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QUEER KINSHIP AND AMBIVALENCE

Video Autoethnographies by Jean Carlomusto and Richard Fung

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*K*inship describes a powerful, provisional, and affectively charged tissue of relations connecting subjects across time and space. Judith Butler describes kinship as “a set of practices that institutes relationships of various kinds which negotiate the reproduction of life and the demands of death.”¹ Conceived in this way as an open and generative web of relations and practices, kinship can be seen as *vital*, an ontological common denominator shared by queers and nonqueers. Nonetheless, the relationship between kinship and lesbian, gay, and queer experience, politics, thought, and cultural production is an anguished and contested one. For subjects frequently marginalized or excluded from its fold, “family” carries a tremendous allure of love and belonging—even as heteronormative political, legal, and theoretical discourses circumscribe kinship to normative, exclusive, and universalizing structures and composition.

Kinship offers a compelling language for understanding the power and constraints of relationality, but to think kinship queerly is an elusive task. Eve Sedgwick describes queer as a “transformative energy” or “relational force.”² Here, queer does not designate a fixed entity but a performative force of transformation or making strange (queering). A case in point: in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault incisively rearticulates the nineteenth-century family as a “place of maximum [sexual] saturation.”³ Foucault epistemologically opens the Freudian family to broader social and historical forces, reframing the “family cell” as a pivotal site for producing and monitoring sexuality. In this spirit, I argue that queer theory, activism, everyday life—and in the focus of this article, cultural production—make strange the grammar of kinship, potentially rearticulating the meanings and membership of family.

Ambivalence is a concept that usefully captures the collision of the terms *queer* and *kinship*. Defined as “the simultaneous experience of powerful, contradictory emotions or attitudes toward a single phenomenon,” ambivalence captures the fraught affective and political stakes of kinship for queer subjects and communities.⁴ For instance, in *Families We Choose*, Kath Weston identifies an influential Anglo-American discourse that has historically positioned lesbians and gay men as exiles from kinship. For Weston, the figure of the lonely homosexual exemplified by Oscar Wilde or Radclyffe Hall has been pivotal to historical discourses of homosexuality.⁵ The notion that lesbians and gay men and family are somehow mutually exclusive was subsequently reappropriated in 1970s feminist and Gay Liberation critiques of the heterosexual nuclear family.⁶ From the 1980s, however, in the wake of the AIDS pandemic, a redemptive discourse of families of choice has emerged in recognition of generative, alternative queer kinship practices. Most recently, in contemporary U.S., and to a lesser extent Canadian, contexts characterized by right-wing family values discourses, political and legal lobbies for the recognition of lesbian and gay kinship bonds have taken center stage in lesbian and gay activism. These struggles for the state legitimation of LGBT kinship structures have, in turn, provoked incisive critiques in some contemporary queer thought and activism.⁷

The tension between the transformative discourse of families of choice and exiles from kinship encapsulates a profoundly ambivalent and affectively charged queer stance toward family. Arguing that ambivalence is a feature of “virtually all” kinship systems, Michael Peletz points to increasing scholarly attention to the “exclusions, denials, betrayals and disappointments associated with discontinuities and crises in filiation.”⁸ Alongside the phenomena of new reproductive technologies and diasporic kinship, studies of lesbian and gay kinship have been central to revisionist anthropology’s rethinking of kinship. For instance, the coming-out process frequently provokes fraught relationships between LGBT subjects and blood family, while the AIDS pandemic has only exacerbated a kinship ontology characterized by exclusion, disappointment, and discontinuity. These experiences contest normative accounts of family characterized by affective plentitude, and by teleological blood and property relations of reproduction, continuity, and heredity. The notion of affective ambivalence, along with an associated attention to fragmented, discontinuous, and traumatic experiences of kinship, is germane to a queer rethinking of kinship.

The places and roles of kinship in LGBT experience, thought, and politics are currently under close scrutiny in many disciplines. Drawing from existing

interdisciplinary scholarship, this article begins a study of how audiovisual cultural production contributes to the cultural and symbolic queering of kinship. In contrast with the precise language required by political and legal discourse—for and against same-sex marriage, for instance—I argue that many LGBT audiovisual productions afford unexpected, affectively nuanced, and above all productively ambivalent accounts of kinship. Specifically, I analyze the formal strategies used to make strange and reconfigure kinship in three video autoethnographies by Jean Carlomusto (*To Catch a Glimpse* [1997] and *Shatzi Is Dying* [1999]) and Richard Fung (*Sea in the Blood* [2000]); I also refer briefly to Fung’s earlier work, *My Mother’s Place* (1990).

Carlomusto and Fung are both established and politically engaged video artists based in New York City and Toronto, respectively. With her recent turn to autoethnography, Carlomusto extends a long-standing engagement with the AIDS pandemic and lesbian representation to a more personal terrain of kinship, memory, and loss.⁹ Meanwhile, within his extensive video oeuvre interrogating the intersections of sexuality, history, and migration, Fung has made several videos documenting his Chinese-Trinidadian family history.¹⁰ Fung’s and Carlomusto’s video essays present nuanced and often uncomfortable scrutiny of kinship against selective sociohistorical canvases. Both artists deploy the embedded first-person narration typical of autoethnography, as well as innovative formal strategies, to retell family histories fragmented by transnational migration and ruptured by illness and death.

Autoethnography is an autobiographical mode of research and writing that integrates a first-person voice with ethnographic cultural analysis. Originally developed as a self-reflexive research practice within revisionist anthropology, the term has subsequently been extended to include fictional writing, performance, film, and video. In the United States and Canada, autobiographical film and video, including experimental or new autobiography, have proliferated since the late 1960s.¹¹ José Muñoz uses the term to evoke a corpus of influential queer and postcolonial films and videos that he describes as “cultural performances . . . [that insert] a subjective, performative, often combative ‘native I’ into ethnographic film’s detached discourse.”¹² Extending existing scholarship that conceptualizes autoethnography as the encounter between a performative subject and a specific historical field, in this article I shift the analytic frame toward questions of kinship. The problem of kinship broadens the focus from individual subjects to the intimate attachments through which they situate themselves (and are in turn situated) in relation to others across time and space.

