lauren berlant

ON THE
INCONVENIENCE
OF OTHER PEOPLE

"For Lauren Berlant, to be intellectual is to produce new forms for optimism by being in sync with someone, with something forming up in some rickety damaged world. Work, after Berlant, is a binding to things ideas people smells we don't know. The binding is what matters in the labor of making a more fitting world for the affects we have."—KATHLEEN STEWART

"Lauren Berlant's stunning achievement is that they used not only their uncanny sensitivity to see the affective impact of power over time, to analyze the dominion of neoliberal capitalism's cruelties in daily lives of struggling precarity but also to mine the utopian wishes embedded in otherwise crushed hopes. Their imperviousness helped them put their genre-bending work out there despite not fitting any disciplinary or theoretical mold. Berlant's alchemical trick was to turn the everyday life of *difficulty* into the dazzling light of *brilliance*."—LISA DUGGAN

"Lauren Berlant's special contribution to human thought (as distinct from academic knowledge) was the unsettling of 'normativity,' the routine, normal unexamined habits that infect thinking in the mundane spaces of everyday life, the halls of academe, and the corridors of power."—W. J. T. MITCHELL

"Lauren Berlant provoked fantasy. . . . They understood that the world, as a destination, was not the point: it was the attachments generated by making it that mattered."—ELIZABETH FREEMAN

"From the beginning, Lauren Berlant's work exemplified what are now called intersectional approaches to race, gender, and sexuality. . . . They wrestled with the back and forth between having feelings and critiquing feelings, moving in close to felt experience and attachments to objects and moving out to systemic and theoretical analysis."—ANN CVETKOVICH

"Every memory of Lauren Berlant reminds me of their interestedness, their attentiveness. Even their writing on modes of detachment—flatness, withdrawal, humorlessness, suicidal ideation—finds in these means of staying in the world."
—DANA LUCIANO

"Everything I write is influenced by Berlant's thinking. Their work taught me to look closely at the ways people attach themselves to objects (lovers, nations), and to look too at the material conditions from which affect and attachment spring. Their writing led me to psychoanalysis, to feminism, to organizing. In my life and in my work, I try to follow Berlant's lead and to politicize feelings: to see them as part of public, collective experience, rather than as features of private, individual lives."
—MAGGIE DOHERTY

"Lauren Berlant fundamentally altered our sense of how language matters, how language can make and sustain alternate worlds. And they did this with the buoying political lessons of writerly style—style as praxis, as a way of doing political thought by critical worldmaking. . . . As if unstoppable, Berlant wrote toward and not just about the forthcoming and the anticipated."—JILL CASID

on the inconvenience of other people

DUKE
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PRESS

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a note to the reader

I am making the final revisions of this book during the coronavirus pandemic. Within a few weeks, a global imperative to kettle bodies in homes shook economies in the home and the world: income streams, intimacies, habituated socialites, rent and ownership, food and electricity, play and education, and demands on attention were all in disarray. Within a few weeks, the anti-Black violence expressed in white state supremacist police practices and limited economic access to health care and work intensified in explicitness the lived political atmosphere. Within a few weeks, the scandal of state-fueled migrant cruelty at the southern border became crowded out, returned, got juggled. Within the year, anti-Asian violence fueled by state xenophobia, straight erotophobia, and ordinary white privilege manifested lethally on and off the streets. Meanwhile the *New York Times* reported surprise that the suicide rate

had gone down by 5 percent during 2020, but then it turned out that was only for white people; for urban, rural, Indigenous, Latinx, Black, and Native Alaskans, the rates rose for predictable reasons that are still being culled.[1] This crisis convergence made scavenging and trespassing an episodic way of life for people who were not used to it and for those already exhausted by a lifetime in search of concrete and affective relief. Things heated up. Life seemed closer to death. Hate became an everyday motive for spontaneous and planned violence; different kinds of love organized resistant and reparative action. Mutual care traditions drove pedagogies of survival, which was never presumed anyway for poor, Indigenous, Black, trans, and other unsettling sexed/gendered people in the United States.

People where I live wished for a random bit of luck, like dodging a bullet or some diapers donated to the local free zone. Women were pleading for formula and tampons. There was so much food insecurity that energetic chefs seemed suddenly like heroes to some. People wished for better infrastructures of resource distribution or the end of the social.

As usual, what "we" could be presumed? Numbers spiked and dropped; outrage and numbness set in. Imaginations stopped trying or got massively creative. Many of us burst into demands for an economic and procedural reboot of safety, security, and community, which included defacing the image of the police as the ideal local military. Meanwhile, mental health crises that faced life as well as death expanded into a pandemic with their own structural bases, their own hotlines, their own everydayness, and their own appearance as intimate partner violence *and* as police actions, where qualified immunity protects them from the consequences of spraying out their own roiling emotions onto other vulnerable bodies. Like dust bouncing off a trampoline, active counter-dominant solidarity on multiple and conflicting fronts induced pervasive and desired atmospheres, with their uneven rhythms of efficacy. The inconvenience of other people became a pragmatic political topic: With whom can you imagine sharing the world's sidewalk? What do you do with the figures of threat and dread that your own mind carries around?

This is a book about the overcloseness of the world and how we live it. It is about navigating and generating change from within the long broken and fractious middle of life. Experiencing nonsovereign relationality—the inconvenience of other people—is inevitably a feature of the sensual ordinary of the world. There are many catastrophes: this book circles around the rape and murder of women, both in chapter 1 and in the coda, and tries delicately to separate out devastating violence from our drive to be inconvenienced by each other and the inescapability of being the inconvenient ones.

This concept of inconvenience describes the pressure of the proximity of many different kinds of tension, positively and negatively valenced.

I don't like making statements about the state of the world at the start of transitional eruptions. People read speculations as truth claims and propositions as opinions. Everything needs to be tested with humility and focus. Chapter 1 is mainly, but not entirely, about the generativity of desire and aggression and the kinds of things we do when we are extending a relation that is not about annihilating each other but about trying to find a way to extend a dynamic; it also addresses what happens when we give up the delicate work of moving through the world together and start thrashing around traumatically. The close of chapter 2, on the concept of the commons, speculates about some things that are opened up by white racist self-enjoyment and the pandemic: in particular the question of what's left of the concept of general publics. We know "we" is a problem; also, what is the "it" of "we're all in it together"? Chapter 2 looks at the concept of the infrastructure to ask about how we learn to function in proximity to each other "in it." Chapter 3 turns to suicidal ideation by members of dominated populations. It argues that suicidal ideation is not only or usually a plan but a way of expressing life at the limit. Each chapter thus offers transitional forms that slow and extend ways to live inconveniently with each other: jokes, infrastructure, ellipses. The coda is about art and criticism that uses some cases of rape and murder to explore the critical urgency of refusing the convenience of the "cold case," which allows people to take solace in finitude. It's not over until we relinquish the question, the problem, the event. The alternative is to move with it, to allow the event to be inconvenient to us because otherwise we leave to the past what was merely overwhelming. As the coda argues, for the engaged critic, the unbearable must be borne.

Looking at sex, democracy, and the desire for life in a better world than the one that exists, the entire book tries narrating from the granular ordinary ways to lose, unlearn, and loosen the objects and structures that otherwise seem intractable. How not to reproduce the embedded violence of the unequal ordinary? People say, "You got this!" "We can do this!" But it's more like, "Once you let in the deaths, all that follows is life." A thing to be used.

Hell is other people, if you're lucky.

"Hell is other people" is a phrase from Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*, although its continued appeal as a thing people say has little to do with the play. In Sartre's version, characters are sentenced to occupy a room in Hell, exposed eternally to each other's bodily presence and, much worse, to each other's insufferable sameness. When people utter "Hell is other people," though, the phrase confirms more than the miserable effects of the relentless repetition of other people's personalities.[1] Freed from context, "Hell is other people" is an affirmative quip, too, emitting a comic, even courageous, air. Such a blunt cut can generate the conspiratorial pleasure of just hearing someone say it: it's other people who are hell, not you. They really are, it's a relief to admit it.

In other words, along with describing a saturating disappointment in others and expressing a kind of grandiose loneliness that aspires to fill its own hole with the satisfying sounds of superiority and contempt, "Hell is other people" has become a consoling thought.

Of course, some other people are hell, relentlessly saturating situations so fully that it's impossible to relax while being around them—so much so that the very idea of them becomes suffocating. This affective sense of the stultifying person or kind of person also girds the affective life of racism, misogyny, ethnonationalism, and other modes of population disgust that Judith Butler points to in her work on "grievable life."[2]

Mostly, though, other people are not hell. Mostly, the sense of friction they produce is not directed toward a specific looming threat. Mostly, people are inconvenient, which is to say that they have to be dealt with. "They" includes you.

"Inconvenience" is a key concept of this book: the affective sense of the familiar friction of being in relation. At a minimum, inconvenience is the force that makes one shift a little while processing the world. It is evident in micro-incidents like a caught glance, a brush on the flesh, the tack of a sound or smell that hits you, an undertone, a semiconscious sense of bodies copresent on the sidewalk, in the world, or on the sidewalk of the world, where many locales may converge in you at once materially and affectively. It lives on in the many genres of involuntary memory—aftertaste, aftershock, afterglow. It might be triggered by anything: a phrase, a smell, a demanding pet, or someone you trip over, even just in your mind. It might be spurred by ordinary racism, misogyny, or class disgust, which can blip into consciousness as organic visceral judgments. The sense of it can come from nothing you remember noticing or from a small adjustment you made or couldn't make, generating an episode bleed that might take on all kinds of mood or tone, from irritation and enjoyment to fake not-caring or genuine light neutrality. In other words, the minimal experience of inconvenience does not require incidents or face-to-faceness: the mere idea of situations or other people can also jolt into awareness the feel of their inconvenience, creating effects that don't stem from events but from internally generated affective prompts.

The important thing is that we are inescapably in relation with other beings and the world and are continuously adjusting to them. I am describing more than "being affected" and sometimes less than "being entangled": this analysis is grounded in the problematics of the social life of affect, drawing from situations involving genres of the sense of proximity, physical and otherwise, that might involve a sense of overcloseness at a physical distance,

or not, and might involve intimate familiarity, or not.[3] It might involve un-clarity about how one is in relation to what one is adjusting to, or not. At whatever scale and duration, "inconvenience" describes a feeling state that registers one's implication in the pressures of coexistence. In that state the body is paying attention, affirming that what's in front of you is not all that's acting on or in you.

