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The Weight of Queerness: Reflections on a Digital Storytelling Project

Karleen Pendleton Jiménez and Jen Rinaldi

Introduction

We came to write this article as collaborators on a 2015 digital storytelling project entitled *Through Thick and Thin*,[1] which focused on queer women's[2] navigation of weight stigma and disordered eating. Our team comprised senior and junior professors, graduate students, community partners, and artists, with core members all queer-identified. Our queerness was complicated by body markers related to body shape and size, gender identity and expression, race and Indigeneity, mental and physical disability, class and age. That complexity only multiplied when our team recruited participants through our community partner.[3] We asked potential recruits how they self-identify in relation to a range of identity markers, so as to ensure that among those invited to participate the most privileged identities were not overrepresented. Our selective recruitment method reflected a project commitment to diverse representation, established because of our team's vested interest in telling stories that celebrate difference. Across these differences, everyone involved in the project was in some way queer and had a complicated relationship with their body weight.

The project unfolded in the form of two workshops: a five-day workshop in June and July 2015 serving as training and a self-reflexive exercise for team members and a three-day workshop in November and December 2015 designed to support participants.[4] For each workshop, the people tasked with video making gathered with workshop facilitators, including hired artists. Participants developed scripts that explored their relationship to queerness and body weight. They presented those scripts in a story circle that involved everyone present at the workshop, after which a hired artist helped them prepare audio recordings of them reading their script. In the days that followed, participants paired their audio recording with visuals (photographs, moving images, and drawings) and with the special effects that video editing software made avail-

able to them. The workshops yielded sixteen digital stories — a small but mighty video archive.

These videos were produced through a digital storytelling method that pairs an autobiographical script with moving imagery.[5] Drafted with care and with artist support in workshop settings, each script was grounded in a video maker's life experiences and recited in the video maker's voice. Video makers also chose the imagery featured and decided how it would be edited together and presented alongside their words. Each story captured an intersection of queer sexuality and body weight. The archive sparks joy, provokes thought, and offers intimate portrayals of a storyteller's relationship with their queer body.

The two authors of this paper each contributed a story to this archive of sixteen videos. These stories represent so much of us and convey difficult, self-affirming lessons we have lived. At a metatextual level, they tell another story about community arts praxis in fraught political space — that is, about the workshop itself and the community that crystallized and came apart through the project's duration. In this paper, we describe the stories we told and the process we undertook to produce them. We take turns doing this, in sections naming their author. Throughout, we consider what our stories say about queerness residing in bodies we have each taken time to accept and what it means to compose and tell stories about our queer bodies in community and professional contexts.[6] Through product and process, we show how our self-reflexive research project enabled us to reperform queerness in ways that confronted and transformed our relationships to shame and desire.

Our Films

Jen: Wednesday's Ghost[7]

The digital story *Wednesday's Ghost* opens with a photograph of my bedroom. I am drawing my curtains shut, closing myself in with you — my voyeur. Layers of photographs make me appear as though I am moving, such that echoes of me linger in the frame. My voice-over starts: "My first crush had dark locks like Wednesday Addams's[8] pleated pigtails, and a penchant for posing metaphysical questions. 'Are you dreaming right now?' she'd tease when dabbling in Cartesian[9] philosophy." In the pause, an image of a Froudian fairy[10] — a drawing excerpted from a visual art book of fantasy characters — is superimposed on the screen. She is crouched at the foot of the bed, staring into the camera lens, all

mischief. My voice-over continues with Wednesday's taunt: "Is someone dreaming you?"

The screen fades to black and resets with a series of photographs of my kitchen, its marble counter stretched across the foreground and shining like a reflecting pond. With each photograph I bustle about to prepare a meal, and clutter — pots, appliances, produce — comes to fill the space. In the voice-over, I reflect on my relationship with Wednesday: "She used to make a game of watching me eat, emerald eyes trained on my sticky fingers and bovine chewing." The relationship I am describing was riddled with toxic adoration, wherein moments of eating were both shameful and sensuous. The camera catches my hands cutting and collecting yams as fairy images flicker in and out of focus — their hauntings brief, their eyes on my motions, their forms bleeding out of the frame. The scene fades to black, leaving a single fairy behind, with the following words: "She'd rattle off her daily caloric intake and for the first time in my life I realized I was fat."