A crucial intermediary frame between self and history, the family figures insistently in queer autoethnography. Autoethnography generates unexpected and inventive audiovisual accounts of queer kinship, incorporating such formal elements as voice-over, interviews, family photographs and home movies, historical footage, and citations from popular culture.¹³ Fung and Carlomusto participate in a widespread turn to film and video autoethnography from the 1980s by lesbian, working-class LGBT people, and queers of color. Continuing the legacy of this practice as a tool for expressing subjugated knowledges, these artists let singular queer voices and relations collide with family images and narratives at once cherished and heteronormative. Like many other queer autoethnographers, Fung and Carlomusto are well versed in current critical political and theoretical debates, bringing a wealth of critical acumen to their video practice. Consequently, I consider their videos not simply as case studies but as considered images of thought: these works intervene eloquently into contemporary theoretical and political debates about queerness and kinship.¹⁴

This article explores some of Fung's and Carlomusto's formal strategies for queering the affective, psychic, political, and epistemological terrain of kinship: ambivalent inside/outside narration; the blood family and the telling secret; the articulation of queer narration with migrant family histories; and particularly, the tapes' unusual accounts of illness and death as central to the practices and relations of kinship. These stunning portraits of illness draw deeply from Fung's and Carlomusto's experiences of AIDS, making connections with diverse illnesses and sociopolitical contexts. Read against hegemonic kinship narratives of continuity across space and time, of heredity and progress, the motifs of displacement, illness, death, and loss explored in these works produce fractured and affectively ambivalent kinship documents characterized by disruptions, silences, traumas, and gaps.

My second, closely related, focus is an investigation into the generative role of audiovisual culture in (re)producing, contesting, and rearticulating kinship. Indeed, Fung's and Carlomusto's formal strategies of multiple voicing and fragmented audiovisual narration amplify the affective and critical motifs of ambivalence, fragmentation, and discontinuity. The montage of disparate elements—family photographs, home movies, and storytelling—makes strange familiar familial media, prompting this preliminary meditation on the role of audiovisual media in constituting kinship.

Queer Autoethnography and the Telling Secret

In the opening moments of *My Mother's Place*, Fung alerts the viewer to the negotiated terms of this fifty-minute homage to his mother, Rita. Chronicling her Chinese-Trinidadian childhood, married life, and emigration to Canada, the tape partially conforms to a conventional biographical trajectory. Yet several framing devices, particularly the prominent voice-over narration characteristic of autoethnography, reinfect this study of the geographic and symbolic places occupied by Fung's mother. At the outset, the gay son announces his own complex role as narrator of a family history fraught (like all family histories) with silences, gaps, and contradictions. Terms such as *disclosures* and *lies* infuse the telling of this family's history with a queer epistemology of the telling secret (a theme that I return to below in discussing *To Catch a Glimpse*): "I'm asking these questions of my mother, but all my life I've heard the answers. I know which questions I'm not allowed to ask. I live in this family and there are consequences. . . . We both have our strategies, what to reveal, what to hint at, so that we neither make full disclosures, nor commit ourselves to outright lies. We eliminate details to protect the guilty."¹⁵

Fung's narration plays over a montage of production stills documenting the staging of the interviews that form the core of *My Mother's Place*. The first shot shows a display of family photographs on the mantelpiece in Rita's living room. Next, a freeze frame places Fung in a subtle yet significant relation to his mother. The artist is framed in partial profile in the foreground of the photograph, sitting on a low stool facing his mother who is seated in an armchair facing the camera. In conjunction with the voice-over, the photograph respectfully yet insistently

places the queer son both inside and outside the frame of the mother's video portrait. (For a variation on this distinctive inside/outside framing, see fig. 1.) This sequence exemplifies autoethnography's frequent use of voice-over narration to offset subtly the conventional wisdom associated with family memory.

The doubled audiovisual rhetoric of this sequence points



Figure 1. An example of the ambivalent inside/outside framing in *My Mother's Place*. Richard Fung

to a recurring ambivalent ontological, epistemological, and political positioning of lesbians, gay men, and queers both inside and outside the fold of kinship. For Diana Fuss, the queer figure of inside/outside evokes “the structures of alienation, splitting, and identification which together produce a self and an other, a subject and an object, an unconscious and a conscious, an interiority and an exteriority. . . . But the figure inside/outside, which encapsulates the structure of language, repression, and subjectivity, also designates the structure of exclusion, oppression, and repudiation.”¹⁶ The ethical and epistemological intricacies of inside/outside are highly suggestive for thinking kinship queerly. In autoethnography, the narrator as both author and protagonist facilitates a scrutiny of the conflicted allegiances and disavowals associated with kinship. Fung’s and Carlomusto’s videos interrogate how relatedness is forged not only on our own terms — as individuals, as lovers, as “families,” as communities — as choice. To paraphrase Karl Marx, if lesbians, gays, and queers seek to transform the historical discourses, practices, symbolic, and cultural forms of kinship, we do so within conditions (and relations) not of our own making.

Part of the difficulty in thinking kinship queerly is the continuity of queer and nonqueer kinship practices and relations. I cannot claim that lesbian-gay-queer kinship practices, taken up with the common ground of reproduction, illness, death, and mourning, are unique. Nevertheless, they do form a visible and controversial vanguard in broader North American and international transformations of intimacy. Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy, and Catherine Donovan argue, for example, that debates about same-sex marriage and parenting mark “boundary conflicts” within a profound transformation of intimate life in Western societies.¹⁷ The narrator’s predicament in *My Mother’s Place* crystallizes the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of LGBT subjects and kinship bonds within both private and public discourses of family. Often inscribed formally in autoethnography through affective, spatial, and temporal disjunctions between voice-over and image-track, the inside/outside figure of queer autoethnography evokes an ambivalent queer positioning on the cusp of kinship.

Like *My Mother’s Place*, Carlomusto’s *To Catch a Glimpse* works through a complexly situated queer narrator who is a family member, yet somehow excluded. Carlomusto’s definitive role as first-person narrator with powerful allegiances to her blood family often stands in tension with her lesbian-feminist analysis and identity. In one brief sequence, for instance, Carlomusto is pictured shaving her armpits in front of the bathroom mirror as a concession to “normal” American femininity. In voice-over, she reflects: “I feel like to really ask about who my family is, I need to fit in, and not be an outsider.”

To Catch a Glimpse investigates the mysterious circumstances surrounding the sudden death of Carlomusto's grandmother Rocca in 1939. The artist figures centrally as narrator and girl-sleuth who combs through family photographs, home movies, fragmented and contradictory memories, fictional films from the period, and archival evidence. Broaching the gap of death and the accompanying loss of intergenerational memory, the tape's search for the cause of Rocca's death prompts a much broader investigation of an immigrant family history, a quest for a time "when the family was [still] Italian." Assembling a partial family history fragmented by illness, death, forgetting, and secrets, *To Catch a Glimpse* foregrounds ruptures rather than continuity in kinship. These discontinuities and uncertainties are mediated through the material and formal properties of photography, video, home movies, oral histories — and through the narrative device of the telling (family) secret.

Like *My Mother's Place*, *To Catch a Glimpse* investigates the stories and events excluded from family lore — the silences and secrets that constitute family memory as much as the records transmitted through familiar stories, family photographs, and home movies. Early in the tape, Carlomusto observes in voice-over: "On Thanksgiving 1981 my aunts did something I'd never seen them do before. They sat down around the kitchen table and talked about their mother's death. It wasn't accidental that I was in the room. At twenty-two years old, I was being given a secret, one that had shaped our lives. That Thanksgiving, I decided to find out the truth about how my grandmother died."