Whatever tone it takes, whatever magnetic field it generates, this latter kind of contact with inconvenience disturbs the vision of yourself you carry around that supports your sovereign fantasy, your fantasy of being in con-trol. This state is a geopolitically specific one, too, insofar as its model of the individual-with-intention includes a political and social demand for au-tonomy as evidence of freedom. The sovereign fantasy is not hardwired into personality, in other words: as US scholars of indigeneity such as Jessica Cat-telino, Jodi A. Byrd, and Michelle Rajaha have demonstrated, sovereignty as idea, ideal, aesthetic, and identity claim is an effect of an ideology of settler-state control over personal and political territories of action that sanctions some privileged individuals as microsovereigns. This fantasy, which satu-rates the liberal colonial state and the citizenship subjectivity shaped by it, is thus seen as a natural condition worthy of defense.[4] But sovereignty is always in defense of something, not a right or a natural state.

As I will argue throughout, the sense of the inconvenience of other people is evidence that no one was ever sovereign, just mostly operating according to some imaginable, often distorted image of their power over things, ac-tions, people, and causality. It points to a style of being in relation and a sense of how things should best happen. People use phrases such as *chain of command* or the *commons of x* to describe what to do with nonsovereignty. The fact of inconvenience is not the exception to one's sense of sovereignty, therefore; sovereignty is the name for a confused, reactive, often not-quite-thought view that there ought to be a solution to the pressure of adapting to "other people" and to other nations' force of existence, intention, action, entitlement, and desire.[5] Sovereignty is thus a fantasy of jurisdiction. It is a defense of entitlement, reference, and agency. Wounded sovereignty is, in some deep way, parallel to the concept of wounded narcissism. For if you or your nation were truly—as opposed to retroactively—sovereign, what then? No submission to or accommodation of another person's or nation's appe-tites, fantasy projections, regimes of happiness, or control over value? No jurisdictional or ethical struggles?

My claim is that there is an inevitability of the sense of inconvenience that has nothing to do with justice. At the same time, what frameworks and

figures do we have available to explain its variety of pressures? This is not a rhetorical question, but a problem that is always being tested out and played with, in this book and generally.

The minima of inconvenience can go under the radar, or not, but it does not register at first as a traumatic or transformative event. At maximum intensity, though, the affective sense of inconvenience is harder, less easy to shake off or step around. In this book the strong version of inconvenience points to forced adaptation to something socially privileged or structurally pervasive. It registers the material effects of inequality's persistent force. It connotes the push of feeling compelled to manage pressures that pervade the ordinary's exercises and disciplines, whether stemming from submission to particular laws or neighbors, or dealing with any of the many hierarchies of difference and distinction that are always jostling one around, demanding one's energies, insisting on the maintenance of one or many supremacist status quos.[6]

We know that, just by existing, historically subordinated populations are deemed inconvenient to the privileged who made them so; the subordinated who are cast as a problem experience themselves as both necessary for and inconvenient to the general supremacist happiness. All politics involves at least one group becoming inconvenient to the reproduction of power; that power might be material or fantasmatic, in the convoluted paranoid way endemic to the intimacy of enemies. The biopolitical politics of inconvenience increases the ordinary pressure of getting in each other's way, magnifying the shaping duration of social friction within the mind's echo chambers and the structuring dynamics of the world.

As an affect, inconvenience can thus encompass all kinds of intensity but still be cast as a mode of impersonal contact that has an impact, opening itself to becoming personal, creating images of what feels like a looming social totality, and making a countervailing social organization imaginable. Think about Cheryl Harris's staging of Blackness as "trespassing" on white consciousness as it strolls and scrolls through the world expecting not to feel impeded; think of the pervasive sexual violence women imagine concretely when they're walking somewhere alone.[7] These sensations of threat are ordinary to the people moving through in the lifeworlds of a supremacist society and its entitlement hierarchies.[8] They can confirm or disconfirm the erotophobia or specific mistrust we have been schooled to live with. The expectation of inconvenience can pull you into a zone where the impersonal opens to genres of viscerally strong yet abstract encounter. It can be an effect of speculation prior to movement that creates hypervigilance, tableaux

or scenarios in prefigurative response to potential encounters. It can get people talking to each other about how to change what's deemed structural, even when the only evidence is a sense of things that permeates the social field and is central to the reproduction of its norms of concentrated value. But the threat posed by politicized inconvenience doesn't have to be immediately theatrical or traumatic: a sense of apprehension can arise in any moment, seemingly happening and passing as an irritation. One never knows about effects until this kind of contact becomes materialized in a series. The inconveniences of managing one's own putative inconvenience to the sense of freedom demanded by the structurally dominant is a completely predictable experience, both draining and animating, in intimate and political settings. It forces a constant reassessment of what kinds of impact constitute an event.

In this book, "inconvenience" draws a membrane across radically private experiences of world-receptivity at the periphery of attention and anything people have to face every day—an ongoing labor situation, a family, a politicized infrastructure they may have been born into, the population they've been assigned to, or other people's projected fantasies.[9] When is a body an event because of the kind of thing it is deemed to be, as when they walk into a room or cross a state line? What price and what kinds of price are being paid in order to live a life as other people's inconvenient object? These questions tap into the ordinary of biopower at the same time as they tap into the encounter with being as such. However dramatic the situation of power, it is at its most powerful when it is distributed across the structural, the casual, and the shadowy, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, Achilles Mbembe, and Jasbir Puar have documented in their work on necropolitical protocols of the state and related apparatuses.[10] As Puar argues, to maim rather than kill in order to maintain political power is to enjoy enforcing the ongoing theater of the inconvenience of certain other people.

But it's not just bullets that disable living. It's inconvenient to bear the burden of a naming you didn't ask for: there is no getting beyond it, only dealing with it as a form of life you live with. To a structurally and/or fantasmatically dominant class, though, the experience of inconvenience produces dramas of unfairness. Take, for example, the paranoid reversals of "incels" and other entitled persons who experience their vulnerability as an injury of unjustly denied deference.[11] It is predictable that the structurally dominant feel vulnerable about their status and insist that if the historically subordinated deserve repair, so do the entitled. It is as though there is a democracy in vulnerability, as though the details do not matter. From both perspectives,
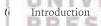
the exhaustion from incessant abrasive contact can produce numbed or intense self-subtraction and the elaboration of massive rage.

At whatever intensity or scale, then, in whatever scenario of power, the sense of the inconvenience of other people in general, and often some other particular kinds of people, is constantly being renewed and reevaluated. Mainly the hit of it surfaces and dives in the ordinary life of being in the world, shifting atmospheres and coordinating stresses without much being memorable. But the ordinary includes the casual reproduction of hatreds and aversions, creating subjectivities powerfully shaped by navigating its entailments, excitements, and tolls.

So, to say that people are inconvenient, that they have to be dealt with, and that this affect is ordinary and profoundly life-shaping in how it generates styles of processing others and life, is not always to point to dramas that feel like melodrama. "Inconvenience" in this sense is more like "attachment": a description of a relation so foundational to coexistence that it's easy to think of it as the whatever of living together and not a constantly pulsing captivation of response. Attachment, one might say, is what draws you out into the world; inconvenience is the adjustment from taking things in. My proposal in this book is that there is an inconvenience drive—a drive to keep taking in and living with objects. The inconvenience drive generates a pressure that is hard to manage, let alone bear. This pressure requires us to reconsider "receptivity" too.

If "inconvenience" is mostly an experience of everyday aversion, adjustment, minor resistance, and exhaustion, it also raises this question: Why are even the objects our inconvenience drive drives us to still hard to bear? We know why threatening things threaten us; it's harder to know why it's difficult to live with the things we want. It can't just be that we fear losing them, we fear having them too. We dread the pressure of constraint, of being with what's ongoing. What makes inconvenience into an event, and not just a state, is the architecture of duration. We know why threatening things are resisted, so as to not be defeating or subordinating, or a puncture to confidence personally or collectively; but it is harder to know why the things we look to for sustenance also induce defenses against what we want from them, especially if one thing we want is to sustain life well while we are working out what to do with it. We know that narcissists and sociopaths and political struggle threaten the pleasure and fact of our and the world's continuity; it is harder to understand what to do when our positive attachments produce queasy-making roils and intimate violence. We know that the mere existence of other people can be a positive fact or negative irritant: it is harder to know

what to do with the fact that wanting to be inconvenienced can produce such pressure and threat.

However it appears, the prompt of inconvenience activates the problematic of receptivity to the stimulus and situations of the world. It points to any propinquity that induces adjustment.[12] We are always taking in things like other people. We are always discovering that they have gotten under our skin without an event of choosing to refer to. The fact of this builds pressure to think historically about genres of encounter and their implication in the difficulty of absorbing each other, any object, or the imaginable world itself. It forces the question of the unpredictable relation between atmospheres and behaviors, involving the deracinated modes of gesture and message that we also use to contact each other and anchor ourselves. It raises political and epistemological questions about what we can justly call trivial. Thus, we can also presume nothing about how the friction of copresence will operate in advance of its emergence in a scene, nor how it will take subjective shape given what John Steiner calls the "psychic retreats" that constitute the vulnerability we protect from exposure, expression, and even self-acknowledgment, in defense of dissolving from what's overwhelming and tender.[13]

This means that inconvenience, though intimate, inevitably operates at a level of abstraction, too, where we encounter each other as kinds of thing—but not necessarily in a bad way, because there is no other way to begin knowing each other, or anything. *We cannot know each other without being inconvenient to each other.* We cannot be in any relation without being inconvenient to each other. This is to say: to know and be known requires experiencing and exerting pressure to be acknowledged and taken in, as Stanley Cavell has argued so forcefully.[14] Acknowledgment requires a disturbance of attention and boundaries. Sustained acknowledgment requires self-reorganization. Most experiences in this register, though, are not relations in the robust sense of a drive toward a reciprocal intimacy. They involve the uptick from ordinary contact that is usually processed by conventions, which might have the heft of a microaggression or merely the force of a flicker. They can produce irritation but also kinds of longing—if they produce anything beyond the ding of encounter. To attend to inconvenience is to attend to our constant exposure to stimulations that need to be processed.