Figure 1: Fairy sitting. Still image from video credited to Jen Rinaldi.[11]

I carry on in the voice-over: "Behind closed doors I'd stand before mirrors contorting back to expose bone, clawing belly to find flesh." In successive photographs, I am still alone in my kitchen, still meticulously preparing a meal, still visibly haunted. The fairies' opacity firms up, and they linger longer to watch me cook. With the use of a special effect, one fairy pulsates with light when I enunciate an abrasive diagnostic

term: *anorexia*, a thing that "seeped through and swelled in me to the point of eclipse." The screen then burns up and gives way again to black.

The next series of photographs shows me in my bedroom cycling through an evening routine as the voice-over ruminates on recovery.[12] The whole room pulsates when I articulate another stark medical term: *homosexuality*, the stuff of "queers and dykes and fairies." More superimposed images of apparitions gather around the frame, perched at my feet and my headboard. They hold steady as I consider the role heteronormativity played in my recovery: "When boys first laid their hands upon me . . . it might have taken me time to learn to like it the way one learns to abide a noxious drink, some acquired taste. But I could at least take comfort in knowing they read this body, marked this body, as . . . healed and whole and worthy." It's an uncomfortable marking, one that ties my recovery to a sexuality stripped of its queerness and tangled in heteropatriarchal power. Each of the three descriptors I identify as my markers coincides with a special effect: a jolt of static ripples through each fairy on the screen. The violence of the narrative pulses through these tokens of desire, as though inflicting injury.

Figure 2: Fairies surround a woman in bed. Still image from video credited to Jen Rinaldi.[13]

The final scene begins with the following voice-over: "I cannot claim an identity that carries the tracings of diagnosis. I was fixed." I am cleaning my kitchen, making my bed, and pulling open my curtains as each fairy evaporates. But I admit that "Wednesday's ghost haunts me. I

imagine her watching me eat, wondering whether this reality of mine is dreamt up." A reality dreamt or a subjectivity painstakingly crafted can appear together and tidy in the light of day when the figurative curtains are drawn back. Such a subjectivity might not overtly convey to others a history of disorder and recovery and might present an oversimplified relationship to desire, but the memories still linger.

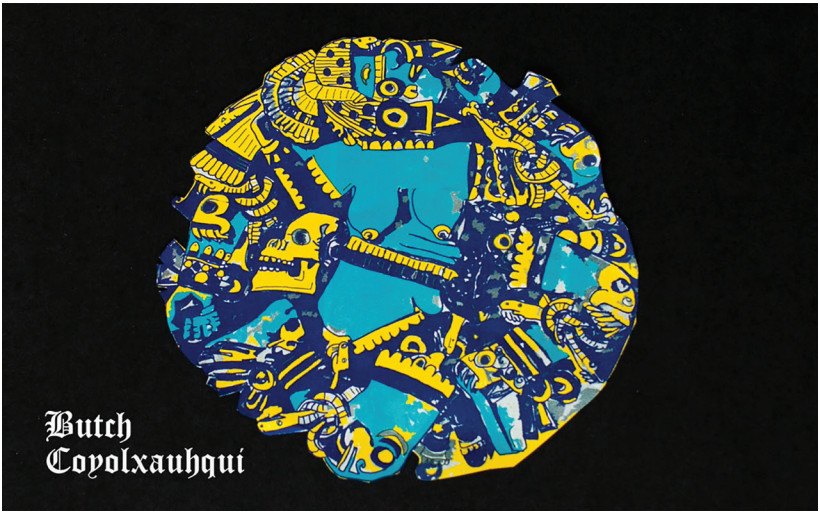

Figure 3: Circular stone engraving of Coyolxauhqui. Still image from video credited to Karleen Pendleton Jiménez.

Karleen: Butch Coyolxauhqui[14]

The film opens with a bright gold and turquoise rendering of the Coyolxauhqui circular stone sculpture. Coyolxuahqui is an Aztec goddess who was murdered by her brother Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. He cut up her body, chopped off her head, and threw it up into the sky, after which she became the moon. A giant stone depicting her severed body was found buried at the Templo Mayor in Mexico City (Knab 24; Schroeder 68). The drawn image in my film is my reconstruction of a photograph (Thelmadatter). The circle quickly breaks up into body pieces that spread across the screen and give way to old family photographs.