To Catch a Glimpse follows an investigative narrative: what was the true cause of Rocca's death? Interviewing her elderly relatives, Carlomusto uncovers several contradictory stories: an internal hemorrhage, a botched illegal abortion, a tumor, and an ectopic pregnancy. Shrouded in obscure family memories and partial medical records, the cause of Rocca's death is ultimately left unresolved. Instead, what Carlomusto "documents" in this tape is a fragmented tissue of family stories and images — a series of half-truths, lies, gossip, and gaps in living memory.

Following Sedgwick's telling secret as a linchpin of queer epistemology, we might expect the family secrets sought out by queer autoethnographers to be of a sexual nature. Certainly, when screened in LGBT contexts — like many viewers, I first saw this work in the context of a LGBT film festival — there is a common expectation of a disclosure connected to same-sex desire. However, the secrets explored in *To Catch a Glimpse* and other autoethnographies are not primarily of this order. Rather, Carlomusto and Fung mine the discursive productivity of "the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the explicit" (along with

the relations of inside and outside) to delve into other kinds of secrets.¹⁸ These autoethnographies probe unspoken, painful, and repressed traumas that elude the family photo album: the unspoken effects of protracted illness or sudden death, the poverty and dislocations associated with migrant and working-class experience. Importantly, it is not the narrator's sexual identity that is at stake here. Instead, the blood family itself is rendered suspect. As with Lourdes Portillo's *The Devil Never Sleeps* (1996), *To Catch a Glimpse* investigates a suspicious death in the past, effectively staging family history as the scene of a crime.

One key aspect of autoethnography's ambivalent positioning on the cusp of kinship is a first-person narration probing family histories from the vantage point of an insistently queer present.¹⁹ This queer present is inscribed in diegetic references to LGBT community and politics, and to the maker's own chosen kin. It is also ensured through the contexts of the videos' production, distribution, and reception (notably LGBT film festivals and cultural venues), and in the artists' profiles as well-known queer activists and cultural producers. One effect of this retrospective temporal, affective, and critical positioning is an attention to secrets and silences, rather than the imposed consensus and continuity associated with family albums and family storytelling.

One hypothesis about Rocca's death explored in the tape is the possibility of an illegal abortion, doubly forbidden in 1939 by the law and by the Catholic Church. Although the abortion is never confirmed, at this juncture Carlomusto incorporates footage of prochoice protests, linking Rocca's experience of the 1930s with the tape's queer and feminist political present. In this way, the "crime" under investigation is deflected from a shameful family secret into a broader social context. In the process, the tape points to the monitoring and control of female reproduction so central to the institution of the family. As Ann Cvetkovich argues, "The secret of Rocca's death stands at the nexus of material histories of migration, class, gender, and sexuality, and in providing that larger context, Carlomusto both mitigates the effects of the secrecy and suggests that it creates a ripple effect that buries other significant histories."²⁰

In making *To Catch a Glimpse* Carlomusto invites a series of conversations and exchanges among her elderly relatives, bringing to light a series of unspoken, often traumatic, events and experiences from the past: young children's loss of their mother, cultural and geographic dislocation, and the material struggle of a working-class immigrant family to make ends meet during the Depression. Ultimately, the *process* of talking about Rocca's death and its lasting effects on the family becomes more important than discovering any fixed truth. In fact, the telling secret becomes a pretext for retelling family history. Near the end of the tape,



Figure 2. *To Catch a Glimpse* is prefaced with this Lumière film from 1896

Carlomusto notes in voice-over: “In remembering Rocca, I connect to my family in a way that isn’t solely bound up by the traditional ties of marriage and children.”

Indeed, this tape could be considered as a special kind of kinship practice, a performative practice allowing the maker to reformulate foundational stories and documents of kinship. Certainly, autoethnography tends to be process oriented, and Fung’s and Carlomusto’s videos allow the artist to forge different relations with their families. At once hermeneutic (the telling secret) and discursively productive (kinship practices in themselves), autoethnography’s ambivalent yet dynamic modes of narration signal the centrality of mediation in the cultural and affective (re)production of kinship. In the remainder of this section, I turn from questions of discourse and storytelling in *To Catch a Glimpse* to the tape’s preoccupation with photography, family, and death.

The tape’s opening sequence underlines a mutually constitutive dynamic between audiovisual technologies and family. The tape begins with 1896 footage by the pioneering filmmaker Auguste Lumière, featuring himself with his wife and child (fig. 2). This footage is accompanied by an organ soundtrack, while an anonymous male narrator voices a commentary by a journalist of the period: “When these cameras are made available to the public everyone will be able to picture those who are dear to them, no longer as static forms, but with their movements and their familiar gestures, capturing the speech on their very lips. Then death will no longer be absolute.” Significantly, Carlomusto prefaces her study of three generations of her Italian American working-class family with this cinematic “primal scene.” Highlighting the central role of visual culture in producing indi-

vidual, familial, and historical memory and identity, *To Catch a Glimpse* begins at the intersection of moving pictures, family, memory, and death.

From the Lumière clip, the film cuts briefly to black, then to a Thanksgiving home-movie sequence introducing Carlomusto's extended Italian American family in the 1960s. In voice-over, Carlomusto recalls that it was her Uncle Pete who brought the movie camera as a gift, and her father who shot the family movies. Meanwhile, her mother, Rose, carries the turkey to the table, smiling for the camera in a ritualistic performance of an all-American Thanksgiving, as Rose's sisters strike glamorous poses for the camera. Replayed in slow motion and intercut with other elements, these home-movie sequences point to the strange conventionality of gender and kinship as "modes of patterned and performative doing."²¹ By returning differently to family photographs and home movies, Carlomusto underscores the productive role of domestic media and storytelling as performative practices that conjoin gender, kinship, and ethnicity.

To Catch a Glimpse explores a particular family history that is at once intimate and social. The filmmaker in the (queer) present narrates home-movie sequences where she features as a child. At first a reluctant participant in her father's home movie, the young Jeanie is later charmed to see each of her aunts "transformed by the bright lights into Rosalind Russell, Greer Garson, Judy Garland." As with many feminist and queer autoethnographies, *To Catch a Glimpse* foregrounds how technology has changed hands, and how point of view is contested and dispersed. In keeping with Carlomusto's commitment to critical viewing practices in previous activist works scrutinizing cultural and political construction of AIDS and lesbian history and representation, this tape interrogates her own Italian American family history. Returning to the mysterious circumstances surrounding Rocca's death, Carlomusto interrogates a working-class, immigrant family history fractured by loss—the loss of a mother and grandmother and the family's Italian language and culture.