In this introduction, the project is first to substantiate why inconvenience is the structure of an affect and a general description of a kind of contact we have no choice but to process. It requires thinking about a whole range of impacts and intensities that may or may not achieve significance, consciousness, politics, or clarity. It also requires thinking about how the vertical hierarchies

of privilege capture and recast the tone of ordinary social frictions to naturalize, weaponize, and calcify a self-interested defensive/projective dynamic.[15] To get at this material requires tracking patterns and historicizing the means through which we are trained to live inside many genres of the brush of the world. Citizenship, social membership, belonging, being a neighbor or a regular, being the conveyor of bodily dynamics are some of these genres, but many of the familiar dings are so nonnarrative that they're hard to archive, even in concepts like gesture, because we're talking about actions that dissolve the fantasy that the impersonal is distinct from the personal, the intimate. It is not only the world of other people either—animals, things, and thoughts are inconvenient too. Inconvenience is not just a punctum experience but a measure of the impact and standing of encountered things.[16]

Social theory tends to melodramatize and draw its energy from pervasive social antagonism. Disasters and catastrophes produce concepts that face up to devastation at its most unbearable, as though the problem of the social could best be resolved in the spaces where it most intensively splinters and shreds. But social theory also needs to attend to the difficulty of being with the ordinary not just as a microecology of disaster but a scene of ongoingness that includes catastrophe, comedy, awkwardness, intimacy, work, care work, noticing, dissociating, demanding, shrugging, and working it out in real time. If there is an inconvenience drive, can consciousness of it become a resource for building solidarity and alliance across ambivalence, rather than appearing mainly as the negative sandpaper of sociality? Is it possible to turn ambivalence from the atmosphere of negativity it currently brings with it into a genuinely conflicted experience that allows us to face up to the phenomenality of self-disturbance in the space of coexistence and even the desire to let in particular objects, or to protect them once they've gotten under the skin? This is a key question cluster for this book.

Such an axis of critical attention would help us slow down how we process the situation of encounter and face processes of adjustment, relief, repair, and testing out whether being open to knowing and being known, or just occupying the same space with other people, will be worth the trouble. There's a secret ellipsis after *trouble*: the trouble to which inconvenience points. The trouble to bother living in proximity to, the trouble to endure or ensure belonging to, the trouble of desiring proximity to, of having reparative dramas with, to seek acknowledgment and recognition from—to live on with. These phrases end with grammatically inconvenient prepositions in search of a linkage. In the chapters that follow, this book's thought experiments pursue the open questions that a focus on inconvenience produces

by providing some narratives that clarify and shift how we're taken up in different scenarios and intensities of relation. Sex, democracy, and life-in-struggle are the exemplary scenes of ambivalent receptivity I play out: they stand for scenes that people say they want, are uneasy wanting, try to make do with, try to get at, go in and out of caring about, and want to be okay with. I'm listing here some of the incommensurate wants that constant adjustment generates; *incommensurate wants* is a synonym for *ambivalence* that is technical and does not port with it the bad odor or Kleinian love/hate with which ambivalence has come to be associated.[17]

Thus, the inconvenience of other people isn't evidence that the Others were bad objects all along: that would be hell. The inconvenience of the world is at its most confusing when one wants the world but resists some of the costs of wanting. It points to the work required in order to be with even the most abstract of beings or objects, including ourselves, when we have to and at some level want to, even if the wanting includes wanting to dominate situations or merely to coexist. The pleasure in anonymity and in being known; the fear of abandonment to not mattering and the fear of mattering the wrong way. I am describing in inconvenience a structural awkwardness in the encounter between someone and anything, but also conventions of structural subordination. Thus "people" in the title stands for any attachment, any dependency that forces us to face how profoundly nonsovereign we are. The concept also points to hates and to the danger to our sense of well-being that is produced even by the things we want to be near; it clarifies some things about the registers of power that attach dramas of such disturbance to bodies living approximately in the ordinary.

I have proposed that to study inconvenience is to study processes of receptivity. To study receptivity is to face this idea: when it comes to living in proximity, there is no such thing as passivity. Adjustment is a constant action: the grinding of the wheels of awkwardness and the bargaining with life's infrastructures. This is why the dominant tone of ambivalence tends to be negative. It takes work to live on the arc from minor irritation to threat—and too often people try to resolve the difficulty of being inconvenienced by the world by becoming depleted, cynical, or dramatic fonts of blame. To study receptivity is thus also to study projective identification, the handing off of the responsibility for one's unsteadiness to others, often the same others one resents for being powerful enough to be there to bear and repair what's overwhelming.[18]

Receptivity thus involves styles of processing being affectively disturbed and seeking relief from disturbance, as we will see in chapter 1 on sex and

jokes. Its processes force us to study norms of affective proximity, which only sometimes have to do with belonging; more frequently they have to deal with the friction of copresence, as we will see in chapter 2 on democracy and the concept of the commons. Just because we are in the same room does not mean that we belong to the room or to each other. The quality of the affinity is built from the action of relation and the conventions that convince you to summarize sociality as a done deal. Nor is the overdetermination of feeling that we call ambivalence only a relation between antithetical tones; to the contrary, the tones belong together like vocal cords in disharmony with themselves. To study the noise of world-absorption when the world offers inadequate object streams to take in and on, then, often produces fatigue or suicidiation, as we will see in chapter 3, on the fundamental political affect-state I call "being in life without wanting the world." To study the inconvenience of receptivity is also to study living with the unbearable, as we will see in the coda's address to returning to the scene of the devastatingly ordinary crime of the rape/murder of women.

This book's cases circulate some concrete conceptual spaces in which one is drawn to other people, structures, and worlds willingly and with a desire to work with what one cannot vanquish: the friction whose energy is part of the frisson, the intensity that fuels us even while the fatigue of the inconvenience of world-receptivity is pretty wearing. This book is an experiment in working out ways not to think of negativity as the substance of the real, although it is a substance of the real, but rather to see the activity of inconvenience as it tilts variously toward drama, comedy, curiosity, aggressive play, enjoyment, disavowal, refusal, unconsciousness, dissociation, and above all multiplicity, from the slapstick of sex to dissociation for life. It would be wrong to think of these conceptually and often temporally simultaneous movements as needing to be resolved: the desire to make stentorian final judgments according to self-preservational interest is one answer to "where does the misery come from?"—Wilhelm Reich's famous question to Freud.[19] The "ontological misery" of being a person as such comes from the violent pressures to resolve the irresolvable, to underdetermine what overwhelms, but also from the expectation that if things like worlds and people were just, living would be simpler. As I have argued here, and as I do in the chapter-experiments to follow, in theory we would like the world against which we defend ourselves to take less of our best good energy. Life can be different; it can be better or worse. Just not simple, in the sense of resolved once and for all.

In the sections that follow this one, I expand on these claims in small keyword riffs I call "assays." An assay tests things out, tries out various ap-

proaches to the object that might change its relevant contexts, associations, and dynamics: its social being. The cases that follow the introduction are also assays in that they involve reading with other aesthetic events for alternative ways of being inconvenient and living with inconvenience. They are assays because they feel out how to create other kinds of social relation from within the world that needs disturbing. The point is not to go from example to example but to use the modular to collect strategies for breaking apart what doesn't work and creating social fields shaped by different, more satisfying dynamics of proximity. The book contains no ranking among strategies; rather, it lays out clusters of actions that become forms of life that shift the pressures of being in relation.

So we need to keep a whole range of object-values and scenes in our head. The sense of inconvenience often erupts in the ordinary of stranger proximity, where people are hanging around the world together. It proceeds even when we notice each other vaguely, not worrying in advance whether incidents will occur. It is a feature of everyday love, of being a regular, and of police side-eye. It fuels the imaginaries that are comfortable with inequality so long as the decisions are "democratic." The pressure of inconvenience pervades how being near each other in time and space will play out, whether in anticipation, in the present, or in the rearview sweep of the retrospect. Pulsating in eruptions and patterns of daily paranoias, speculations, attractions, and attentiveness, these triggers might not reach the level of language, consciousness, or event, or they might stick and amplify, as when the police claim that their violence was justified because they felt fear. Whatever proximity induces associations, which are kinds of relation with histories but not ontologies of cause or effect. From every angle the sense of inconvenience circulates through the body and mind, time and space. It can generate intensities like the awkwardness of an encounter; it can overstimulate a sense of threat; it can just get filed away, stored for later reference; it can appear to be resolved—or not.[20]

Assays

The assays here anatomize the affect called inconvenience to provide different angles on the problem of metabolizing it. Pretty much everything I've written has been modular that way, built through sections that allow a problem-cluster to be both established and transformed through its contact with specific object/scenes or cases.[21] In this book, successive chapters on things we want but not surely—sex, democracy, and a better world for the

life we want to be in—stand in for the internally clashing dramas of impersonality, intimacy, and ordinary viciousness that shape the social. They draw out the structural and incidental contexts of lateral coexistence. They continue the historical interest of *Cruel Optimism* in the splintering of the fantasy that there will be a world that rewards one's labors of reproduction: the 1960s fantasy of antibourgeois sex, discussed in chapter 1; in chapter 2, the drawing of lines between the abstraction of the commons and the broken infrastructures of collective existence throughout the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries that people keep trying to patch, especially in the deindustrialized Midwest; and, in chapter 3, biopolitics and dissociation from the 1960s to the present, where the specific vulnerabilities of different populations—gendered, queer, Black—engender dissociation and prefer the inconclusiveness of life in ellipsis. They stage politics as a scene where antagonists are inconvenient to each other in ways that reveal, resist, and disturb the reproduction of structural antagonisms, mentalities, sensual encounters, and properties. They help us stay with different social and political dimensions of the overdetermination that the inconvenience of other people expresses in practical terms. They recognize that one is always in the middle of the broken world, but also that one is learning how to move in it without reproducing the conventional forms of its violence. They offer concepts as tools with which to loosen other concepts. To loosen an object is to make it available to transition. Each chapter seeks to help change the dynamics of association and material practice that can calcify an object/scene. The cases are also just that: explorations that are inadequate to the problem whose scene they stage.