The narration begins with a story of my body and my mother's body in relationship. Black and white photos show my mother holding me tenderly through the years. I am smiling with the pleasure of my moth-

er's body around me, which contrasts with narrated voice-over stories of discrimination perpetrated by others against my mother's perceived fat body: "The doctors put her on speed to lose weight by the time she was fourteen; the man at the food stand gave her less guacamole out of concern for her health." Coyolxauhqui returns to the screen reconfigured into an upright body that stumbles and loses her head. Only the head remains on screen, representing the daughter moon and circling the subsequent photographs. The black and white photos that follow are erotic shots of my butch body. The narration recounts the special qualities and skills of a butch body: "I've got the emotional insights of estrogen. . . . I've got the desperate drive of testosterone. . . . Sometimes I feel like a superhero, like I could love any woman's body." The pride expressed in these shots ends abruptly when I confess that while I am adept at loving other women's bodies, I have difficulty loving my own.

The imagery and narrative that follow from this line depict my awkward, gender ambiguous childhood, shifting again to Coyolxauhqui and a flying penis that she takes hold of. It is a humorous image that lightens my narration, while I discuss the feeling of having become a monster because of my dual embodiment of fat man and fat woman. As I describe my own body parts, the camera focuses in on those of Coyolxauhqui instead, offering the safety of a stand-in sculptured body to look at instead of me having to expose my own. Finally, I challenge the assumption that Coyolxauhqui[15] and I have been perceived as grotesque and insist instead that we might also be beautiful: "A fallen goddess severed into pieces, but a goddess nonetheless etched in giant stone for hundreds of years. Someone had to believe she was important for that to happen; someone must have thought her beautiful."

Queers on Screen

Jen on Wednesday's Ghost: Recovering from Regulation

The video's choreography illustrates the life force of routine. My body carries out the rhythms of preparing a meal and turning in at night. In so doing, I am enacting the bio-pedagogies imprinted in my muscle memory. Borrowing from traditionally Foucauldian terminology (Foucault 18), *bio-pedagogy* comprises the normative standards, instructions, and directions for daily living that surface through iterative, embodied performance (Wright 2). These life lessons teach individuals "how to live, how to eat, how much to eat, how to move, how much

to move" (Harwood 15). Throughout my video, the bio-pedagogical routines that move me and structure my time are patently recognizable in otherwise static empty space to the extent that they are corporeally performed. Judith Butler describes performativity as a "citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies* 2). A body that performs its bio-pedagogical lessons brings those lessons into being.

Figure 4: Fairies surround a woman cleaning her kitchen. Still image from video credited to Jen Rinaldi.[16]

Butler's theory of performativity references how a body can be sexed and how signifiers of sexual differences operate within heterosexual matrices. The materiality of sex is "sustained through . . . regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony" (*Bodies* 15). Diane Griffin Crowder explains this notion in plainer terms: "The assumption of heterosexuality as a *natural* relation between male and female bodies has often been translated . . . into the literal (re/de)construction of the female body" (48). *Wednesday's Ghost* depicts my being sexed, my coming into a sexed body, through heterosexual norms that were at once violent and formative. I learn to like men and what they do to me "the way one learns to abide a noxious drink, some acquired taste." In other words, I learn bio-pedagogies through submission to habit.

I also perform recovery in Wednesday's Ghost to the extent that I make space for rest (instead of exercise) and prepare food (rather than restricting my eating). Put simply, routine saves my life. When I feel

myself lapsing into obsessive thoughts about body image and compulsive habits related to eating and exercise, I recommit myself to iterative bodywork that has kept me alive. Those particular routines are inextricably bound up in my sexuality. That is, I perform recovery in relation to a normalized and naturalized sexuality. Across the duration of the digital story, clutter gathers around me as my narrative sinks into the complications of my sexuality and of body shame, but I tidy my living space before I open the curtains to invite in the day. "I cannot claim an identity that carries the tracings of diagnosis," I reflect as I clean. "I was fixed," I say definitively and with some remorse, invoking Butlerian performativity to the extent that the embodied identity I came to claim was something that sedimented and hardened through practice.

