of the AIDS epidemic during the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to queer temporal theorists who argued against futurity as a diagnosis of death faced by gay men who are unable to heteronormatively reproduce (Edelman, 2013). This sculpture, then, transmits Laycock’s embod-

iment into a “future” outside of heteronormative temporality. In doing so, queer bodies connect in a different, queer time. In a refusal of traditional procreation, Ross’s queer body proliferates into the encountering subject, implicating the subject in a deviation from linear chrononormativity.

A sweetness, a pleasurable feeling, impresses upon Fleischmann concurrently with the ingestion of pieces of the sculpture. However, this pleasure is not without complexity: possibly akin to what González-Torres felt in the presence of their partner. Along with bodily incorporation, pleasure is conducive to an embodiment of a historiography. Freeman writes that there is the “very queer possibility that encounters with history are bodily encounters, and even that they have a revivifying and pleasurable effect” (2010, 105). Fleischmann’s pleasure in eating the candy is also attached to a deep melancholy, not only in representing a diminishing body but also in Fleischmann’s conflicting feelings present throughout their written reflection. They describe feeling both “loss” and “beauty” to be indistinguishable from one another. I suggest that this complicated feeling is conducive to a queer sense of belonging that sticks on the sculpture and Fleischmann’s reinterpretation.

While the pleasure grounds them through ingestion, incorporating embodiment, Fleischmann could become inculcated with the public’s complicity of the loss of Gonzalez Torres’s lover due to AIDS (Isherwood 2020). Pryor’s notion of “time slips” through live performance is illuminating here, as a chrononormative timeline does not allow for time to be “spent” on dallying in emotions that have yet to be healed or validated (2017, 32). For example, queer trauma at the hands of a heteronormatively systemic world is not given the “time” to be seen, heard, or healed within the forward march of a heteronormative clock (Pryor 2017). Nonetheless, Pryor also uses art to expose the cracks through which these feelings have been seeping. Pryor writes that “time slips are moments in live performance in which normative conceptions of time fail, or fall away, and the spectator or slip reveals a previously unseen aspect of either the past, present, or future (while complicating the presumably linear relationship among and between each)” (2017, 9). The moment that Fleischmann takes to ingest the sweetness of the candy, representative of Ross, is not merely a tactile grounding of pleasure but a moment to dwell in sadness. Thus, my conceptualization of queer sense of belonging also makes room for feelings not often associated with ease or comfort. I believe that they elicit an unbinding from bodily discordance in that queer bodies no longer have to contort themselves to ignore and move beyond their trauma in a way that adheres to a chrononormative forward march of time. Instead, they can take a moment to dwell in the sadness.

For Fleischmann, this moment was also a “time slip,” in that the sadness and beauty of González-Torres’s time with Ross can be seen and ultimately felt and incorporated into the bodies of others. In a world that often sidelines queer tragedy, the moment to dwell in a sadness accompanied by pleasure and love is indeed a queer moment.

The hard-candy used to create this sculpture is not extraordinary but rather a reasonably accessible, everyday material. In this section of Fleischmann’s narrative, it keeps cropping up, even outside of the art encounter (2019, 4-6). This inclusion of the object outside the curated sculpture gestures to ephemeral queerness’s glimmers in the everyday object, a hard-candy, beyond the art piece. Isherwood argues that because a queer sensibility can orientate queer bodies toward seeing the queerness in every day, it “must detect queer desire in objects and situations that might not be obvious to others” (2020, 236). Indeed, for Isherwood, this is reflective of a Muñozian ephemeral knowing: “a queer aesthetic sensibility,” he writes, “seems familiar to the practice of gay cruising and its reliance on one’s capacity to detect ephemeral traces in queer possibility” (2020, 235). Fleischmann’s references to candy outside of the encounter with the sculpture imply a connection to queerness in the everyday object: a queerness perhaps unavailable to those not searching for it. This connection might be demonstrative of Ahmed’s analysis of the uses of objects. In *What’s the Use?* Ahmed writes that “queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of things; queer uses may linger on those qualities rendering them all the more lively” (2019, 26). González-Torres’s usage of hard candy becomes ever-more salient in its altering of the purposes of an everyday object; candy takes upon a different life—one that stays with its consumers, the participants of the sculpture, and perhaps Fleischmann—and thus it gestures at a queer possibility (Muñoz 2009; Isherwood 2020).