In so offering the pressure of inconvenience as an experience of sociality that overdetermines what counts as the personal and the impersonal, the present and its pasts, and the mutual propping of violence and pleasure in the labor of the reproduction of existence, I join thinkers who represent the contemporary as a zone of life in which the dour realism of an ongoing near-survival scramble is enmeshed with the creative and life-insistent energy that improvises and makes counterinfrastructures for revising what's possible in life. They produce transitional figures for violently unequal normative experience that both make it vivid and refuse to reproduce its worst-case scenario as the Real, using phrases as objects to open the ordinary to transformation by shifting its associations and resonance. They admit that the lived idealized life is still much more inconvenient than its dreamers wished. This mess of divergent directions has been central to the transformative emphases, locales, and attunement prospects described for Queer Theory by many,

including Gayatri Gopinath, Kadji Amin, and Siohban Sommerville's *Queer Companion*, whose transnational genealogies and multiple bodies of the queerly embodied, desiring, and located reveal so many varieties of inconvenient subjects gearing up for the present even as the prospect of a general lifeworld fades.[22] Michael Hardt's version of the immaterial in "immaterial labor" reshapes contemporary biopolitics with a counter-logic of biopower generalized across various modes of production, drawing together disparate and sometimes antithetical objects, relations, and institutions into a scene on the basis of their common world-building activity; Calvin Warren and Fred Moten figure Black nonbeing as a philosophical, aesthetic, and political prompt for rethinking relational nonsovereignty; in work in disability studies, queer and Indigenous scholars have also used the boundary drawn between who's convenient and inconvenient to shift the perspective of lifeworld normativity into alternative builds. These associations transform the exemplary object while still drawing connections among problems of the biopolitical drama of getting in each other's way. Madalina Diaconu and Shannon Lee Dawdy look to patina to figure the overdeterminations and ongoing aesthetic generativity of death, life, and history across the material planes of touch; Christina Sharpe configures a version of "the wake" of an object/event's impact that is not a beyonding the inconvenient Black object but a living-, being-, and bringing-with.[23] Our proximities animate and hover near resources for lifeworld reorganization and rebooted transferential projections; they stretch across and rearrange contemporary and historical archives and memorial fields.[24]

Among others, these scholars have generated debates that keep the figural event of the concept of copresence open. They attend to the social consequences of the inconvenience of othered people as the motive for visualizing and reoccupying social form. I write these assays in solidarity with projects of using overdetermined and tonally self-clashing causal dynamics to create better frames for commonly held object/scenes: of course, the question these days and throughout the book is whether and when one can even say that something is commonly held. These assays attempt to create a backstory genre through which we can loosen the world of conventions, spongy norms, and conventional violence—and to provide dimension, texture, and resonance for emergent and ongoing alt-forms of life.[25] To slow the object's movement, to describe its internal dynamics, to shift how we recognize and consider its parts and galvanize their transformation in psychic and social processes require such ongoing expansion, contraction, looping, shredding.

Heterotopias, for Example

Once I called myself a utopian.[26] What I meant by that was that I don't take the insistence of a dug-in world to define constraints on living. In some way, any imaginary situation can be lived in advance. This is partly how realities change.[27] But as an analyst of the historical present, I should have called on the heterotopian, which attends to living in the copresence of many forms of life. The figure here is not of an ontologically radical heterogeneity, though. Of heterotopias, Foucault writes, "We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."[28] At the same time, however, he bisects the heterotopic space into the "crisis heterotopia" and the "heterotopia of deviation," each a transitional space where the social reaches a limit and opens a window to an outside, to new dictionaries and the counternormative.[29] But an object/world transformation does not have to assume a drama of overcoming something leaned against.

Here, to see like a heterotopian is to attend to and elaborate a loose assemblage of emergent lifeworlds.[30] The multiple lifeworlds operating in the heterotopia's heterogeneity provide conduits among the sensual and conceptual, extending according to diverse logics while remaining interrelated. These lifeworlds are related because they are in proximity. Their relation is dynamic and unpredictable, offering as the scene of life discontinuities and decaying holes and loose joints for reshaping. Paying attention to the heterogeneity of lifeworlds that constitute the contemporary social field redistributes the pressure generated by the "it is what it is" assurance of some versions of the dialectic, more regular views of structure, or the confusion of a cultural dominant with history itself.[31] Joshua Clover's "Genres of the Dialectic" is an exemplary demonstration of one way to tell a story about the movement of capitalist form toward overcoming its modes of value generation until it reaches a limit that interrupts structural reproduction entirely and allows for a different dynamic.[32] This image of structural reproduction from within the generative patterns of value chaos has generally been the great contribution of the Marxist tradition; see in chapter 2 the proposal about a destructive use of analogy in my investigation of the commons concept as an unlearning device for conventional ways of denoting structure.

To register the dynamics of receptivity and attachment requires reading across, or scanning, the dynamics of social form and atmosphere, and not just at first. Scanning isn't skimming. The scan-form recognizes that there is always more to see, to process, and to find words for that will point to many

potential spaces, pasts, and futures, without adding it all up to an object that can be revealed by two sides of a debate, rigorous scholarship, or the taxonomic assurance of most structural analysis. The scan-form creates frames from the inside of a scene.

It would be easy to go crazy by using the riot and clutter of worldmaking as material to be edited, stored in citations, and trained into tropes and generalizing statements. Establishing smooth systematicity was the training of structuralism and many instances of its posts. After the surprise of reading Jameson's assertion that context is immanent in a text and not a pushpin board securing the present like a police procedural's flowchart of collaborating criminals, my contextualizing practice cracked and changed.[33] Now I see making contexts for my objects as a scene for making concepts, which requires a creative archival practice, a construction of objects from the currents among collected things.[34] It confirms a realist staging of the object's inconvenience to the desire to fix history and meaning by way of a materialist empiricism that sees material as an effect. There are always more things to say, more explanations, not a finite number of things to stack into a predictable shape. Sometimes there are heterotopias in dominance, and sometimes scatter is what attention and narration require. The proliferation of qualities can make you feel desperate, or stop writing, or feel bad when you're doing your small but difficult thing; or it can allow you to craft thought experiments, throw out heuristics that you hope can attain analytic ballast. Through a heterotopian lens, things never quite fit together or manifest all of their potential dimensionality and so deserve a critical infrastructure that can bear the material dynamic that looks solid at a distance while being elastic, rubbery, animated, elliptical, context-changing, and the effect of the drift or clanging of many causes: "the part, that is, of life that is never given: an existence."[35]

In chapter 3 I describe the study of this transformative spatiality as a proxemics.[36] Proxemics studies the closeness and distance among things, and the transformative pressure of the space generated by active organizations of matter.[37] What does it mean to be in the span of proximity, whether perceived as too-closeness, radical alterity, or a vibrating field of objects bouncing off of each other at some perceptible or imperceptible speed, governed by laws and norms but not, as a cluster, predictable in the ways they take and can make up space?

Heterotopias induce historical conditions for situations that will never appear to take shape fully. In them we don't lose our objects but play with their form and test their implications. With them we discover new ways to release

ourselves from some forms while remaining some form of ourselves, comic and tragic and messed up as these forms can be. Which is to say that heterotopianism skirts the unbearable. The impact of living its concept might not be fun because it forces inconvenient objects into focus along with the dominating shiny ones, but it might be a relief because it signals the copresence of an otherwise. Because political vision can proceed effectively only if it disturbs the concrete shape of the world it wants to bring into being, the political question for the heterotopian is historical not only in the sense of how we got to this place of many spaces, but also insofar as it generates what else a vision of loose object causality can do. Queer work was all about this from another angle, I thought: a refusal to submit to normative form as though it were good form as opposed to what serves a set of interests.[38] Queer work is skeptical about ordinary modes of attachment, repair, survival, and good objects. It describes the ambivalent position of being in desire while being unsure of what to do with what's overwhelming or threatening in it, and it opens the floodgates about what can be an object of desire: persons, objects, ways of life, a landscape, an angle, pets, ideas, and so on. It usually forces admissions that statements about how the senses, the social, and bodies work are, at best, propositions about the conditions for outcomes. To queer something doesn't mean just to stick an antinormative needle into it, but to open up a vein to unpredicted and nonsovereign infusions.

From this perspective, every heterotopia is a historical fiction, hooked into a distilled version of the world and extending to a yet-unlived plane. It is overdetermined by pressures from the lifeworld that it can bear the weight of while I'm describing them, like the trough of the worm I describe in chapter 2, which inscribes a joinable location even as it changes. Scholarship and riffing, too, create breathing room for alternative constructions of concept and causality, infrastructure and institution. At times I felt, while writing these chapters, that the objects that both hindered and created the spaces of transition in the scene of inconvenience still threatened me. They were hard to describe, and what I wrote about them was insufficient, merely writing; yet the need to stay with the intractable questions about impaired sociality and structural resistances to transforming, and not repairing, the violent reductions that often follow strong ambivalence was enough to fuel my optimism about the generative effects of thinking on affective and purposive judgment. For, like sex, politics, and theory, writing is not a performative performance of the end to violence or ambivalence. It can be a go at shaking up an object/scene to make a fresh fold in time and space, or a new way of disturbing life-disaffirming limits, a generative hetero-topos that is not

obliged to, although not free of, any laws or norms. This is what it means to describe the ambivalence of a writing that needs both to fix its object enough that it can be seen and to disturb it enough that it can reorganize its objects. Conventional clauses and the unstable world of contact co-assert the shapes that writers take as facts or fates, and meanwhile we do not just live with contingency but desire its inconvenience.

To be a heterotopian is to live in the disturbing episode but also to recognize that there are multiple discontinuous spaces conceptually adjacent to its presence. It is to understand that even the longest assay is a prompt, a pod full of reactive chemicals waiting to be found, floated, tracked, tested, resisted, and retested.

Overdetermination and Its Affects

This book argues that amid the threat of enemies who want us not to exist, or the intimates who jostle our sense of stability on a solid ground, there sits the threat of objects and lifeworlds we want but in the very wanting are bothered by. This is to say that not only the unbearable is defined by the formal fact that it must be borne, as I propose in the coda. The sense of the world as inconvenient threatens the infrastructures we build out from the very overdetermination of threat, desire, and intensity's shadings that have not yet organized into a genre we want to, or can, coast in.[39] This way of thinking about a social field undermines any linear, mechanical understanding of causality and gives a new inflection to the actualizations we call history, calling attention to the ways in which particular forms and processes associated with diverse lifeworlds are also commonly shaped by multiple factors, in some combination of close together or translocally along a supply chain, in solidarity, and transgenerationally, for example. These kinds of relation are sometimes intimate in the way of a mutuality insofar as personality is involved, but at the same time they are not, because they are governed by the holding environment of a common historical experience with which one will always have been shaped—whether or not one resists or might want entirely to break the dynamic of its reproduction.[40] In my previous work I pointed to this dynamic by way of the concept of the intimate public, but here our focus is on the pressure exerted by any sense of contact, including when it has nothing to do with the material conditions of identification or intimacy.