I avoid queer performance, then, because I developed disordered eating through queer desire. The story I tell in this video is rooted in my attraction to a girl who herself found solace in disordered eating habits. All my efforts to be near her and everything I learned from her took deep root in eating and exercise. When constructing the video's content, then, and imagining the shape of my impulses, I remembered Portia de Rossi's memoir, wherein she describes anorexia as "a drill sergeant of a voice that is pushing me forward, marching ahead, keeping time" (3), a "deep, male voice that was so loud and clear" (27). The repressed voice in me, however, was softer, feminine, and seductive; it coaxed like a mistress rather than ordering like a military man.

What about fairies? The fairies of *Wednesday's Ghost* are quiet in places — faint and unobtrusive, keeping watch. As the narrative intensifies, they come into focus and are stubborn about staying, their superimposed images fading from the screen only when the photographs beneath them feature me cleaning — as though I can wash away traces of them. But their residue, a remnant of queer desire, remains in my muscle and my marrow, haunting and teasing, despite all my efforts to perform otherwise. Given how I have constructed and come to queer desire, I cannot shake its attendant dangers. But Brian Froud, the artist who created the fairies I included in my video, articulates that "despite our tendency to split the world into good and bad, right and wrong, light and dark, we must remember that in truth (and in the faery realms) such divisions are not always cleanly cut. Each contains a piece of the other" (*Good* n.pag.). I am still vegan, after all, in a commitment I made after Wednesday lectured me on animal cruelty. I became a philosopher long after she teased me with metaphysical puzzles. Despite

the self-starvation, my attachment to her was healthier than many men's attachments to me. Through digital storytelling, I worked to reconcile with — rather than renounce — my history. I reached into the depths of that history as though venturing into another realm or staring into healing waters. And I found inspiration to do so in Froud, who expresses his sincere "hope and intent" that his visual art "may be of active use in engaging Faery's potent transformational powers" (*Good* n.pag.).

Karleen on Butch Coyolxauhqui: How Do You Screen a Butch Dyke?

> The masculine woman prowls the film set as an emblem of social upheaval and as a marker of sexual disorder. She wears the wrong clothes, expresses aberrant desires, and is very often associated with clear markers of a distinctly phallic power. She may carry a gun, smoke a cigar, wear leather, ride a motorbike; she may swagger, strut, boast, flirt with younger and more obviously feminine women. . . . (Halberstam, *Female* 186)

My first attempt at the visual representation of my butch adult self was prompted by the viewing of two versions of the film *Beauty and the Beast* when I was twenty-six years old. In both films, queer artists held instrumental roles in the creative process. The 1946 version featured the gaze of director Jean Cocteau on his male lover, actor Jean Marais, portraying (in furry costume) the role of the Beast (Cocteau, *Diary*). In Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (released in 1991 and directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise), the Beast hopes to charm Beauty while struggling with shame over his body and escaping a mob attack by villagers. The film score features lyrics by gay songwriter Howard Ashman (Leon), who died of AIDS before the movie's release. I began to understand that the role of the Beast was a home for queer subjectivity and promptly sketched an image of myself in a notebook. I drew in dark smudged pencil a butch/trans beast, with large breasts, belly, and dick, covered with hair. The image was an epiphany for me as it finally captured what I could not find in the mirror but showed clearly for the first time the body that was in my mind. I was simultaneously satisfied that I had found a way to depict myself accurately and embarrassed that I had drawn this image, which was now something tangible that existed outside of myself. Someone else might see it or might see me. On the one hand, I was proud to view myself as a fully developed sexual being; on the other hand, I was ashamed of the part man/part woman beastly

body that I perceived to be unnatural or perverted. I stared at it for many days and then hid it away with the rest of my piles of notebooks.

The forgotten image was uncovered when I was forty-three years old and given the task during the *Through Thick and Thin* research project to create a film about my butch body. Through a free-writing process, the beastly image reappeared in my mind, so I wrote it into the script: "I drew a picture of myself as a monster with breasts, a dick and a growing stomach, all of which I tried to keep covered." I dug through piles of my old journals attempting to unearth the physical image but could not locate it. I do not think its disappearance is a coincidence. Each time I hear the above line at a screening of my film, I am shocked by it. I forget it each time to keep my queer shame at bay. It is a forgetting that helps me to survive my queerness (Halberstam, *Queer* 70).