Ben Highmore also makes a case for the everyday object’s aesthetics as being affectively significant in its messiness and “sticky entanglements.” In his article, “Bitter After Taste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics,” Highmore complicates the distinction of embodied apprehensions:

The interlacing of sensual, physical experience (here, the insistent reference to the haptic realm—touch, feel, move) with the passionate intensities of love, say, or bitterness, makes it hard to imagine untangling them, allotting them to discrete categories in terms of their physicality or the ideational existence (2010, 120).

However, acknowledging that everyday objects can be multiple, messy, and sticky, we must again acknowledge how subjectivity and personal history of affect are relevant in our encounter with art. Fleischmann points to this in their narration regarding the piece: "I know, however, that I was only in my own memories./My losses are squarely different than his,/as none of our losses are the same" (2019, 9). As Highmore suggests, it is not impossible to connect a sense of a beautiful sweetness with a positive affect beyond the taste itself. However, as Highmore also reflects, moments of "cultural experience" are "densely woven entanglement[s] of all these aspects [...] sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect are central to our contact with the world" (2010, 119). Fleischmann's encounter with the sculpture of using an everyday object is not only queer in its use, it also ties them to a tangled web of feelings that do not merely resolve. Instead, they are a bodily sensation that they see and feel in other spaces. The messiness of the mundane in its queer use sticks to Fleischmann.

Through these queer aesthetic interpretations of the piece and Fleischmann's rendition of their encounter, I have argued that the author felt a sense of "queer belonging." Despite González-Torres's and Ross's deaths, Fleischmann embodies them through the act of participating in the piece. This work opens up Fleischmann to a temporal structure that recognizes pleasurable embodiment and validates queer loss. It also can cultivate the queer into the messiness of the everyday. In a trans and queer body, Fleischmann was then able to breathe and perhaps felt an affect of belonging outside of a heteronormative framework.

Sticking to the Reader

Again, I consider the nature and relevance of "autotheory," Fleischmann's book is written in a similar way that incorporates creative elements. Autotheory also works in ways that are explicitly feminist as it serves to acknowledge idiosyncratic experiences as inseparable from the political. I acknowledge how I am only aware of Fleischmann's *narration* of their encounter. Simultaneously, there is an element of aesthetic form and technique within Fleischmann's text. Thus, through this paper, my analysis is layered. However, the layers are blurry. I first consider Fleischmann's retelling of their experience as they offer it, considering it to be a version of the truth. However, I cannot disentangle my subjectivity as I encounter this piece of work as art in itself. It is this within this messiness that things begin to get sticky.

Not only is Fleischmann encountering González-Torres, but I am encountering Fleischmann recapitulating the personal encounter with the sculpture. I am approaching and co-creating meaning in an artistic rendering of their own experience. I have access to their feelings about the piece. I encounter the feelings with my non-neutral embodiment. Their words become a unique conduit into the sculptural experience that can be affectively profound for the reader. This profundity could be explicitly amplified for the reader who regularly feels an embodied discordance and perhaps, even unknowingly, is open to unbinding in a queer sense of belonging. Just as Fleischmann's embodiment orientated them to a queer aesthetic sensibility (Isherwood 2020), the reader of their essay comes to the piece with personal, historical subjective experiences. Fleischmann's narration, theoretical inquiries, and analyses are offered to the stylistic reader, suggesting queerly affective prose. As autotheory tends to oscillate between the narrative that stretches the truth and biological "fact" (Weigman 2020), it might be that "truth" and "fiction" become entangled. Elsewhere, Fleischmann argues that traditional constructions of truth have been utilized to disavow and invalidate marginalized peoples' experiences (2013). Thus, Fleischmann argues for the value in considering these stories whose narratives offer perspectives that bleed between truth and untruths in creative writing. For Fleischmann, "the role of knowledge is not so much to inform, but to encourage exploration, especially when that exploration leads us further into the place we call the margins" (2013, 48).