So, here the intensities expressed in the figure of frictional receptivity requires wrestling with the ongoingness of clash, contradiction, and converging causalities. For example, how does a sex-positive person like me write

about sexual violence in its collapse of the personal and the impersonal, of the local incident and its pervasiveness? How does a commitment to radical equality bear the perverse fact that equality must be defined by the impossibility of attaining it, if by *attain* we imagine a steady-state objective condition or a predictable affective one, "feeling equal"? After all, we live heterotopically in so many environments at once that it would be hard to know how the topoi mesh, how to translate across a wide variety of scenes and qualities of attention, how to recognize resources in the real time of the reproduction of life and the ordinary temporalities of capitalist value. How do we write about staying attached to life while living defensively and porously at the same time? How does someone stay attached to life while repudiating the world of bad objects? What's the relation between the uses of an object and multiple processes of object formation, and how does our assessment of its overdetermination affect our analyses of racial and white patriarchal capitalism, with its implication in heteronormativity? Adorno argues that "the shudder" one feels on receiving the aesthetic object registers the intimate effects of an abstract, yet affectively personal, transaction with the world; one could also propose that this very event of receptivity is the event of the inconvenience of the object by way of the adjustment demands it is already making on what is possible to arrange affectively.[41]

If one question of our inconvenient others—that of our inconvenience to others' security or panting desire for sovereignty—motivates this exercise, another question was how to take on inconvenience as an affective sense that has no vernacular emotional correlate called inconvenience, the way the structure of shame has an emotion of shame to anchor its various representations or the way the structure of attachment-love has an emotion called love to organize the variety of linkage styles that can be organized under it, disciplined by the name, and disturbed by the constant sense of approximateness and self-violation associated with it that are supposed to be calmed by its conventions, infrastructures, and rituals. But inconvenience in the vernacular is a state that comes from the sense of having to take in and defend against an object, or of being that object onto whom others project a too-muchness. Inconvenience is another way of pointing to the experience of nonsovereign relationality. It does not always produce a sense of injury but *does* always signify the pressure of what to do with coexistence. Whether or not one has management skills for it, it produces the injury of nonsovereignty.

But, seen as an affect, inconvenience is not the Real interfering with the Sovereign Balloon at its most parade-inflated, although sometimes it takes

the form of a drama that feels like drama. The usual inconvenience of being affected assumes the kind of guttural noise that resounds from an impact that one may or may not have asked for but can never be protected from in advance. It's not just what Teresa Brennan describes as the affective discernment one's gut performs when entering a room or a thing that grabs your attention in a way in which you're fully present, but an accommodation that isn't exactly a submission but is a sensed forced entailment, like being drafted.[42]

This introduction to the book's ambition is modular because the affect of inconvenience flows from many dimensions, varying in its intensity of emphasis and the means of mediation. There is no possibility of drawing out this set of problems by addressing them "all at once," if *all at once* means developing concepts from a pretense of knowing what leads from what. We have an ethical obligation to overdetermine our objects while clarifying the scenes of their action. This obligation is why work claiming to be theory must be read as propositional. The animating questions are inconvenient to the thinker's aim; absorbing the transformative implications while reading is inconvenient to the reader. Our inconvenience drive keeps us up, forces fugue states and naps, and distracts us as we try to move some life-entangling problems somewhere by testing them out, rearranging, and supposing.

Infrastructures, Infrastructuralism, Infrastructuring

A heterotopia is an infrastructure. This way of thinking the terms of living across diverse spaces of the personal and the impersonal also encourages us to see what connects people and their practices within a social field. This does not involve establishing the dynamics of a shared, coherent structure that guides thought and action in patterned and consistent ways, but the atmospheres in which infrastructures of inconvenience appear as generative, multiple, and often contested processes involved in the substantive connections among people and lifeworlds. This is why the infrastructure concept is central to the problem of transforming democracy-under-capitalism that focuses chapter 2: having disturbed the conventional object of "structure," I'm also proposing that proffering transitional infrastructures for the extended meanwhile is also a critical obligation of any analyst, writer, or artist, dilating on the long meanwhile of life in the crisis ordinary.

"Capitalism" is often offhandedly designated as the structure that saturates the reproduction of modern life in its lateral and hierarchical forms. But the way it is captured as the machinery of power and origin of everyday

life is undergoing many serious challenges and definitional shifts—not, though, because capital's power over life is over.[43] In the current world-national-capitalist theater, the fragility and forced improvisation introduced as capitalist "crisis" is manifestly and incoherently reshaping many processes of value creation, including the protocols of finance and contract: the liberal nation's historic ways of inviting immigration for purposes of exploitation and shunning immigrants for purposes of ethnopride, the capitalist's production of value through the destruction of its/our own lifeworld and resources, the centrality of racial and gendered exploitation to the image of an economic system that figures itself as democratic in its exploitation and not inherently racist and misogynist, and so on. This cacophony of wealth-generating disturbances makes any claim that capitalism produces a plane of structural consistency looks at once as true and banal as the source of figuring a trustworthy world-picture. As I demonstrate in chapter 2, Marxists, anarchists, and realists are now turning to "infrastructure" to reimagine the transformation of living from within the scene of life, replacing focus on the abstraction of what counts as "structure" with attention to what expresses itself most profoundly in concrete social relations—a set that includes ideas about what internally binds the world beyond practices that can be photographed or organized in a spreadsheet.[44]

Infrastructuralism might be called a perspective that looks at the extension of life from within lifeworlds rather than at the dominant causal mechanism for reproducing the world's time, spaces, hierarchies, and relations. As an example: an infrastructure of feeling is different from the structure of feeling to which Raymond Williams pointed.[45] The latter phrase points to an atmospherically felt but unexpressed class-based affect, whereas the infrastructural version confirms and solidifies the sediment of many proximate kinds of sociality, including pasts and futures as they express themselves in the present.[46] To think infrastructure in the context of this book is to focus on the generation of forms of life that broadly bind and extend relationality and the world seen as substance and concept. Rather than seeing the material of lived relationality as epiphenomenal or as merely the present's expressive causality, infrastructuralism focuses on many phases of the activity of poeisis, or world-making.[47]

I am not abandoning materialism by stepping back from "structure." To the contrary, here are some propositions: infrastructure is the living mediation of what provides the consistency of life in the ordinary; infrastructure is the lifeworld of structure. Marshall Sahlins even argues that the superstructure/infrastructure distinction was already tending toward infrastructural-

ization in the mid-twentieth century. Roads, bridges, schools, food chains, finance systems, prisons, families, and districts link the living in ongoing proximities that are at once material and symbolized.[48] Paul Edwards points out that failure of an infrastructure is ordinary in poor countries and countries at war, but people suffer through its disturbances, adapting and adjusting.[49] This is to say that even ordinary failure spurs infrastructural forces into existence that reorganize life, fueling what Deborah Cowen has described as the creative practicality of logistics in the supply chain.[50] In the best ethnographic work on infrastructure, buildings, roads, economic institutions, systems of norms and laws, and norms that pass as laws are accompanied by ideas and concepts that are generated in the process of keeping things going. The consistency-making, resource-distributing processes are mediations that bind worlds together along with ideas about what the world might be. In chapter 2 this gets emblematized as the wormhole a worm makes while it's moving in order to enable its movement. It may be moving simultaneously within and outside of the normative social: as the work on "evil infrastructures" argues, you can't always tell from the form of it who will flourish and who will have to pay a painful cost. Space- and time-making patterns gain solidity because they represent consistently linked activity, that's all.

   The power of thinking the infrastructural mediation of the ongoingness of the ordinary, and the constant copresence of its intelligibility and creative generativity, has been at the core of queer commentary—not just theory, but the very descriptive redistortions that open up gestures, scenes, tableaux, phrases, and demands to at once materializing formations and trans-ing them too. Examples abound, but in the wake of Michael Warner's counterpublics, Jose Esteban Muñoz's utopian horizons, and Juana María Rodríguez's history through gestural transmission, the process I'm describing could be called a queer infrastructuralism insofar as it shares with queer formalism a version of the object/scene that is relational and dynamic, local and utopian, gestural and demanding, situational, labile, internally discontinuous, and yet projected out across fields of clarity and guesses that allow for an inventive longing to amplify what is already here and yet incomplete.[51] It embraces the social labor of attachment, the inevitability of projection, and the utility of speculation as equally strong participants in the infrastructures that shape what's changing. So this infrastructuralism is not focused only on the usual networks of conveyance, like roads and channels; as I have learned especially from Cowen, infrastructural objects are communicative in a lifeworld sense, at once shaped and shape-shifting.

As I argue in chapter 2, infrastructures that manage ongoing relational disturbances can continue indefinitely in their mode or be shocked into shifting their processes fundamentally, yet without stopping. Encounters, episodes, inclinations, patterns become things on the move to return to, concepts elaborated in practice, practices without a concept. Heterotopic, they allow for experiment with teasing temporary practices into continuously lived spaces, topoi to return to and use. Forms of life have an animated solidity that does not have to become calcified in representations, though there's always a danger of it, and often a practice of clinging to them as foundations rather than heuristics. The work infrastructure performs of transforming the temporary into the contemporary can remediate the world. An emergent ongoing form of convergence can dig unexpected grooves. Yet it is important not to get too productivist about it. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues, everything proceeds under conditions of probability, friction, accident, and uneven transformation, which are not the same thing as determination, nor the same thing as indeterminate lability.[52]

Infrastructure, then, is another way of talking about mediation—but always as a material process of binding, never merely as a material technology, aesthetic genre, form, or norm that achieves something. Mediation is not a stable thing but a way of seeing the unstable relations among dynamically related things. It is in this sense that any formulation of mediation is a heuristic, which is one kind of infrastructure, a propositional one. A heuristic is a thought experiment floated on offer, its logic followed through. As Diana Taylor has argued, when extended as an inflammatory counter-realism or as a counter-power, heuristics alone don't defeat institutions like, say, racialized capital, patriarchy, or the fantasy of the law as justice.[53] But they do spark blocks that are inconvenient to a thing's reproduction.

Think about Fanon's argument about interruption: "I should say that the Negro, because of his body, impedes the closing of the postural schema of the white man."[54] This politically animated impediment is not just a prop for whiteness but an inconvenience to its reproduction. It produces, in Fanon's work, figural and political infrastructures for countersocial organization: not from the determinative force of a violent event but in a war of attrition, form against form—the friction of productive movement, Tsing would say. As Harney and Moten argue it likewise, the undercommons is a heuristic infrastructure. You could say that people live there because the infrastructures change as they travel and become more or less elastic; or you could say that they make an atmosphere of generative movement in proximity to a historical community that may or may not be caught up in liberal "recogni-

tion" of identity. Infrastructure points to the inconvenience of a concept that reorganizes spaces and practices in the glitch and suspension it creates, and to the figuration it offers for a collective tryout. Infrastructure can, in other words, loosen the object-world's self-relation while holding on to living, and in this sense it offers the pleasures of an attachment to life from an otherwise arduous space.