If gender is a repetition of practices en masse (Butler, *Gender*), what butches exist on the screen for me to copy? Butch images in film are not plentiful, and when they appear they often possess similar characteristics: "Contemporary dyke cinema is filled with sexy images of butches as tomboys, predators, perverts, and queers" (Halberstam, *Female* 230). They are often aggressive, rude, raunchy, sadistic, hanging out with the guys (Pérez 155), leering at women, though sometimes simultaneously chivalrous, humorous, and handsome.[17] They admire beauty in other women. Butches on screen possess the gaze and the desire for feminine women; it can be perverted or unnatural desire, a non-heteronormative desire, and often simultaneously a sexy desire for the beauty of feminine women. What butches are not, however, is beautiful themselves. They are typically not presented as objects of beauty to be gazed upon. They are the ones who will act upon a woman with desire but will not be acted upon. For a butch to be the object of beauty would add unnaturalness to the already unnatural predicament of queer desire.

I had a different idea in mind for *Butch Coyolxauhqui*. In 1991, I needed all of the courage I could muster to come out as a butch dyke, cut my hair, and cross the aisle to the men's department. But truth be told, the fear was relatively brief, as the transition from tomboy to butch felt more natural to me than the pink sweaters I wore for five years as a failed heteronormative disguise. In the representation of butch experience, I personally need to shore up far more courage to remove the clothes. *Butch Coyolxauhqui* is symbolic of the removal of butch clothing, albeit through the use of a stone carved goddess.

Halberstam[18] described their book *Female Masculinity* as "an attempt to make my own female masculinity plausible, credible, and real" (19). As with Halberstam's statement, my work over the past twenty years has been devoted to the project of butch representation and legitimacy. I have written about a broad range of butch humanity (e.g., Chicana butch intersectionality, butch daughtering, butch childhood, butch parenting, butch working, and butch desire). *Butch Coyolxauhqui* is a frightening, new sliver of this project. It is an attempt to render the butch body an object of beauty.

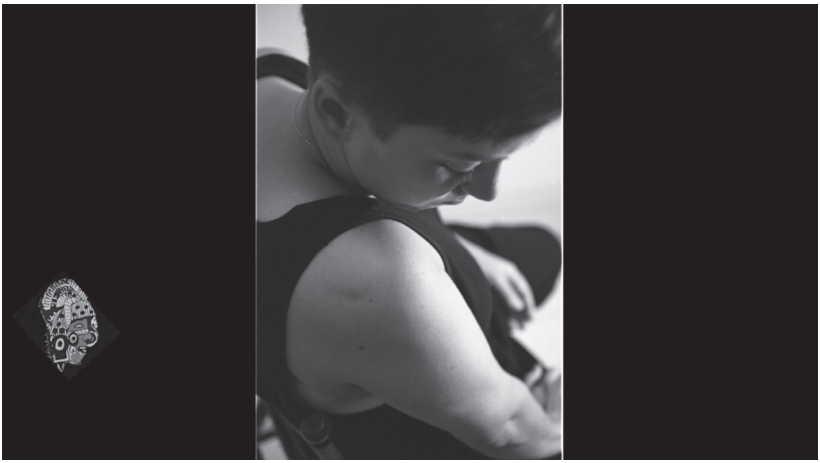

Figure 5: A black and white photograph of a butch woman looking over her shoulder. Coyolxauhqui's head hovers outside the frame. Still image from video credited to Karleen Pendleton Jiménez.

Part of my inspiration is derived from Ivan Coyote's YouTube performance piece "To All of the Kick Ass, Beautiful Fierce Femmes Out There." The performance piece includes the pleasure of butch topping with the fear and shame of butch bottoming (if only briefly). Coyote describes how painful and precarious it can be to let their femme lover touch their butch body: "sometimes my chest is a field full of landmines." The butch chest is described as a "landmine" to a lover's touch. The butch body is momentarily available. It is the only moment on screen that I have seen a butch body available to another's desire. With this availability comes a danger not thoroughly described, but I imagine a "landmine" to involve a butch's physical aggression or withdrawal. Either response could be a devastating turn from the intended pleasure

of the erotic encounter. Coyote confesses that "there is no manual, there is no road map, no helpline you can call. My body does not come with instructions, and sometimes even I don't know what to do with it. This cannot be easy." I take Coyote's words as a recognition of the need for a map, a visual cue, or some type of medium of navigation that could successfully hold a butch body still for a moment to give us all a chance to see and touch what it is. I offer *Butch Coyolxauhqui* as such a visual cue toward the representation of the butch body, uncovered.