Alongside its complex voicing and narrative strategies, *To Catch a Glimpse* resonates with feminist and queer scholarship exploring how kinship is embedded within the practices of visual culture. Marianne Hirsch, for instance, describes the familial look inscribed within family photographs and, by extension, home movies: "Not the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object. . . . Family subjectivity is constructed relationally, and in these relations I am always both self and other(ed), both speaking and looking subject and spoken and looked at object. I am subjected and objectified."²²

Hirsch explores the familial look with reference to Roland Barthes's *Cam-*

era Lucida. She describes how the author's contemplation of his mother's photograph "provokes a moment of self-recognition which, in the reading process, becomes a process of self-discovery, a discovery of self-in-relation."²³ Hirsch's reading of *Camera Lucida* aligns suggestively with autoethnography's selves-in-relation; these works stage the impossible origins of the queer subject, tracing how she or he emerges entangled in family histories and narratives that are also shared, social histories and narratives. Indeed, the tapes' ambivalent inside/outside narration resonates closely with the intersubjective self-in-relation. These insights signal the centrality of practices of mediation—storytelling, domestic photography, and home movies—in forging kinship relations.

Camera Lucida shares with *To Catch a Glimpse* an affective and epistemological preoccupation with visual media as conduits and filters of memory and intimate relation. Here, Barthes deploys a singular (queer) voice to photography's intimate connection with death, but his scholarly study stumbles when confronted by the image of his beloved mother. Famously, he declines to reproduce his mother's photograph, its absence standing in for photography's indexical imprint of death, or "that-has-been."²⁴ *To Catch a Glimpse* also turns around a cherished photograph, one of the few remaining likenesses of Carlomusto's grandmother in a family portrait with her husband and children taken shortly before Rocca's death.

Briefly glimpsed in the title sequence, this photograph's importance is signaled shortly afterward, when Carlomusto is pictured with her mother, Rose, watching *Stella Dallas*, the classic maternal melodrama of 1937. The resemblance between Rose and Jean is striking as they sit together on the sofa, both weeping during the film's tragic ending where a devoted working-class mother is separated from her daughter on her wedding day; significantly, this classic film features Barbara Stanwyck, often rumored to be a lesbian. In the context of this intergenerational video chronicling the death of Rose's mother, the artist's bond with her mother is inevitably haunted by separation and loss; this mother-daughter bond is also inflected by issues of class so central to *Stella Dallas* and by the unspoken presence of lesbian identity and desire. From the two-shot of Carlomusto and her mother, the camera pans up the wall above their heads to the family portrait, zooming in on Rocca. In voice-over, Carlomusto notes: "I learned to love old movies from my mother, Rose. . . . We were always watched over by my mother's portrait. Rose had picked this spot to hang the only picture she had of her mother, Rocca."

Throughout the tape, the camera lingers on old photographs, returning again and again to this one. Near the end of the tape, Carlomusto states in voice-over: "I get very attached to certain images, especially this one, Rocca's copy

of the family portrait.” At this point, we learn that Aunt Lee has given Rocca’s copy of the photograph to Carlomusto and that it now hangs in the artist’s living room. In this way, the photograph becomes an affectively charged partial object in a relay of memory joining different generations of women across dispersed domestic spaces.

Muñoz observes that queer autoethnography is characterized by “an effort to reclaim the past and put it in direct relationship with the present.”²⁵ Part of the inside/outside quality of these works arises from their retrospective narration, an audiovisual collision between the past and the (queer) present. Autoethnography’s incorporation of family photographs and home movies evokes a recurring play of presence and absence. In *To Catch a Glimpse*, Rocca and the different aspects of the family past that she represents are irrecoverable, her loss underscored by her portrait’s fleeting quality of that-has-been. The very indexicality of photography, audio recording, home movies, and video binds them in memory and in time to familial scenes, which are also paradoxically scenes of the author’s own emergence.

The family photograph is a material marker both of tenuous connection and of discontinuity in kinship. In the next section, I extend the study of autoethnography’s ambivalent and fragmented accounts of kinship with reference to *Sea in the Blood*. Sharing with Carlomusto’s tape the themes of death and displacement, Fung’s tape juxtaposes two distinct experiences of illness, alongside a singular account of migrant kinship.

Fragmented Kinship, Illness, and Migration

First-person documentary frequently chronicles personal traumas or crises.²⁶ Emerging within the determining context of the AIDS pandemic, queer autoethnography often explores kinship practices and relations that crystallize around illness, death, and mourning. Narrated on the cusp of public and private experience, of blood family, chosen family, and community, queer autoethnography frequently chronicles illness, death, and mourning in fresh and unexpected ways. Groundbreaking early works such as *Tongues Untied* (1990) and *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993) offer vivid and singular accounts of illness. While these earlier tapes confront the immediacy of HIV/AIDS, Carlomusto and Fung turn to other illnesses in *Sea in the Blood* and *Shatzi Is Dying*. Reflecting on the experience of protracted illness and the long-term effects of loss, these autoethnographies juxtapose illness narratives with the migrations, dispersion, and discontinuities of diasporic kinship.



Figure 3. Recurring imagery of water and swimmers in *Sea in the Blood*. Richard Fung

Fung's *Sea in the Blood* documents a painful negotiation between the artist's Chinese-Trinidadian blood family and his chosen family. The title refers to the video's core metaphor of fluids, where Fung parallels his lover's struggle with HIV/AIDS with his sister Nan's rare blood disorder thalassemia (or "sea in the blood"); this metaphor is anchored in recurring imagery of water and swimmers. The video begins with

an underwater sequence featuring Fung and his lover, Tim. Each dives gracefully through the inverted "V" of the other's spread legs, their faces and bodies almost brushing the camera as they glide upward to the surface. Tinted with ambers and reds and shot through with rays of light, this footage is speed altered to accentuate a dreamlike fluidity of motion (fig. 3). Nayan Shah describes this leitmotif as follows: "The rose-tinted waters dilute and refract the blood everywhere. The color of the water recalls the blood of heredity: the blood that carries illness, the blood that can cause distress, and the blood of intimacy."²⁷

In this quiet and intricate video essay of twenty-six minutes, Fung traces parallels and tensions between his birth family and a long-standing gay relationship. The tape begins with romance, a series of snapshots and slides held up to the camera depicting Richard and Tim's travels as young lovers; in voice-over Fung describes how his family disapproved of his travels with Tim, calling him home to his dying sister's bedside. The next segment traces Fung's Trinidadian childhood with Nan as his constant companion. Through home movies, photographs, and voice-over narration, a tender sibling relationship emerges; the swimming motif returns in footage of a young Asian boy and girl playing on a tropical beach. By intercutting the two narratives, tensions between Fung's gay relationship and blood family culminate as he defies his family, returning home too late from his trip, only hours after Nan's death.

This doubled kinship narrative infuses the tape with ambivalence—impossible choices between blood family and same-sex love affair, between new lover and cherished sister. Deftly layering memoir and conflict, the tape includes Fung's own and other family members' recollections (in voice-over, e-mail, and interview), personal photographs, documentary footage, and an inscrutable line

of text that comments silently along the bottom of the screen. For instance, Fung recalls in voice-over: “Nan would talk about how she could never lead a normal life, never have a boyfriend”; meanwhile, the text scrolling along the bottom of the screen silently adds: “I couldn’t tell her that I wanted a boyfriend.”