As a test, think about the difference between the phrases *the institution of marriage* and *the infrastructure of marriage*. Infrastructures are productive, durationally extensive spaces for the pliable forms of life that people use to make rules and norms and other means of extending the world. Infrastructures do not honor distinctions between the productive and the reproductive because they follow the elastic logic of cluster, of assemblage. Rules are stretchy and norms are porous. In our notice of this capacity for structural distortion and disturbance, infrastructural thought is a way of coming to analytic terms with the complex material and discursive dimensionality, temporality, and use value that constitute the disturbed, yet ongoing, forces of the ordinary. The Deleuzian logic of Jameson's representation of the synchronic or historical present in *Political Unconscious* and the charts in Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille plateaux* figure this: all of these accounts of mediation set the stage for thinking of infrastructure's heuristic genres as radically redefining some definition of *structure* as something other than a kind of smoothness on top of volatility.[55]

Infrastructural affect throws a light onto the generic material kind. The affectivity infrastructure generates is not just in the air or the gut or thrown together or ideology but specifically involves the sensing of the dimension and extension of what we might call organized air, the projected atmospheres sustained by collective practices. For example, Shannon Lee Dawdy and Madalina Diaconu offer "patina" as a slowly moving emerging object/scene made from specific usages that come to constitute historical, political, and potential environments. Patina-spaces are affective insofar as they texture forms of life to one side of hegemonic representations of life in scenes of generative contact. Patina-spaces provide infrastructures through the practical touch that resonates to history and the sense of what is collective and accruing.[56] This means that the very living lability of infrastructure is where actions are located once structure is recast as structures in the space/times where they also operate, have impact, and organize the potential to change. Thus the heterotopic linkage. The perspective it generates shifts how we evaluate the solidity of the world, in order to think about the disturbance that is life as making forms that stand in as structures to return to that are also

themselves always disturbed and on the move: adjusting, dilating, and offering new possibilities for causality and experience. This affective dimension of infrastructure expands the gritty version of it to the imaginaries that have to accompany its mediating performance of sociality. It allows us to think not that there will be other worlds later but that other environs are emerging now whose shapes are made by the living.

In a crisis we need to provide a concept of structure for transitional times: I call it transitional infrastructure. All times are transitional. But at some crisis times like this one, politics is defined by a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life. A glitch is an interruption within a transition, a troubled transmission. A glitch is also a claim about the revelation of an infrastructural failure. The repair or replacement of broken infrastructure is necessary for any form of sociality to extend itself, but a few definitional problems arise from this observation. One is defining what distinguishes a transitional infrastructure from the ordinary relational scene that generates the ongoingness of the world through some cobbled-together inventive and repetitive activity; the other is about what repair, or the beyond of glitch, looks like both generally and amid a catastrophe.

Crisis infrastructuralism as an epistemology emerges when we are compelled to understand that nothing from above or on the outside is holding the world together solidly; the emergent threads become manifestly loose and knotty and multiply while still reproducing some aspects of life. In a crisis, what passed as "structure" passes into infrastructure.[57] The glitch of the present that we link to economic crisis, for example, fans out into other ongoing emergencies involving the movement of bodies into and out of citizenship and other forms of being-with and jurisdiction; contemporary anti-austerity politics not only points to new ties among disparately located and unequally precarious lives, but also marks the need for a collective struggle to determine the terms of transition for general social existence. Terms for transition provide conceptual infrastructures for living change as something other than loss, but as part of the protocols or practices that hold the world up.

To attend to the terms for transition is to forge an imaginary for managing the meanwhile within damaged life's perdurance, a meanwhile that is less an end or an ethical scene than a technical political heuristic that allows for ambivalence not to destroy collective existence. This use of writing the long middle without drowning in it is what I take to be one function of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* and also a way of reading the "interesting" and "frenzy" chapters of Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories*. Jeremy Gilbert adapts Gilbert Simondon's concept of provisional unity or metastability for this

matter, allowing us to see transitional infrastructure as a loose convergence that lets a collectivity stay bound to the ordinary even as some of its forms of life are fraying, wasting, and developing offshoots among types of speculative practice, from the paranoid to the queer utopian.[58]

Social movement witnesses to the glitch of this moment have included the political practices of Occupy and other anti-austerity movements, as well as antiracist and antixenophobic movements across the world, insofar as they all define the present not just as a fresh slice of settler colonial efficacy, but as a scene shaped by the infrastructural breakdown of modernist practices of resource distribution, social relation, and affective continuity as an effect of capitalist chaos and resistance by communities of solidarity, from the nation-state to the grassroots. Moreover, they all manifest as process philosophies, building critique and distributing self-governance as emergent practices across episodes, without the metastructure of party authority—they work on infrastructural principle. Given newly intensified tensions, anxieties, and antipathies at all levels of intimate abstraction, the question of politics becomes identical with the reinvention of infrastructures for managing the unevenness, ambivalence, violence, and ordinary contingency of contemporary existence.

Crisis infrastructures have already populated our imaginaries of affective realism and material collective life, where we find the affective zone of its collective tone. Tone is what Sianne Ngai calls the "unfelt but perceived feeling" that disturbs our judgment of what in the world is internal and what's external, what's personal and impersonal, subjective and objective.[59] The tone of infrastructure is confident when the present is defined by convergence; when crisis infrastructures point to scavenging as a way of life, the tone is anxious, flailing, emerging from a desperation that's hard to locate but that calls into being patching action in order to maintain the collective movement that joins survival to adjectives other than *mere* and on multiple registers.

But if a glitch has made apparent these conditions of disrupted jurisdiction, resource, and circulation, a disruption in rules and norms is not the same thing as the absence or defeat of structure as such. I've suggested that an infrastructural analysis helps us see that what we commonly call "structure" is not what we usually presume—an intractable principle of continuity across time and space—but is really a convergence of force and value in patterns of movement seen as solid from a distance. Objects are always looser than they appear. Objectness is only a semblance, a seeming, a projection-effect of interest in a thing we are trying to stabilize. I am also therefore proposing that one task for makers of critical social form is to offer not just

judgment about positions and practices in the world, and not just prefigurations of the better good life, but terms for transition that help alter the hard and soft infrastructures of sociality itself.

Ambivalence

Along the way to writing this book, many subtitles floated around until I gave up: *On the Inconvenience of Other People: But Not You*—the audience favorite; *Essays on Ambivalence; Essays on Unlearning*. Nothing was alive enough: I'm trying to bring these concepts back from the flat monodirectionality or bidirectionality with which they're associated. One presupposition of *Inconvenience* is that the problem of the world isn't one's alienation from it but, as Adam Phillips writes, its overcloseness, the ongoing pressure of it.[60] See the earlier argument about nonsovereignty. *Alienation* is a technical term for not being in control of the conditions of one's value or ownership of the products of one's labor. It is also an affective state that can be lived in many ways, from the negative sense of separateness from things to a range of feelings from rage to depression. It suggests subtraction, withdrawal, a distance. Yet if the a priori of alienation is the world's overcloseness, then alienation implies a style of response that manages the inconvenience of the world by creating a distance from within the space of relation: in Marxist technical terms, a way of rerouting the body's intimate labor for the value extraction of others. Capitalism fracks the sensorium.

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So, brainstorm your own examples of structural and affective alienation.

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You will see, I think, that they express not a failure to be in relation but a failure within it. We wouldn't need defenses if relations really failed: defenses are against something or someone that's still there, whether the "there" is just in one's head or appreciable by others or verifiable via research. Creating affective distance in order to make being in relation bearable, good, possible, or just happen is the expression of ambivalent attachment to living on despite, with, against, and in a dynamic relation to whatever's structuring things, both the in-your-face things and the in-the-world things. Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis argue that fantasy is what allows you to bear your ambivalence, not by resolving and vanquishing it, but in the way it fills in the holes left by your incoherence toward yourself, those you love, what matters, your appetites, and the world, whose concept you carry around as

a figure in your head and walk through responding in a range of moods—numb, confirmed, and surprised.[61] Fantasy is therefore an infrastructure that points to and protects ambivalence without erasing it. It is inconvenient to genuine transformation insofar as it confuses the world with its penumbra and prospects; it is crucial to the force of social transformation. It is one of the many transformational infrastructures this book will speak to.

When we usually think about ambivalence, it's tilted negatively, as an alienation toward. This book proposes to return ambivalence to its dynamic etymology, as being strongly mixed, drawn in many directions, positively and negatively charged. When I say "I love you," it means that I want to be near the feeling of ambivalence our relation induces and hope that what's negative, aggressive, or just hard about it doesn't defeat what's great about it really—or in my fantasies of it, anyway. This isn't just interpersonal—it's about any affective infrastructure that importantly holds up one's world. If it's important, it names the scene of the inconvenient relation among its threat to overwhelm, the survival it shakes up, the life that proceeds anyway, the confusion about what to do, inventiveness, and, in certain situations, the enjoyment it offers.

This book might be irritating because of its insistence on the many both/ands of attachment. But it is motivated by desires worthy of following through, even if the case study exercises offering transformative infrastructures for being in relation are in themselves too few, too local, too normative, or otherwise unsatisfying. Books are never finished: one just stops writing them. The exempla are beginnings, not hermetic seals.

Unlearning, or Loosening the Object

My argument so far has been that that our task as engaged thinkers is not to replace inconvenient objects with better ones but to loosen up the object to reorganize and extend it, whether that object includes personal or impersonal processes. In *Cruel Optimism* I suggested that our important objects are not things but clusters of promise, projection, and speculation that hold up a world that we need to sustain. They are scenes of attachment that at once seem specific the way a beloved person, animal, or idea can, while at the same time they represent abstractions that allow speculation about the kind of reliable life they generate. That book focuses on stuck or poisonous relations to objects, including ideas of the good life in its many domains, and it points to ways of resisting the reproduction of attachment to diminishing but world-sustaining things. My next book, on humorlessness, is about

holding on to the object so tightly one would prefer to bring the world down around it, not in the sense of an addict's auto-consumption but in the sense of wanting to be in relationality yet so in control of its dynamics that they become defined by what is immovable. Inconvenience, though, focuses on the encounter with and the desire for the bother of other people and objects; it's about the problem of wanting that finds oneself wanting in maintaining yet disturbing relations and thus about the problem of transforming objects that aren't only toxic, necessarily, but difficult to negotiate.

How do you change an object from within life? How do you change the kind of inconvenience you represent to others? The concept points to ambivalent relationality that induces elbow room, breathing space, and patience with the contradictory demands we make of our objects—to be known but not too much, to know without presumption, to be real and worthy of idealization, to be graceful but generous when things get awkward.