In another collaborative research paper that emerged from the *Through Thick and Thin* research study, one of my research partners described my film initially as a move toward embracing my femininity. I was shocked by this notion and promptly erased the words. In my pursuit of having my body recognized as beautiful, in no way did I mean to suggest that my body was feminine. The possibility of having my work perceived in this way was frightening, but it also provoked me to question what I was actually attempting to show. Was I talking about the feminization of the butch body? Is that what it means to become an object of beauty? In a collaborative article entitled "A Butch Dandy and a Trans Man Get Real about the Intersection of Their Identities," Laura Bridgeman explains that "sometimes, it can take a lot of courage to define as butch and wear the clothes and have the haircut that you've always wanted. There can be shame around butch presentation, the butch body, the feminisation of the body with hips, and tits and periods. But if we can come together and talk, it does help." What is interesting to me here is that naming the butch's womanly body parts is linked (or equated) with feminization. Exposing a butch's womanly parts is the imbuing of femininity. But does this have to be the case? Couldn't a butch offer male/masculine breasts, stomach, and pussy to be caressed or objectified?[19] Could there be less butch shame if these body parts are perceived as masculine? Are we collapsing body parts with gender? Are we collapsing top desire with masculinity and bottom desire with femininity? This approach is as harmful for butches who want to be held, as it would be for femmes who like to fuck. I offer the film *Butch Coyolxauhqui* as "queer cinema," as a way to look again—or even for the first time—at butch bodies and to recognize their beauty. As Halberstam notes, "Queer cinema, with its invitations to play through numerous identifications within a single sitting, creates one site for creative reinvention of ways of seeing" (*Female* 179).

Figure 6: People sitting around a long table, working. Photo credited to Project ReVision.

Conclusion: Thoughts on Process

Jen: Coming Out with Story

I often look back to 2015 and think about what a *terrible* idea it was to poke at my rawest vulnerabilities through the course of a research project I was leading. It's hard to know which hat to wear in the middle of self-reflexive research creation: the hat of the project lead who solves problems, puts out fires, and takes the long view or the hat of the participant who gets to feel the affective impacts of the goings-on in the room and trusts the people tasked with holding the space. That tension was certainly clear enough in our summer workshop, wherein research team members came together to practise our methodology *as* participants. The story each of us settled on for video making spoke back against a bio-pedagogical script that held us firm. But we each brought to our round table a different body history, a unique set of bio-pedagogies to resist, a fresh assemblage of privileges and disadvantages that put some of us on collision courses with one another.

In many ways, I was an ally in that space: white settler, cis-gender, thirty-something, thin. I held power as a project lead and as an established scholar with job security. Especially significant to the pro-

ject itself, I am not always read as queer — rightly so since, as I just described through storytelling, I have a history of resisting all my queer instincts. So for most intents and purposes, I am an ally, and allyship entails not centring oneself in the work (Almassi 12; Hemmings 153). And to be honest, I feel much more comfortable behind the scenes than I do at the centre of a show. As part of my efforts to enact recovery and to avoid the stigma attached to disordered eating, I prefer not to draw attention.

Nonetheless, the methodology we advanced in this project included a self-reflexive praxis that situated — without necessarily centring — researchers.[20] Our first workshop with research team members prepared us for our second with participants, because by the time we met participants we had done the work to understand what they might be feeling when exploring and exposing their vulnerabilities. I am an ideal choice to participate in a test run because, as an ally in so many respects, I have far less to lose when telling my story. I also owed the community at the heart of this research project some deep contemplation on my own positionalities, some coming to terms with my own daemons, in order to earn trust and a place at the table.

This does not necessarily mean I gave myself over to collaborative artistic praxis. I avoided artist support and conducted much of my video making tasks from home. If I had to be exposed, I preferred at the very least to be polished. And after producing my video, I have not used it in any conference or community setting. I have relegated all presentation and analysis of *Wednesday's Ghost* to scholarly publications, so I do not have to look an audience in the face. Admittedly, all my concerns about "performing polished" reinscribe the worst habits I identify in my digital story. I am still holding back on presenting as too queer or as not recovered enough. I am still controlling who has access to the version of myself presented in my video for fear that too much vulnerability leads to shame. But what a difficult thing it was, showcasing my body and my story. Five years later, as I watch my younger self on screen, I can feel that old impulse to judge harshly how my body has taken shape since filming. Every viewing hurts, like a cut freshly opened. But at least the existence of the video feels like I have thrown open the curtains for the briefest glimpse of my clutter — and that surely counts as a disruption, however small, to my usual bio-pedagogical scripts.

