

A FEW NOTES ON INTIMACY

My alarm clock clicks on and the CBC DJ announces one from Carly Rae Jepsen. “Too Much” admits to excess. *When I party, then I party too much / When I feel it, then I feel it too much.*¹ I’ve listened to the song a fair bit since it came out, but this is the first time I’ve done it in the suggestible state of half-sleep. When Jepsen sings repeatedly to her addressee, *Is this too much?* it resonates with a question I’ve often asked myself: *Am I not enough?*

What does this exchange between too much and not enough involve? Both sides invoke a frame of brokenness, an excess or lack that deviates from normative sexualities. In critical work on intimacy, Lauren Berlant insists on the public face of intimacy, asking how we can *think about the ways attachments make people public*,² which is a way of asking, since we are always in intimate relation, with someone or something, how our intimacies are public. The seeming brokenness of desire isn’t the result of some individual subjective failure to desire correctly, but is instead the very public feeling that accompanies the work of building relation when the path to relation-building isn’t clearly cut.

Even in loneliness, I am always in relation, living in the place where the demand for tact meets the assembled eyes of surveillance.

1.
“Too Much,” track 8 on Carly Rae Jepsen, *Dedicated*, 604 Records, 2019.

2
Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” in *Intimacy*, ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.



Orientations, Sara Ahmed tells us, *are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places*.³ Despite insistences from many asexual folks that asexuality doesn't delimit a person's ability to make relationships or enter the spaces burrowed out by the couple form, I find asexuality involves a peculiar kind of loneliness resultant of spaces unfolding and bending with the body in ways that resist a sticky permanence created when sex and romance harden and institutionalize intimacy.

As I write this, I'm oriented by the space in my one-bedroom basement apartment rented in the Beaches neighbourhood of Toronto for the obscene price of \$1375/month. I generously call the corner of the apartment I'm working in my *library*—a space I decided to carve out of this one room open-concept void. I sit at my desk with my back to no fewer than seven Ikea bookshelves, each one buckling with the weight. An assemblage of objects that extend to and from me. These objects help me read the world and in turn orient me. When I leave this little library, or when I enter a space where I can't read the room, I feel queered in Ahmed's sense, misoriented by a pushy mesh of unpredictable relation. Left tapping on a compass that doesn't seem to work.



Bee and flower, wasp and orchid, lung and air, hammer and nail, ball and socket, book and shelf, snow and plough, shoe and sock, foot and mouth, tea and mug, soup and bowl, fork and knife, nut and bolt, water and pipe, lens and eye, electricity and wire, hook and gill, rack and tire, rain and umbrella, scissors and paper, bob and weave, punch and jab, ball and hoop, knit and purl, dirt and spade, heave and ho, check and double-check, tick and box, foot and doorframe, wiener and bun, cock and asshole, tooth and nail, road and shoulder, trash and dumpster, trash and landfill, trash and raccoon, dam and flood, the clouds and the lake, the lake and my kitchen tap, the surface of the water and the life just under it, symptom and underlying cause, bubbles and champagne, base and superstructure, branch and swing, subject and subjectivity, improvisation and routine, date and duration, tape measure and plywood sheet, board and ramp, rent and landlord, property and trespass, development and real estate, penthouse and the clear

3

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

view of Grouse Mountain, north and south, slavery and liberation, pickaxe and shovel, wax and wick, fluff and fold, plastic and ocean, hook and eye, country and western, rhythm and blues, country and western and rhythm and blues, discipline and punishment, culture and imperialism, process and reality, being and event, writing and difference, mourning and melancholy, sign and machine, architecture and urbanism, fixity and flow, intensive and extensive, shipping and logistics, private and public, care and harm, peace and love, culture and nature, squirrel and nut, bear and salmon, mosquito and blood, moth and bulb, housefly and the musk of inertia, breeze and plastic grocery bag, flora and fauna, wax and wane, steam and sauna, black and blue, red and gold, sun and moon, friendship and fire, love and autonomy, kith and kin, politics and economy, sink and swim, on and off, up and down, one and zero, x and y, right and left, signal and noise, grate and vent, everyday and exceptional, window and street, panorama and crowd, fold and soul, this and that, here and there, like and love.



Isn't intimacy a primarily spatial concept? Intimate bodies defined not merely through their proximity, but also by the ways they begin to bleed into shared folds. Love always gets imagined as a union, as two becoming one, and yet in the opening lines of *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari describe their collaboration as a multitude: *Since each of us was several, we were already quite a crowd.*⁴ Through their shared work, their meshworks become indistinguishable. They fold together. The bleeding together of the inaccessible space inside the body, the space where the soul lives and the unconscious cuts through.

Intimacy as incipient space. Erin Manning presents this as a feeling for movement's prearticulations, the improvisational instants before routine kicks in.⁵ Like time, intimacy is not some indivisible "now," but is instead a constant exchange. Enter the virtual, the topological, the non-metric *something* produced as intimate parts slide and fold together into a shared inside, into each other's mattering spirit, into *agencement*. Am I intimate with the leaves on the tree just next to me as I write at this picnic table near the Olympic pool at the base of Woodbine Avenue? Am I intimate with the picnic table? With the slowly moving shade? With the light coming off the lake? I feel the tug of immanent dependency. I need with your

4. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3.

5. Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

needing, fold over fold, one upon the other, all the way to infinity.

How do I unfold myself into the theatre of everything else, a body abandoning yet inseparable from its organization? Is this love?



Berlant asks after intimacy, commitment, and desire in terms of stability and instability. *In its instantiation as desire*, she writes, *[intimacy] destabilizes the very things that institutions of intimacy are created to stabilize and people are constantly surprised about this*. There's an interference between the stabilized calm of what she calls *the taken-for-grantedness of the feeling that there would be a flowing reiteration where the intimate is*⁶ and the staticky self-awareness of metadiscourse, between the smoothed, silent logistics of not being able to talk about it and the enabling diagram drawn while simultaneously standing in the street and hanging from the window. That flowing reiteration gushes from an institutional feeling: a love for shelter, for measure, for anchor, for category.



*Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is folding. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is wishing he could be two or three places tonight. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is sleeping. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is enjoying his day off. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is sleeping, though he shouldn't be. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is feeling better, thank you. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is feeling less better, thank you. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is sick, or sickly. Ryan Christopher Fitzpatrick is a little better.*⁷

Even as a proscenium pinned to the top of the page, is this set of status updates a better record of my life than my poems, or do they mark an arm's length performativity? Don't they mark a shift from face-to-face sociality to parasociality, from knowing someone to merely feeling like you know them? I feel some attachment to people I've never met; people who I know or was once friends with refiled as parasocial. Still, doomscrolling, I feel obligated to confess my affect for an audience, trying to negotiate the face I slide behind, collaging the social texture of the face itself. If I don't, I might vanish.

6.
Berlant, *Intimacy*, 6.

7.
Personal Facebook status updates made between June and September 2007.