My commitment in this book is to generate a nonreproductive theory that uses the glitch of the present in crisis to displace the protocols and norms that got us here, as I argue in this introduction's section on infrastructure. Its strategy, which I learned first from reading Nietzsche, is to induce transformation from within relations to the object. I call it loosening the object. You can't simply lose your object if it's providing a foundational world infrastructure for you. You can't decide not to be racist, not to be misogynist, not to be ambivalent about your anchors or fixations. But you can use the contradictions the object prompts to loosen and reconfigure it, exploiting the elasticity of its contradictions, the incoherence of the forces that overdetermine it, that make every object/scene an assemblage that requires an intersectional analysis.

To loosen an object is to look to recombining its component parts. Another way to say it: to unlearn its objectness. This threatens the very way of knowing that brings us to the inconvenience of our objects, to the project of living with them. I learned to attach to the inconvenience of unlearning from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's demand for an ethics of epistemological discomfort involving the unlearning of Euro-American monoculturalism.[62] An entire industry of dedicated thought involving unlearning as a project has extended from this work, developing now in decolonial theory: the unlearning of a perspective on the world that reproduces the vertical power presumptions of the West, rationality, patriarchy, white supremacy, and capital.[63] To unlearn the very structuring perspectives of entitlement and freedom that have long sustained settler colonial optimism requires the painful transitional commitment to unlearning the anchoring perspective from which

one writes. How to do this? There are many ways to unlearn the object, of which the perspective of unlearning is one that moves throughout the text. This cluster of assays is another formal example of how to do that: to think at once about the many moving parts that would need to shift for a form of thought to come into being and to elaborate their substance, to be a theorist of a process that coordinates without calculating the implications of that shift. A third would be breaking the object, as in chapter 2; refusing its performativity, as in chapter 3; slackening it, as in the coda. In chapter 1, I link and disorganize the conventional relation between disturbance and trauma and then sit inside the overlap of sustaining and destructive sexual desire.

Additionally, as an experiment in loosening the object, and therefore in changing the encounter with its inconvenience, I have attempted to write this book in my parenthetical voice. When writers insert in parentheses material that is not math nor for purposes of documentation, it's sometimes out of laziness: they're inserting something when they think of it. But the parenthetical voice also tends to emerge when, within the parentheses, the author says what they really think. It's an intimate voice, an insider's tonal shift. Its status is confusing: higher truth, gut feeling, unprocessed thought, note for later. Ironic self-undermining, or pseudo-self-undermining. An eruption of frankness in many tones. I have banned parentheses from the writing and tried to be disciplined about limiting the sneaky ways em dashes, notes, and other modes of insertion produce hierarchies among knowledges that distinguish "rational" analysis from other modes deemed less legitimate, more spontaneous, more visceral.[64]

From the moment I wrote my first theoretical preface, I've been flailing in public to find a tone to write in, one that would allow me to bring all of my knowledge to the table that's created by engaging the problem-cause of the writing. The skeptical tradition that Stanley Cavell elaborated allowed him to think that his thinking aloud in the vernacular of world-relation should be the same thing as being philosophically technical: this is especially the case when he thinks with art, where he takes on the limited perspective of limited persons and sees how, whatever mistakes they made, they did what they could do to navigate a world unready for the form of contact in liberty that they could imagine. To show up for the situation of mutuality with what one has is another way Cavell talks about love. "She did what she could do at the time" has long been my comic epitaph, and by *comic* I mean it enables me to write even from the limits of my ordinariness.

I decided a long time ago that I would write this book in the space of permission opened by Cavell and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, too, although they

are different in their adjudication of the technical and the vernacular. From Sedgwick I learned that it's not an idea until you circulate it, whatever stage it has reached. From Cavell I learned that showing up with the bruised fruit of one's perspective is what the argument requires to reshape the dynamic processes always on the move from and toward forms of life. These methodological commitments helped me see a way into writing that would be freeing.

To write without parentheses is to avoid the tricky insertions or hierarchies of theoretical, exemplary, aesthetic, or personal value that extend an insider pleasure and witty snob-value to the scene of reading. Proceeding in brokenness, casting heuristic forms for the next phase of thinking, believing genuinely that an experiment extended can become a form of life, it queers the thought experiment, queers form into what's labile, argumentative, and intimate because it's available to the inconvenience of thinking that loosens a question, unlocking its repetitions and releasing its energies beyond coasting. In theory, anyway.

notes

Preface

1 See Rabin, "U.S. Suicides Declined Over All in 2020 but May Have Risen among People of Color." *The New York Times*, April 15, 2021, accessed April 18, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/15/health/coronavirus-suicide-cdc.html.

Introduction

1 On comedy as a scene for revealing personality as a mechanical stuckness, see the tradition of humanistic comedy theory from Bergson, *Laughter*, to Zupančič, *The Odd One In*, and Dolar, "Comic Mimesis," 570–89.
2 J. Butler, *Frames of War*.
3 "Being affected" is how the Spinozan tradition of affect theory introduces the dynamics of affect that animate the human from a nonhuman space. See,

for example, Deleuze, *Spinoza*. Entanglement is a central concept both for Fred Moten and Elizabeth Povinelli in describing the a priori form of social relations. I find it only moderately useful, insofar as it presumes an intensity and an ethical scene that I think only sometimes applies. But when it does, it's a powerful concept and logic. See Moten, *Black and Blur*; and Povinelli, *Geontologies*.

4   See Byrd, *Transit of Empire*; Cattelino, *High Stakes*. See also the extremely rich reconsiderations of sovereignty throughout Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja, eds., *Native Studies Keywords*, and the "curated section" titled "Sovereignty" in the *Journal of Cultural Anthropology*, https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/catalog/category/sovereignty.

5   The phrase *other people* carries weight in many films and books. It usually designates ground zero of social irritation from the pressure to adapt or submit to other people's stuckness, will, and desire—or other cats' mere existence. In *The Book of Other People*, Zadie Smith translates this tendency into character study. I learned to notice this phrase from Klausner, "Cat News." A later instance includes Shields, *Other People*.

6   Critical theory of "the neighbor" has developed ways of thinking about the projected pressures of proximity, adding to classic political accounts of paranoia. See Copjec, "Sartorial Superego," 65–116; Hofstadter, "Paranoid Style in American Politics," 3–40; and Santner, Žižek, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*.

7   Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1707. As for women walking alone at night, it's worth noting here that sexual violence to women and girls happens mainly in a situation with an intimate partner or at home, which means the image of the abandoned street is itself what we might call, after Freud's "screen memory," a "screen trope," a fantasia that blocks out how predictably the threat of violence in the lure of intimacy escalates from the intimacy drive to unbearable, and sometimes unliveable, situations. Chapter 1 and the coda in this book return to this scene of the torque. Most sexual violence happens among intimates in proximity to the domestic: the inconvenient there is more about the sense that women's performance of autonomy is a structural threat to the couple's or family's happiness. The literature of powerful testimonies to the predictable crash of love into violence is vast; recent rich resources include González-López, *Family Secrets*; and Snyder, *No Visible Bruises*.

8   For scholars new to the concept of the liebenswelt, or "life world," introduced by Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz and first made known to me through Jürgen Habermas, see Harrington, "Lifeworld," 341–43. In this chapter the term *lifeworld* is interchangeable with "the ordinary," but it brackets the separation between material or structural and subjective conditions that conventionally accompany the term. In this book the structural is not outside of anything but expresses itself in institutions, subjectivities, and other processes through which it becomes reproduced. See the section and chapters on infrastructure and mediation.

9   Joshua Chambers-Letson points out that the logistics that established the very architecture of global commerce also produced the means of production of both slavery and racism. So while this chapter looks at infrastructure building as a heterotopic tool, its emancipatory potential is released and releasing only if its users want it. Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 179–89. See also the analysis of the Cold War's long-term infrastructural effects in the clarifying, materialist, and affectively attuned work of Joseph Masco in *Theater of Operations*.

10 Harney and Moten, "Michael Brown"; Mbembe, "Necropolitics"; Puar, *Right to Maim*.

11 On supremacist love and resentment as entitled affects, see Ahmed, "In the Name of Love."

12 I learned to think about propinquity and contiguity from conversations with Joan Copjec. See Copjec and Sorkin, eds., *Giving Ground*.

13 In drawing out the enigmatic and designified signifier, and the concept of the psychic enclave or retreat, Jean Laplanche and John Steiner offer important resources for my thinking with the sensed but often partly acknowledged registers of affective exchange; I draw on these throughout the book. Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*; Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*; Steiner, *Psychic Retreats*; and Steiner, *Seeing and Being Seen*.

14 Cavell's large corpus of work on comedies of remarriage as figures of the philosophical skepticism he advances makes this claim about love being the scene to which we show up abundantly without having to be good at it. See, for example, his classic *Pursuits of Happiness*.

15 Tsing, *Friction*. Tsing's conceptualization of friction is usually far more engaged and conscious than this book's proposition about the frictions of inconvenience, but its rigor and exemplary storytelling have accompanied me throughout this process.

16 As a description of the singular encounter that draws someone into an image, or what I think of as a scene, Roland Barthes's concept of the punctum serves as a resource to think with in detailing what Freud calls the "economic problem" of the rise and fall of intensities in response to the world. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

17 I refer here both to the vernacular and psychoanalytic negativity of "ambivalence." The vernacular sense of "mixed feelings" is weighted heavily toward the negative, as though positive attachments would at best and realistically feel unmixed. Most famously, the psychoanalytic version of the concept is associated with Melanie Klein. Her construction of ambivalence was at first in extremis along axes of love and hate of world-sustaining objects like the breast and the mother. The descriptive development of the complex dynamics of love and hate in terms of fear, envy, and gratitude and reparative positions extended through her career. She criticized Freud for being too binaristic with respect to love and hate, so my resistance to her dramatization of psychic dramas feels somewhat tu quoque. Klein's classic essays are "A Contribution

to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," and "Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant."

18 The literature on projective identification following Melanie Klein's introduction of the concept tends to find its clearer and more stable home in T. Ogden, "On Projective Identification." Theorists and clinicians continue to debate the question of whether use of the other to make bearable the subject's intensely difficult internal states is an extraordinary aggression or ordinary propping. Some useful summaries include W. Goldstein, "Clarification of Projective Identification"; and Mendelsohn, "Projective Identifications of Everyday Life." Joshua Chambers-Letson has usefully turned this concept toward rethinking the dynamics of aggressive racialization in a time of heightened white-racist negativity and antiterrorism in the United States. See Chambers-Letson, "Homegrown Terror."