Karleen: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative

In arts inquiry, when considering the production of knowledge, the process of creation can be as significant as the product. Chloë Brushwood Rose and Bronwen Low found in their research on digital narratives that it was important to pay attention not only to the content of digital narratives and not only to the aesthetic qualities of the visual art but also to "the story of their creative process and their process of self-representation" (34). The story of my creative process takes me to the act of the art, within community and as an individual.

In this case, I was deeply moved by the group learning that other participants/researchers and I experienced through our workshops together. Each of us brought our expertise as writers, editors, filmmakers, visual artists, facilitators, teachers, fat-phobia activists, and eating disorder scholars. We sat together in a large boardroom, busily writing out scripts, editing sound, brainstorming visuals, learning software, and taking photographs. It was an experience reminiscent of the "lifeforce" Audre Lorde describes in her essay "Uses of the Erotic": "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce 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" (55). It was a *sensational* experience working on art in a space full of queer women (who identified partially or fully with the term "woman"), and I am referring to the literal meaning of sensational; it was a profoundly sensory/sensitive undertaking that encouraged enduring learning. It brought together the power of women working creatively as a collective and the focus on the energy of our bodies on this endeavour. As Sara Ahmed describes, there is a creative force to queer women building together and loving together, drawing upon their bodies as their source of strength:

> We could think of lesbian feminism as willful carpentry: she builds with her own hands; she is handy. Maybe I am thinking too of your arms, your strong butch arms and what they can do, whom they can hold; of how they can hold me. If a feminist history is army, . . . that history is also a history of lesbian arms.
>
> I think of being held by your arms
>
> Yes, I do (232-33)

Figure 7: Engraving of Coyolxauhqui broken apart. Still image from video credited to Karleen Pendleton Jiménez.

As I sat with the others, I remembered that Coyolxauhqui had a body sculpted in stone. And I turned to her to learn about my own body. I traced the photograph of her stone sculpture. I drew over her image with black ink. I connected the lines so that I could fill the spaces with bright turquoise and gold from the computer. I drew bells and bellies over and over again. I lifted her body from the sculpture and watched her walk across the screen. I animated stone. Judith Butler asks:

> What kind of subversive repetition [of our bodies, genders, or sex] might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?
>
> If there is no recourse to a "person," a "sex," or a "sexuality" that escapes the matrix of power and discursive relations that effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts for us, what constitutes the possibility of effective inversion, subversion, or displacement within the terms of a constructed identity? (*Gender* 32)

That repeated movement of my hand and my careful eye over each detail of Coyolxauhqui until I loved her and loved myself are my answer to Butler's call for a repetition that subverts the monster. They are my answer to a queer cinema that remakes and transforms from the contradictory stories and representations of queer lives. They are my answer to making room for the beauty of butch bodies.

I chose Coyolxauhqui as an object for the digital story writing

prompt because when I looked at my butch body after pregnancy, with large breasts and a creased stomach, I was at a loss as to how to make a relationship with this body. I couldn't remember having seen a body like it. But the push to make the film in and with community helped me to recall Coyolxauhqui, who is also a foundation for Chicana feminist theorizing.

> The path of the artist, the creative impulse, what I call the Coyolxauhqui imperative is basically an attempt to heal the wounds. It's a search for inner completeness. Suffering is one of the motivating forces of the creative impulse. Adversity calls forth your best energies and most creative solutions. Creativity sets off an alchemical process that transforms adversity and difficulties into works of art. All of life's adventures go into the cauldron, la hoya, where all fragments, inconsistencies, contradictions are stirred and cooked to a new integration. They undergo transformation. (Anzaldúa 292)

The work of our filmmaking followed Anzaldúa's description of the Coyolxauhqui imperative of gathering, regrouping, and transforming the painful, beautiful, and humorous parts of ourselves as a creative process. As both researchers and participants in this process, we had the opportunity to experience dual aspects of this research project, assembling and regrouping a queer filmmaking community while simultaneously pulling apart and reconstructing our own bodies on film. We exemplified Halberstam's notion of a queer cinema "that recycles as much as it produces" (*Female* 185), then grows through healing, bodies, and community.