Later, as Fung’s mother, Rita, describes Nan’s death to the video maker (the voice track nonsynchronous with close-ups of Rita’s face and hands as she works in the garden), the written text reveals: “It took twenty years for me to ask my mother to describe Nan’s death.” Discretely refusing to film his mother’s face at this painful moment, Fung uses the disjunctures between image track (Rita’s hands gardening), soundtrack (the mother’s account of the daughter’s death), and silent postscript to accentuate the painful and irreconcilable conflicts intrinsic to kinship (fig. 4). Neither a narrative of choice nor of exile from kinship, *Sea in the Blood* forges a measured reconciliation of the emotional rifts among the living. Nan’s loss can never be remedied, but the tape could be seen as a



Figure 4. A close-up of Rita Fung’s hands from a crucial moment in *Sea in the Blood*. Richard Fung

queer brother’s love letter to cherish his sister’s memory as inscribed in stories, photographs, and home movies. Like *To Catch a Glimpse*, the tape functions as a special kind of kinship document that probes the painful silences and gaps that haunt family memory. In the process, the artists propose an audiovisual reconfiguration of family history and memory indelibly marked by the affective and political queer present.

One dissonant strategy frequently used in queer autoethnography is to juxtapose family photographs and home movies with other elements to prisme open the intimate sphere to other historical forces. For instance, *Sea in the Blood* incorporates an odd juxtaposition in the sequence where Richard travels as a child with his mother and Nan to Dublin for treatment of the latter’s illness. Home-movie footage shows a smiling Richard playing in the snow with his older sister Arlene (then in medical school in Dublin), his mother, and Nan. Intercut with this footage are sequences from a pedagogical slide show about thalassemia, where a Punnett square details the genetic probability of transmission in a union between two people with thalassemia minor. A male “voice of god” narrator observes impassively: “There is a 25 percent chance for a normal child to be conceived, a 50



Figure 5. Fung uses captions and text to “make strange” family photographs and home movies in *Sea in the Blood*. Richard Fung

percent chance for a beta thalassemia minor child, and a 25 percent chance for a beta thalassemia major child.” Cut back to the footage of the Fung family playing in the snow as captioned balloons appear above each figure, designating Richard and Arlene as “normal,” their mother, Rita, as “minor,” and Nan as “major.” (For an example of this distinctive captioning, see fig. 5).

The stylistic and affective dissonance between the tape’s predominantly personal narration and this impassive scientific account accentuates how seemingly intimate family histories are shaped by scientific discourses and intersecting histories of race, ethnicity, and colonialism. In voice-over, Fung notes that in the 1960s thalassemia was not recognized as an illness affecting Asians; in fact, as an unusual case, a famous British doctor subsidized Nan’s treatment. In an e-mail exchange with Arlene (now a doctor), Richard asks if Nan’s unusual status made her a medical curiosity—a troubling query that is ultimately left unresolved. As with the abortion segment in *To Catch a Glimpse*, the interface between family and the medical establishment raises unanswerable questions; in the process, the tapes foreground broader social and historical forces brought to bear on the bodies of individuals and on the relations and practices of kinship.

The reconciliation between different types of intimacy through narratives of illness and trauma points to a conciliatory, if not redemptive, tendency within

queer autoethnography. As with *My Mother's Place*, the slow, thoughtful, polyphonic narration of *Sea in the Blood* is marked with the artist's love and respect for his family. This ethical and affective tone links the tape with a body of autoethnographies produced by lesbians, working-class lesbians, and gay men and queers of color that offer considered and moving accounts of blood family.²⁸ This tendency aligns with Weston's ethnographic findings that "people of color, whites with strong ethnic identities, and people who considered themselves working class were the ones who most frequently drew connections between sexual identity, race, class, ethnicity, and kinship."²⁹

Carlomusto and Fung share a sensitivity to these intersecting forces. Both artists carefully record the voices and images of immigrant, female, or working-class subjects and clans. In contrast with the closed form of the white heteronuclear family entrenched in North American postwar political discourse and audiovisual culture, Fung's and Carlomusto's migrant kinship tales are fractured by illness and dispersed in time and space. The migration theme is encapsulated by the frequent use of ocean imagery. In *To Catch a Glimpse*, recurring footage of waves comes to stand in for lost cultural and linguistic connections with Italy. In *Sea in the Blood*, the sea imagery invokes the swimmers' pleasures—Fung on a beach as a child with Nan, and later swimming with his lover—alongside the displacements characteristic of migrant experience. Initially at odds, these two types of relatedness are conjoined in the metaphor of fluids: blood as bearer of hereditary material and illness, and the ocean as a site of pleasure, barrier, and passage.

Images of ocean, travel, and movement are characteristic of a Caribbean poetics.³⁰ Citing the history of slavery and the inside passage, Édouard Glissant evokes the Caribbean as "a place of encounter and connivance and, at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent."³¹ Distinct from the inland sea of the Mediterranean (the cradle of Greek, Hebrew, Roman, and Islamic unitary thought), Glissant argues that the Caribbean archipelago privileges rhizomatic relations rather than origins, societies characterized by creolization and métissage. In place of the linear narratives of filiation structuring Western thought, Glissant invokes "a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry."³²

As an audiovisual image of thought, *Sea in the Blood* illuminates the fragile tissues of relation bridging geographic separation, across time, evoking a rhizomatic postcolonial poetics of relation. Fung's autoethnographic tapes are full of movement: travel for pleasure (Richard's liberating honeymoon trip with Tim);

Nan's travel to Dublin for treatment; and finally, the family's immigration to Trinidad and subsequent emigration to Canada. Fung's formal strategies make evident the slow and painful work of creating links across spatial and temporal separation. For instance, in *Sea in the Blood*, Richard converses with Arlene (now living in Malaysia) by e-mail, their typed online dialogue unfolding in real time. Toward the end of the tape, in a message typed ghostlike onto the screen, Fung confides to Arlene: "I have always lived with illness, first with Nan, now with Tim." This moment poignantly conjoins the tape's study of two painful discontinuities in kinship: illness and death as corporeal and temporal rupture, and the spatial separation characteristic of diasporic kinship.

Autoethnography returns again and again to the moments where kinship falters or breaks down. This fascination with painful and productive kinship crises contributes to an ambivalent narration of "powerful contradictory emotions"—a heightened awareness of the conflicting desires and obligations that bind the subject to others in intimate relations. The unusual collision of diasporic histories with singular accounts of illness in these tapes generates unexpected, moving, and incisive kinship essays.³³ In the final section I further investigate autoethnography's nuanced accounts of illness, death, and mourning with reference to *Shatzi Is Dying*.