As I consider how the author presents their embodiment in their book, I do not require a picture of their experience whose "accuracy" is determined through traditional epistemological methods. The transmission of Fleischmann's experience is truthful as it presents their experience of the events that open possibilities for further interpretation from the reader. I began my writing by acknowledging what led me to read Fleischmann in the first place: much of this was contingent upon my queer scholarly pursuits. Indeed, this may mean that the words impress upon me in a way that is open to particular *feelings* to which others in different circumstances might not be privy. Thus, the author's stylistic choices let me cozy into cracks and fissures of queer belonging that they have created. We create meaning together and with González-Torres as queer affect becomes transmitted through the page, sticking to Fleischmann's art.

I suggest the writing recalls similar themes of the queer aesthetic relations and forms of the sculpture that reapplies this meaning, further allowing the affect to stick. Fleischmann's text lingers, circles, dawdles and eludes

any notion of linear temporality. Paragraphs of thick description are broken by lines of prose, allowing the reader to take a moment and indulge in perhaps a tangential thread of thought. These moments exemplify a queer timeline. Rather than adhere to chrononormative linearity that asserts a forward-facing continuous march, Fleischmann takes time to dally and tarry (Muñoz 2009; Freeman 2010). This also makes room for Pryor's "time slip." The reader is given a new time to join Fleischmann in their emotive and affecting reflections. Indeed, many of the incorporations of poetic accounts demand attention to one's embodiment, as Fleischmann's descriptions ground the author in their trans body. Highmore characterizes bodily experiences of aesthetic modes as being difficult to disentangle from one another. Thus, the reader can *feel* and be affected by Fleischmann's experiences alongside them. A queer reader can open themselves to the impressions of the candy, for example, and the space in which Fleischmann can finally breathe; we are drawn in with complex pleasure and sadness, connecting to Fleischmann and connecting to González-Torres and Ross Laycock. I suggest that residues of this "queer sense of belonging" stick to me, as I allow it to impress upon my queer body. This suggestion does not say that a non-queer-identifying reader would not have an affective experience. Instead, insofar as queer bodies are open and orientated to these experiences (Ahmed 2006; Isherwood 2020), the boundaries of these bodies and objects become blurred, unlike if an encountering subject is closed off, perhaps hardened, or at the very least not "reading into" the aesthetics for deeper, queer meaning (Doyle & Getsy 2013).

Conclusion

This reading of sticky affective aesthetics through an autotheoretical retelling can potentially open us to different timelines and different worlds that offer queer belonging. As Fleischmann details this affective experience of belonging, I feel its traces wash over me. The affective encounter with a piece of art can be transmitted poignantly through reinterpretations to a queer reader or a reader unknowingly open to a possible queer sense of belonging. To have this experience mediated through another queer person means to connect with their embodied interpretation of the event at a later date. When Fleischmann talks about how they suddenly feel like they have room to breathe, bodies bound up by chrononormativity can relax in tandem. Co-creation of meaning in art can occur across various formats that open possibilities for connections outside of the logic of chrononormative tempo-

rality. While the interlocutor is apprehending a different mediated experience, there still is some level of access to the affective feeling of belonging as Fleischmann transmits this through the page.

I wrote this paper during the time of forced closures due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which poses a unique challenge for art and artists. Because of this, I considered how art, which presumes an embodied participatory component, retains its possibility to be accessed despite our inability to attend museums or performances at this time. If queer artists and writers reinterpret and retell their embodied encounters, queer readers can connect to these moments in a genuine and affective manner. This consideration does not offer an all-encompassing solution to closures or the nature of accessibility via economic privileges or varying bodily abilities. Nevertheless, it does show that affective elements of art, particularly art encompassing queer aesthetic forms, can stick and transmit to other bodies in a way that can be meaningful: by imbuing a queer sense of belonging.

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