Notes

[1] This project was possible thanks to a Women's College Hospital funding program called the Women's Xchange $15K Challenge. Our team earned a large-scale $75,000 grant to improve women's health and quality of life through gender-sensitive community-based research.

[2] While our focus on women satisfied the conditions of a Women's College Hospital grant, we used the term loosely and ensured our space was inclusive to trans, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming folks by inviting in people who claimed the identifier *woman* wholly or partially.

[3] This project was conducted in collaboration with Rainbow Health Ontario, a province-wide LGBTQQIP2SAA health-care provider housed at Sherbourne Health Centre in Toronto.

[4] Workshops took place at Sherbourne Health Centre and made use of Project ReVision's mobile media laboratory equipment for video making and editing.

[5] Our research team adopted a methodology founded by the arts-based research program Project ReVision, which oversees a cluster of digital storytelling projects invested in exploring marginalized differences, including disability, Indigeneity, and queerness.

[6] Storytellers own their work and determine whether their videos will be anonymized or will contain credits.

[7] *Wednesday's Ghost* is available for viewing at revisioncentre.ca/the-weight-of-queerness. The password needed to access the film is *weight*.

[8] For readers who are unaware of the reference, this character is from a franchise with many properties, including the 1991 film *The Addams Family* that I watched when I was a child. I was drawn for so long to the character's deadpan delivery, political action, and gothic schoolgirl aesthetic.

[9] I am referencing René Descartes's Dream Argument in his treatise "Meditations on First Philosophy," wherein he begins with radical doubt in order to build his theory of knowledge on solid foundations.

[10] All fairy imagery comes from Brian Froud's unpaginated head-to-tail ("*tête bêche*") book *Good Faeries / Bad Faeries*. Froud is best known for his artistic contributions to dark fantasy films that captured my imagination through my youth, namely *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*.

[11] The cut-out image is named Laume, found in Froud's *Good Faeries / Bad Faeries*.

[12] In this scene I am reading Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, a 1905 book about an impoverished woman who uses ornament and affectation to hide her debts. I included the book in my digital story because the juxtaposition of Lily Bart's glamourous facade and tragic inner life felt like a fitting — albeit pretentious — analogy.

[13] The fairies featured left to right are Froud's Little Nell, Lilu, and Gwenhwyfar, all featured in *Good Faeries / Bad Faeries*.

[14] *Butch Coyolxauhqui* is available for viewing at revisioncentre.ca/the-weight-of-queerness. The password needed to access the film is *weight*.

[15] It was after many days of working with an online photograph of Coyolxauhqui's stone that I began to read the description of the photograph: "Coyolxauhqui is shown naked, with sagging breasts and a stretched belly to indicate that she was a mother. For the Mexica, nakedness was considered a form of humiliation and defeat" (Kilroy-Ewbank). I found myself shocked at the negative descriptors of the goddess, "sagging," "stretched," and "humiliated," because when I looked at her, I only saw beauty. I could not see these words; I describe the same features using the words "big," "creased," and "proud."

[16] The fairies featured left to right are Froud's Water Fay, Lady of the Faery Well, and Quempel, all featured in *Good Faeries / Bad Faeries*.

[17] See, for example, the butch characters in *Touch of Evil*, *Locas*, *Aliens*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Orange Is the New Black*, *Set it Off*, *The L Word*, *Queer as Folk*, and *Gentleman Jack*.

[18] As a theorist self-reflexively exploring the contours of gender queerness, Halberstam has written using the first names Jack and Judith. See Halberstam's interview with Sinclair Sexsmith.

[19] Many thanks to trans activist Hershel T. Russell, who in a conversation with me in October 2019 suggested that all butch body parts could be viewed as masculine.

[20] Across a range of projects that involved digital storytelling with marginalized populations, Project ReVision developed a methodology that requires self-reflexivity on the part of research team members (see Rice et al.). This approach to research blurs the boundaries and dissolves the potential power imbalance between facilitator and participant. Researchers come to know the digital storytelling process by themselves taking part in it. They also

contribute their own narratives to the data pool, so they are reminded of their own vulnerability when facilitating workshops and analyzing finished products.

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