Chosen Families, Companion Species

To this point, I have examined how autoethnography queers the vexed primal scene of blood family. Here, I turn to Carlomusto's *Shatzi Is Dying*, an unusual account of kinship practices and relations at a remove from blood family. This tape chronicles the protracted death of Shatzi, the artist's pet Doberman. Shot as a home movie enhanced with interviews, documentary footage, and fantasy sequences, *Shatzi Is Dying* traces the dog's slow death against a backdrop of the everyday lives of Carlomusto and her lover, the photographer Jane Rossett. In the video's present, these activists and artists deeply implicated in the AIDS pandemic in New York City have taken refuge with their animals in a rambling country house. Carlomusto notes in voice-over that while the move to the country offers a respite, the personal and political trauma of AIDS marks a crucial absent presence in the house. "We live in a house co-inhabited by the dead," states Carlomusto, referring to Rossett's photographs and Carlomusto's videotapes, documents of the pandemic filed away in the basement, but by no means forgotten.

Like *Sea in the Blood*, this tape's doubled narration reflects retrospectively on the experience of HIV/AIDS with reference to another site, another illness.

Cvetkovich identifies the tape's complex agenda as follows: "The video risks sentimentality by daring to take seriously the death of a dog and the intensity of the relationships between lesbians and their animals. It uses Shatzi's death to explore queer love and the unusual forms of mourning it engenders, including the documentary strategies the video itself exemplifies. For *Shatzi Is Dying* is also a video about AIDS."³⁴

The video opens on a grainy black-and-white winter scene in the country, where Carlomusto and Rossett frolic in the snow with their two dogs. Accompanied by a sprightly tune, this informal home-movie sequence is playful, domestic, and informal. It is speed altered to play at an accelerated pace like early silent film, and the women's and dogs' movements are rendered rapid and jerky like those of *Keystone Cops*. Rossett and Carlomusto clown for the camera, dancing a jig and moving in close to make faces into the camera lens. Meanwhile, Carlomusto's opening voice-over states: "Some people keep dogs as pets. I prefer to say that we have animals in the family." She goes on to recount that after learning from the vet three years ago that Shatzi was dying, the couple had chosen to adopt a puppy (Rifkah)—a risky move that ultimately gave Shatzi a new lease on life. In the present of the video, some years later, Carlomusto notes, "Shatzi is still dying, we just don't know when." On the image track, Carlomusto, wearing her housecoat on the snowy driveway, waves coyly to the camera as the music concludes and the title fades up. At once playful, homey, funny, and serious, this preface sets the tone for a simultaneously joyful, wacky, and moving video on illness, death, and mourning (fig. 6).

Shatzi Is Dying is structured as a series of diverse short segments roughly following the chronology of seasons in Shatzi's final year. Domestic scenes form the backbone of the tape,

but when in need of "outside advice," Carlomusto consults a series of "experts," friends and ex-lovers of the video maker and her partner. Periodically, she cuts to interviews with a highly articulate group of friends and lovers. In a wry nod toward standard documentary form, these talking heads operate to legitimate the queer and lesbian claim to kinship with domestic animals. At the same time, the tape offers a rare and valuable audiovisual document of contemporary lesbian domestic



Figure 6. Carlomusto waves to the camera: black-and-white home-movie footage in *Shatzi Is Dying*. Jean Carlomusto

life, a porous kinship practice where chosen family of friends and ex-lovers visit often, dogs in tow. Meanwhile, Rossett and Carlomusto, along with their friends, belong to a broader LGBT political and community network also taken up with the kinship practices associated with illness, death, and dying. Taken together, these three cultures of relatedness (or kinship practices exceeding conventional biogenetic models) confound the parameters of kinship and love.³⁵

In *Shatzi Is Dying*, Carlomusto probes a special affinity between lesbians and domestic animals. In one interview, a friend and performance artist Holly Hughes describes three categories of lesbians: cat lesbians, dog lesbians, and lesbians with asthma; tongue-in-cheek, she adds that for a lesbian to reveal that she doesn't like animals is tantamount to admitting membership in Hitler Youth. Carlomusto's informants observe that domestic animals offer unconditional love to LGBT people often at odds with blood family, providing companionship and affective continuity against "a certain turnover" of lovers. The poet and writer Gerry Gomez Pearlberg wonders at how she can be so "deeply moved and deeply in concert with this creature that doesn't speak." She goes on to explore a close link among domestic animals, spirituality, sexuality, and death; because of their shorter life spans, cats and dogs are somehow closer to death, providing "a touchstone for the tender place in our heart where we experience loss or . . . mortality."

In her study of human-canine relations, Donna Haraway describes dogs as the first companion species, proposing affinities between humans and dogs as a relation of significant otherness. As with her influential earlier work proposing the cyborg as a utopian figure for rethinking the relationships between humans and technology, here Haraway describes hybrid connections with companion species as "non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories, and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures."³⁶ Like Carlomusto's autoethnographic portrait of pets in the family, Haraway's study of the dog-human interface could be seen as a trivial digression from more "serious" topics: for Haraway a departure from humans and technoscience, for Carlomusto a retreat from the serious human politics of AIDS. Yet for both creative thinkers, taking seriously interspecies kinship is potentially generative, unexpected, queer. As an account of cultures of relatedness at a remove from blood family, *Shatzi Is Dying* exemplifies the productive possibilities of audiovisual production to imagine kinship *otherwise*.

Alongside its study of the intense kinship bonds between lesbians and their animals, the tape offers a series of anecdotes of the couple's domestic life: Rossett plants her garden to the tune of "Falling in Love Again"; Carlomusto savors a bowl of artichokes at the kitchen table while listening to Patti Smith; Rossett mows the

lawn on a small John Deere tractor in slow motion, to the tune of “Blue Moon.” Music, both diegetic and nondiegetic, is a crucial element of this tape, punctuating and infusing these brief episodes with an affective overlay, alternately humorous, longing, joyful, and mournful. Against an intermittent narrative arc shadowing Shatzi’s uncertain health, much of the tape is taken up with these everyday



Figure 7. *Companion species*: a rare portrait of contemporary lesbian life in *Shatzi Is Dying*. Jean Carlomusto

rituals that make up life and kinship (fig. 7). If this tape is centrally about mourning and loss, these sequences underscore its celebration of life’s copresence with illness and death. According to the Buddhist spiritual guide Pat Enkyo O’Hara, who appears at several points in the tape, “Both sickness and dying are what’s going on right now, and to deny what is is to miss your life, or to miss your death. To be present to one’s death, if you can do it, is a wonderful thing.” Death and dying, she comments, allows us to “experience incredible sadness, incredible love and joy.”

Chronicled with wry humor and compassion, the phases of Shatzi’s extended death correspond roughly with the cycle of the seasons. After a difficult winter close to death, Shatzi rallies in the spring to chase squirrels and to romp with a friend’s poodles. In the autumn, she becomes delusional, barking relentlessly at some unknown presence outside the house. For Halloween, in a gesture toward her imminent demise, the dog is fitted with a canine angel costume of halo and wings. Finally, in the winter, Shatzi, once again in decline, passes away quietly in her sleep. The tape’s slow, episodic, and fragmented structure corresponds with the uncertainty and disruptions associated with the dog’s condition—a condition that uncannily shadows the experience of AIDS and other protracted illnesses.