19 On Wilhelm Reich's question to Freud, "Where does the misery come from?" see Rose, "Where Does the Misery Come From?"

20 Goffman, "Footing."

21 I address the aspiration of critical thought toward at once establishing, disturbing, *and* transforming objects of engagement, including questions, in Berlant, "Genre Flailing."

22 Many queer, Indigenous, and disability theorists richly conceptualize the specificity of time emerging from the lived perspective of an overdetermined, specific, yet collective body. A wide range of queer work that is engaged with these problematics and archives can be found in the recent cutting-edge collection edited by Siobhan Somerville, *The Cambridge Companion to Queer Studies*. My particular focus on living through the present also draws me to care modes as marking durational urgencies: see Fink, *Forget Burial*; and of course Dean Spade's mighty work in the "right now" of *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity during This Crisis (and the Next)*. See also Goodley, "Dis/Entangling Critical Disability Studies"; Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*; and Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time." Mark Rifkin amply engages with the question of Indigenous survival as more than a reckoning with pasts throughout the oeuvre, but notably in *Beyond Settler Time*. See also P. Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*.

23 Hardt, "Affective Labor"; and Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*. See also Negri, "Labor of the Multitude"; Diaconu, "Patina-Atmosphere-Aroma"; Dawdy, *Patina*; Moten, *Stolen Life*; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; and Warren, *Ontological Terror*. See also important critiques of strong theory by Eve Sedgwick and Sylvia Yanagisako, which claim an aversion to rigid figurations of process. See Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading"; and Yanagaisako, "Immaterial and Industrial Labor." I see strongly figurative works as more dynamic than that, *because* they are more figurative, involving methods of testing out rather than bearing down. But that might be more about what we read for and against than about what's on the page.

24 In this sense these writers of the present-in-transition fulfill the image bequeathed by Juliet Mitchell in "Theory as an Object."

25 Eve Sedgwick quips at one point that, unlike Elizabeth Bishop, she's not trying to lose her objects but to loosen the space her collection of them can inhabit in an ensemble of no particular order. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 8. My use of *loose* is not to increase spaciousness but to make different ones available from within the scene of attachment.

26 Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 5.

27 This perspective resonates with the model of movement as a productive entangling of conceptual and lifeworld materiality. See Harney and Moten, "Michael Brown"; and A. K. Thompson, *Premonitions*.

28 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 22.

29 Although not uncontroversial, the strongest materialist and theoretical writing on Foucauldian heterotopias includes Teyssot, "Heterotopias and the History of Spaces."

30 On lifeworlds, see note 8 above.

31 The concept of the "cultural dominant" is Fredric Jameson's, in and after *Postmodernism*. Sometimes he invokes the achievement of such a dominant as the other to "sheer heterogeneity" (6) and sometimes as a synonym of *hegemony*, an organizing force that tries to organize diverse domains of the social (158). I'm pushing at the second definition, which professional and lay theorists often misperceive as "the Real."

32 Clover, "Genres of the Dialectic."

33 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 81.

34 On the concept/context toggle, producing a dynamic representation of history, see Bosteels, *Actuality of Communism*.

35 Kapil, *Ban en Banlieue*, 30.

36 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces." Delaney, *Times Square Red*; Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*.

37 I came on my own to proxemics, framing it as a dialed-back preliminary concept of "belonging," but I discovered during early revisions of chapter 3 two scenes of related thought and art to move with: Edward T. Hall's ethnographic work on proximity as a social, mathematical, and neuropsychological emanation, and the social space work of Liam Gillick. See further discussion in chapter 3, note 65. This concept resonates with Ben Anderson's great work on atmosphere as well in *Encountering Affect*.

38 The strongest statements about queerness as an ethics have shaped my sense of the relation of the personal and the impersonal obligation among intimates, whether strangers or mutually known. That kind of toggle is central to this book's discussion of the infrastructures of inconvenience. Amin, *Disturbing Attachments*; Chen, *Animacies*; Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*.

39 I learned to think about overdetermination by studying Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, Roger Establet, and Pierre Macherey in

Reading Capital, and of course Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," and Jameson, *Political Unconscious*. In this tradition, clear and concrete figurations of a process are deemed to be defenses against facing its multiple causes of situations, scenes, antagonisms, and events and therefore holding tight to a simplified model of "solution." In the decades after these interventions into how to think about structure and structure-related subjectivity, overdetermination has been made structuralist again by Slavoj Žižek and his formidable allies. I prefer this other tradition's general framing of the event, the scene, and the social formation of the ideologeme as at once the distillation, amplification, and transformative extension of an overdetermined problem. See also Pignarre and Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery*.

40 On breaking with the reproduction of an intimate public, see Best, *None Like Us*.

41 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*.

42 Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*.

43 Not only are there many theoretical arguments about how the contemporary object works, but consensus is abundant that the World Bank, the European Union, and authoritarian states are allied sources of the contemporary world that accept fully and are committed to spreading the neoliberal model of constantly adjusting market-prejudiced policy and the individual responsibility to self-exploit, with progressively less and less support from state infrastructures for those who are unable to find traction in the world of whack-a-mole opportunism. The centrality of social and economic chaos to contemporary capitalism has become an affective fact for many, leading to radical political animation and also mass resignation. The centrality of counter-logics in the form of alternative economic and social infrastructures for creating a counter-chaos is also central to much vitalizing contemporary thought. Such a bibliography is too enormous to contain here; for exemplary condensations, see Harvey, *Enigma of Capital*; Postone, "Thinking the Global Crisis"; Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist Politics*; Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot*; and Bear et al., "Gens."

44 The forms of life induced by processes of structuration have been addressed quite differently by various materialist analyses of the structure/infrastructure relation. In one—the more economistic and structuralist one—a great distance is maintained between the scramble of everyday life's reproductive activity and the institutions managing the capitalist control of value. In the other, the contemporary literature on infrastructure, subjectivity, and wealth are seen as more fully and productively bound up with each other. This infrastructure literature is more extensively cited in my investigation of the commons concept in chapter 2. My main teachers from this perspective have been McCormack, "Elemental Infrastructures for Atmospheric Media"; and Sahlins, "Infrastructuralism."

45 R. Williams, "Structures of Feeling." For a witty and effective synthesis of the feminist and queer traditions that established infrastructure as a measure of

the material and affective dynamics of relation, see Wilson, "Infrastructure of Intimacy."

46 Here I refer to many literatures imagining a transformation of the social and economic infrastructures based on forms and temporalities of value other than property, sovereignty, and wealth. Three particular traditions have shaped this analysis. The feminist and queer literature on "social reproduction" is too vast to lay out here, but my foundations go from Silvia Federici's entire oeuvre to Gibson-Graham's *A Postcapitalist Politics* to Katz, Marston, and Mitchell, eds., *Life's Work*. A clear recent review essay points accurately to developments in the discourse; see Norton and Katz, "Social Reproduction." See also Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%*; and Cooper, *Feeling Like a State*.

47 I learned to focus on crafting terms for thinking the overdetermination of the always developing historical present through Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," which argues for seeing the body as a constantly but discontinuously mutating effect of the world's impacts. I use *infrastructure* here to point to such a potentializing process that animates spaces of social convergence, in alliance with the anarchist tradition that turns to infrastructuring as a means by which to reimagine the transformation of living in concrete social relations and material relations. Recent anarchist thought that's been sustaining, clarifying, and powerful for me include A. Thompson, *Premonitions*; and Klausen and Martel, eds., *How Not to Be Governed*.

48 Sahlins, "Infrastructrualism."

49 Cowen et al., "Elemental Infrastructures for Atmospheric Media." See note 44. In addition to the citations in note 44, see Rubenstein, *Public Works*; and Rubenstein, Robbins, and Beal, "Infrastructuralism." The latter essay argues that "the alignment of infrastructure with the concept of the public good or the commons is essential to our definition" (577), whereas this introduction argues against the vague implication of such "alignment." That essay's interest in infrastructural complexity and contradiction, though, is in line with this chapter's resistance to the pastoral, reparative simplicity that the commons concept also wields.

50 Deborah Cowen, "Disrupting Distribution: Subversion, the Social Factory, and the 'State' of Supply Chains."

51 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures*. In 2017 at the University of California, Berkeley, Warner gave a Tanner Lecture on infrastructure titled "Environmental Care and the Infrastructure of Indifference." In it his logics are intelligible in proximity to the concept of the counterpublic but are not manifestly affiliated with queer thought. A video of the lecture is available online: "Tanner Lectures: 2017–2018 Lecture Series," University of California, Berkeley, March 20–22, 2018, https://tannerlectures.berkeley.edu/2017-2018-lecture-series/.

52 Tsing, *Friction*; and Tsing, *Mushroom*.

53 Taylor, "Double-Blind."

54 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 124.

55 Jameson, *Political Unconscious*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

56 See note 21.

57 Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*; Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*.

58 Gilbert, *Common Ground*, 107–18.

59 Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 28.

60 Phillips, "Close-Ups."

61 Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality."

62 Relevant essays where Spivak asserts the need for, elaborates, and transforms what she means by unlearning include "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice," and "Politics of Translation." Spivak is continuously modifying her concept: see Danius, Jonsson, and Spivak, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak."

63 See Tlostanova and Mignolo, eds., *Learning to Unlearn*. See also Jimmy Casas Klausen's recent critique of the binarist programmatic practice expressed in much decolonial work in his review of *On Decoloniality*, by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, and *The End of Cognitive Empire*.

64 There's always the lure of the footnote . . .

ONE / SEX *Sex in the Event of Happiness*

1 For a popular essayistic encounter with this question of countering erotophobia in proximity to assault, see Friedman and Valenti, *Yes Means Yes*. Another inspiring piece on this topic is Delaney, *Times Square Red*.

2 For more on the difficulty of thinking sex with and without world-building optimism, see the chapter "Sex Without Optimism" in Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 1–34.

3 The title of this subheading gestures toward that of Jacqueline Rose's essay "Where Does the Misery Come From?" (1989), which extends Wilhelm Reich's "Sexual Misery of the Masses" to see the implantation of sexual difference as the scene of sexual unhappiness. This chapter suggests not sexual difference but erotophobia as that scene, the association of sex with all threats to sovereignty, which often drowns out the desire for threats to sovereignty for which sex, and other intimacies, also stand. See Rose's "Feminism and the Psychic" in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, 1–25.

4 *Body genre* comes from L. Williams, "Film Bodies."

5 Freud, *Jokes*, 25, 195–97.

6 Freud, *Jokes*, 185.

7 For my other constantly evolving discussions of genre, see Berlant, *Female Complaint* and *Cruel Optimism*.

8 See Freud, *Jokes*; Žižek, *Žižek's Jokes*; Limon, *Stand-up Comedy in Theory*.