Monica B. Pearl identifies a parallel between the retrovirus HIV as a disruptive force in the lives of individuals and communities, and the “formal discontinuities and disruptions” of new queer cinema, as well as other works such as *Silverlake Life*. Pearl suggests that disruptions related to AIDS are echoed in queer cinema’s frequent “lack of coherent narrative, or genre recognition, or familiarly fulfilled cinematic expectations.”³⁷ As with other queer experimental film and video, autoethnography’s preoccupation with disruptions and discontinuities,

notably illness and death, corresponds to a fragmented formal structure. Illness narratives that elide traditional narrative structures and resolutions offer distinctive affective and temporal accounts of marginal kinship relations fractured by the pandemic.

Many of queer autoethnography's formal strategies work against the grain of what Lee Edelman identifies as a familiar familial narrative drive of "reproductive futurity." A dominant fictional and political narrative within the contemporary United States (and to a lesser degree Canada), this teleological narrativity forges "an identification with an always about-to-be-realized identity" signified by the Child as a privileged figure of futurity, but also of continuity of the species and of the nation.³⁸ In contrast with pervasive teleological narrative forms that symbolically shore up the heteronuclear family, queer autoethnography challenges genealogies based on heredity, continuity, and property. Instead, Fung's and Carlomusto's autoethnographies explore video's formal capacities to generate complex, multiple, and ambivalent accounts of kinship. The tapes' collagelike structures resonate with multiple kinship networks at once parallel and closely interconnected, yet dissonant.

Shatzi Is Dying, for instance, moves adroitly between four distinct yet interconnected kinship networks: Carlomusto and Rossett's intimate lives with Shatzi and Rifkah; an extensive chosen family of friends and ex-lovers; Jane's blood family (Jewish mourning rituals associated with her father's death); and the cultural and political bonds forged within LGBT communities. By intercutting these distinct yet interrelated sites, Carlomusto brings into relief contrasting practices concerned with illness, death, and mourning.³⁹ One vivid example of a queer public ritual of mourning is a video sequence from a 1987 candlelight vigil. In this open-air ceremony in the streets of New York, many balloons are simultaneously released in memory of the dead, as the mourners call out the names of their lost loved ones. By juxtaposing Shatzi's condition with public mourning rituals, Carlomusto negotiates the ongoing political and affective consequences of the AIDS pandemic in queer communities with the quiet intimate processes of living with illness, death, and dying.

Another example of the montage of interrelated kinship networks is in the following sequence: while eating her breakfast cereal one morning, Carlomusto comes across one of Rossett's photographs picturing their friend Ray Jacobs shortly before his death (fig. 8). Not recognizing her friend in this photograph, Carlomusto chooses to picture Ray as she remembers him: the "flamboyant diva" talking about empowerment at the First Lesbian and Gay Conference on AIDS in



Figure 8. Carlomusto finds a photograph of Ray Jacobs shortly before his death in *Shatzi Is Dying*. Jean Carlomusto

1983. In a strange and no doubt deliberate instance of simultaneity, Ray is pictured here eating breakfast cereal, mirrored by Carlomusto in the present. This sequence offers an intriguing instance of photographic relationality distinct from Hirsch's account of how family photographs facilitate the relational construction of familial subjectivity. In contrast, autoethnography's unexpected parallels and juxtapositions facilitate the staging of (queer) selves-in-relation forged through diverse kinship networks. By intercutting two very ordinary (breakfast) moments, Carlomusto inscribes her friend's memory and the processes of mourning within the most everyday rituals. The strange simultaneity of this moment points to how kinship is mediated across time through the commemorative and generative processes of visual media.

Autoethnography is characterized by restless transitions between intimate and public settings and narratives. Indeed, Françoise Lionnet suggests that autoethnography operates in cultural production through "skepticism about writing the self, the autobiography, turning it into the allegory of the ethnographic project that self-consciously moves from the general to the particular to the general."⁴⁰ Within the works considered here, neither the self nor the family are self-contained entities. Rather, domestic scenes of blood family and same-sex couples, alongside the emergent queer selves-in-relation portrayed in Fung's and Carlomusto's tapes, are always inflected by and contributing to other historical, geographic, and affective times and places. These works are haunted by individual and collective traumas of AIDS, and weighted with kinship practices concerned with illness, death, and mourning. Nonetheless, *Shatzi Is Dying*, like *To Catch a Glimpse* and *Sea in*

the Blood, is by no means a gloomy tape. Fung's and Carlomusto's video autoethnographies brim over with the ambivalence or powerful contradictory emotions associated with (queer) kinship—a generous, textured, and unpredictable affective spectrum encompassing playfulness, joy, and offbeat humor, uncertainty, and mourning.

In *Shatzi Is Dying*, Carlomusto explores unexpected queer kinship bonds as a counterpoint to dominant biogenetic kinship logics. This message is articulated incisively toward the end of the tape by Hughes: “I also mourn a gay community that was based around nonbiological family, chosen family, fucking and animals. . . . The energy that other people put into their children went into building community, and into doing political work, and also into creatures that wouldn't survive them.”

Conclusion

Shatzi Is Dying provides a cautionary note and a coda for this study of queer kinship. Through formal innovation, and by drawing on different genealogical, narrative, and spatiotemporal logics, autoethnography opens up the possibilities for imaging kinship differently. Fung's and Carlomusto's ambivalent accounts of intergenerational ties in *To Catch a Glimpse* and *Sea in the Blood* exemplify an important and diverse interrogation of blood family by queers of color, lesbian, and working-class LGBT cultural producers. Yet a return to the determining site of blood family—even an ambivalent and self-reflexive return—by no means exhausts the possibilities of queer kinship. With its innovative collage of lesbian domestic space, intimacies with domestic animals, queer public rituals of mourning and memory, *Shatzi Is Dying* paints a broad and compelling portrait of the possibilities of queer kinship.

In this article, I have argued for the critical and theoretical resonance of ambivalence for thinking kinship queerly. I deploy the term in two distinct yet complementary ways. First, as an affective term, *ambivalence* captures the explosive and dissonant array of emotions related to the discursive and material positioning of LGBT people on the cusp of kinship. In autoethnography, this positioning is accentuated most strikingly through inside/out voice-over narration. Second, as a (post)structural concept, the term refers to the fragmented and discontinuous kinship ontologies explored in autoethnography, notably illness, death, mourning, and migration. Autoethnography's fragmented and collage like form, I have argued, facilitates powerful and unusual accounts of ruptured or disappointed kinship. I would like to propose ambivalence as a concept that can accommodate the

trenchant critique of the heteronuclear family common to feminist, lesbian and gay liberationist, and queer analysis—and the transformative possibilities associated with families of choice. Indeed, in its productive tensions between critique and transformation, belonging and exclusion, autoethnography helps us understand (queer) kinship as a set of performative practices.

This article is centrally concerned with cultural form, hence my analysis is grounded in textual analysis. My intervention is primarily a conceptual one. I mine Fung's and Carlomusto's videos as evocative images of thought for their lucid and nuanced contributions to the urgent task of rethinking kinship queerly. In highlighting the artists' formal strategies—inside/outside narration, the telling secret, the repositioning or making strange of domestic media, spatial and temporal fragmentation, unexpected juxtapositions of different elements and contexts—I delve into the textual complexity of these singular and sophisticated works. In the process, I hope to have contributed to the recognition of autoethnography as a mode of recent queer audiovisual production replete with precious, singular, and diverse accounts of kinship.

Finally, this article opens up a study of the constitutive relation between kinship and audiovisual form. I am interested in the tremendous power of visual culture generally, and audiovisual texts specifically, as a special kind of kinship practice. As a mode of independent and formally innovative documentary, autoethnography is situated on the productive margins of contemporary audiovisual production. Carlomusto's and Fung's fragmented and ambivalent formal strategies highlight the stringent conventions governing the mediation of kinship in family photography, home movies, and the narration of family. These conventions are taken up in autoethnography, then reassembled and replayed in montage practices that make strange their familiar familial imagery and narrativity. As a singular and suggestive mode of audiovisual production, autoethnography points to audiovisual media's generative role not only in the corrosive critique or the ambivalent rearticulation of blood family—but also in imaging different sites, practices, and configurations of queer kinship.

Notes

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1. Judith Butler, “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13 (2002): 14–15.
2. Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, introduction to *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed. Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (London: Routledge, 2002), 5–7.
3. Michel Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 47.
4. Michael G. Peletz, “Ambivalence in Kinship since the 1940s,” in *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, ed. Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 413.
5. Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 43.
6. Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic, 1990), 395.
7. In the realm of queer theory, Lee Edelman describes queerness as a “pulsive force of negativity” that unravels the integrated gendered/sexual/national identities promised by family values. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 13–17. In the realm of political thought, see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2004). For a philosophical discussion, see Butler, “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?”
8. Peletz, “Ambivalence in Kinship,” 425.
9. Carlomusto was a member of the influential Testing the Limits collective and ACT-UP’s DIVA-TV, and coproducer of the Gay Men’s Health Crisis *Living with AIDS* cable television series. Her earlier individual works include *L Is for the Way You Look* (1990), a humorous tape about lesbians in popular culture, while *Not Just Passing Through* (1994) explores lesbian history. In 2001, in the context of the exposition *AIDS: A Living Archive*, she and Jane Rossett made *The Portrait Gallery*, an interactive installation.

10. Alongside *My Mother's Place* and *Sea in the Blood* discussed here, the third work in Fung's family trilogy is *The Way to My Father's Village* (1988).
11. These works have received considerable scholarly attention. For an account of the North American autobiographical documentary tradition that has developed since 1968, see Jim Lane, "Notes on Theory and the Autobiographical Documentary Film in America," *Wide Angle* 15, no. 3 (1993): 21–36. For survey analysis of autobiographical documentary, see Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); and Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
12. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 81. In this article, I am much indebted to Muñoz's incisive analysis of Fung's works *My Mother's Place* and *Chinese Characters* (1986); see *Disidentifications*, 77–92.
13. Some key examples of queer autoethnography are *Ties That Bind* (Su Friedrich, United States; 1983), *The Displaced View* (Midi Onodera, Canada; 1988), *Sink or Swim* (Su Friedrich, United States; 1990), *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, United States; 1990), *The Coalminer's Granddaughter* (Cecilia Dougherty, United States; 1991), *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (Tom Joslin and Peter Friedman, United States; 1993), *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (Deborah Hoffmann, United States; 1994), *The Devil Never Sleeps* (Lourdes Portillo, Mexico; 1996), *That's My Face/É Minha Cara* (Thomas Allen Harris, United States; 2001), *Dear Gabe* (Alexandra Juhasz, United States; 2003), *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, United States; 2003), *Video Remains* (Alexandra Juhasz, United States; 2005), *Zero Degrees of Separation* (Elle Flanders, Canada; 2005).
14. This account of audiovisual works as "images of thought" is inspired by a Deleuzian reading of the cinema. See Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, "Translators' Introduction," in Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xi.
15. All passages quoted from the videos under discussion are taken from my own transcripts.
16. Diana Fuss, *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1–2.
17. Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy, and Catherine Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2. See also Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992); Stacey, *Brave New Families*; and Judith Stacey, *Changing Family Values*, ed. Gill Jagger and Caroline Wright (London: Routledge, 1999).

18. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 3.
19. For a discussion of the *queer present* (derived from Sedgwick's *queer moment*), see Barber and Clark, *Regarding Sedgwick*, 2.
20. Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 259.
21. Butler, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?" 34.
22. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9. For key feminist studies of family photographs, see also Julia Hirsch, *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect* (New York: Oxford, 1981); and Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, eds., *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography* (London: Virago, 1991). For a study of home movies, see Patricia R. Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 112–42.
23. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 2.
24. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Noonday, 1981), 76–77.
25. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 82.
26. See Patricia Auferheide, "Public Intimacy: The Development of First-Person Documentary," *Afterimage*, July 1, 1997, www.thefreelibrary.com/Public+intimacy:+the+development+of+first-person+documentary.-a020198552.
27. Nayan Shah, "Undertow," in *Like Mangoes in July: The Work of Richard Fung*, ed. Helen Lee and Kerri Sakamoto (Toronto: Insomniac Press/Images Festival, 2002), 102.
28. See, for instance, the autoethnographies by Cecilia Dougherty, Marlon Riggs, Midi Onodera, Tony Ayre, Lourdes Portillo, Elle Flanders, Alexandra Juhasz, and Thomas Allen Harris.
29. Weston, *Families We Choose*, 56.
30. Many thanks to Gail Lewis for pointing out the Caribbean poetics of islands and to Lily Cho for introducing me to the work of Édouard Glissant.
31. Édouard Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 33.
32. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.
33. For an incisive analysis of some of the stakes of queer postcolonial kinship, see David L. Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas," *Social Text* 21, no. 3 (2003): 1–37.
34. Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 262.
35. For a discussion of the term *cultures of relatedness*, see Janet Carsten, *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

36. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003), 7.
37. Monica B. Pearl, "AIDS and New Queer Cinema," in *The New Queer Cinema Reader*, ed. Michele Aaron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 23–24.
38. Edelman, *No Future*, 13.
39. See Cvetkovich's account of queer public rituals of mourning in *Shatzi Is Dying* in *Archive of Feelings*, 265–66.
40. Françoise Lionnet, cited in Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 81.