14

EXPANDED SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

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The sum of "queer photography" is impossible to pinpoint, its component parts each notoriously mutable and changing. What we mean by 'queer' is contextual; as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "anyone's use of 'queer' about themselves means differently from their use of it about someone else" (Sedgwick 1994, p. 9). Defining the term in 1993, she proposed that queer—reclaimed from its use as a derogatory slur—is "an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excess of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 1994, p. 4). Definitions of photography have shifted with changes in technology, art-historical debates, the seal of curatorial approval, and the endorsement of art markets. Taken together, these two words, 'queer' and 'photography,' can be used to describe practices across every category and genre of photographic history.

Photography has been asserted as a crucial medium for exploring queer subjectivity and desire, in collections like Deborah Bright's *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire* (1998), and Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser's *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs* (1991). But its networked nature has also facilitated the proliferation of nominally 'queer' imagery, foreclosing the term's possible uses by fixing it to distinct looks and styles, often serving to render it synonymous with cisgender, gay, white men. This evacuation of queer's radical charge served as a prompt for David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, who in a 2005 special issue of *Social Text* ask "what's queer about queer studies now?". They propose that

> the contemporary mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity—as a mass-mediated consumer lifestyle and embattled legal category—demands a renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent.
>
> *(Eng et al., 2005, p. 1)*

Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz argue that 'queer' must remain contingent and available to critique, open to the continuous re-inventions which evade normalization. In conversation

with the photographic connotations of 'metaphor' and 'referent,' I follow them to ask: what's queer about queer *photography* now?

In the thirty years since 'queer' was reclaimed, the labels which fall under its auspices have proliferated. Queer is employed to communicate sexual preferences, relationship formations, and gender identities, as well as different ways of navigating through, and deviating from, heteronormative conventions. In the work of American photographer Talia Chetrit, these expansive possibilities needle into the representation of domesticity. Photographs of Chetrit's partner, a cisgender man, show him garbed in frothy dresses, or a patent leather harness. Posed on their porch he lifts up the edges of a tulle gown, splaying its canary yellow layers across the frame. Their baby sits at his feet, tying the making of the photograph and its female gaze to a performance of family. Chetrit disturbs an idea of how the nuclear family 'should' appear, undermining a heteronormative ideal of parenting and the maintenance of heterosexuality through the binary trappings of gender. Welsh photographer Llyr Evans takes his father as his subject, who in *Dafydd I* (2022) is pictured standing surrounded by the tattered plastic sheets which line his greenhouse (Figure 14.1). Wearing a skirt made from traditional Welsh tapestry and a pair of heeled, golden boots, Dafydd buckles an expectation of how Welsh masculinity might appear. By posing his father in the clothes and accessories which signify his own identity, one which he has described "filtering" in the context of his hometown (Collins, 2023), Evans opens the space of the family portrait to allow himself in. Chetrit's and Evans's work visual-

Figure 14.1   Llyr Evans, *Dafydd I*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

izes the dispersal of queerness, which is pictured not in terms of sexual object choice, but as a more diffuse "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner, 1993, cited in Eng et al., 2005, p. 3). Queer is seen to work relationally, passing between and across bodies through love, kinship, and solidarity, as well as desire.

This chapter considers contemporary practices, like Chetrit's and Evans's, which are exploring, challenging, and re-figuring the representation of sexual and gender identity. Arranged around a handful of the discursive sites where 'queer' and 'photography' meet, namely translation, archives, visibility and materiality, I assess how 'queer photography' appears, both vexing and maintaining queer's promise to work as, in Sedgwick's terms, an open mesh of possibility. If 'queer' is a metaphor, a word used to evoke a changing and unstable referent, how can a photograph's singularity chance to mirror it? Is it the collapse of this indexical promise, and the subsequent disclosure of photography's own manipulability, that stands it as a productive site for queer expression? Or does the idea of an 'unfixed referent' chime with what Amelia Jones might call photography's 'queer effects' (Jones, 2021, p. xvi), which is to say, not photographs made by and of queer-identified subjects, but photographs which activate the bodies implicated across their creation and circulation in various queer ways? In asking what's queer about 'queer photography' now, this chapter acknowledges that when these two words are hung together, the answer might be nothing at all. By assessing the sites where 'queer' and 'photography' come together, and the 'modes of difference' through which ideas of authentic identity calcify, I offer that when asked differently, the question might instead point to the generous possibilities that the medium still has to offer in visualizing sexual and gender identities. What's queer about photographic practices now?

Translation

'Queer' has largely been articulated in Euro-American contexts, and anthropologist María-Amelia Viteri has explored how as an identity category it can "re-signify the experiences and practices" of subjects in other locations (for her purposes, Mexico and Central America), for whom gender and sexuality are produced and lived differently (Viteri, 2014, p. xxiv). She describes how the projection of 'queer' can contribute to ongoing, colonial processes of assimilation that silence the use of more resonant words. Viteri thinks through 'translation' as a means of attending to how language can be utilized in ways that call up—rather than resolve—cultural specificity. To put queer in relation to '*loca*' – which in the context of El Salvador means something akin to 'bisexual' – is not to subsume loca to queer, and loca is used differently in other contexts to mean something else altogether (see: González, 2014). By showing that loca *cannot* be reduced, Viteri demonstrates how "a process of translating and interpreting culture involves a relocation, a reterritorialization of hegemonic ways of representing the world," and "that there are different systems of sexuality that are not necessarily 'translatable' in a straight line across cultures" (Viteri, 2014, p. 37–38). For instance, *faʻafafine* (Polynesia), *muxe* (Mexico), and *sekrata* (Madagascar) pre-exist queer theory's formulation, and expose how the rhetorical move of 'queering' a subject or field of study is predicated on not having recognized it as dissident in the first place, sometimes willfully.

Artist Alexis Ruiseco Lombera, who emigrated from Cuba to the United States as a child, describes working between the two countries, and that "I have to be careful not to conflate the trans and queer politic that has flourished here [in New York] with the one developing on the island" (Ettachfini, 2019). Their series *Añoranza* (2016–18), made with Rafael Suri-Gonzalez, pictures queer and trans subjects in the Cuban provinces of Villa Clara and Mayabeque. The

photographs navigate a legacy of state-sanctioned rhetoric, through which prejudice towards queerly non-normative bodies advanced by post-Revolution ideology continues to be replicated. This has resulted in a lack of language, and a "lack of public narrative to frame the knowledge of institutionalized trans and homophobia" (Ettachfini, 2019). Accounting for these erasures, *Añoranza* pictures the forms of sexual and gender dissidence which have nonetheless continued to be lived and shared. The series alternates between portraits and self-portraits, where the shutter-release snakes through the frame to suture Ruiseco Lombera, positioned behind the camera, to the photograph's subject, who is also the author of their own image. Ruiseco Lombera has described feeling that they "fail and fall within Cubanidad for being both non-binary and Cuban" (Ruiseco Lombera, 2018). *Añoranza*, which means something like homesickness or nostalgia, negotiates this displacement. Rather than projecting 'queer' onto Cubanidad, the shutter-release acts as a material assertion of self-identification, reciprocating Ruiseco Lombera's gaze and interpellating them as part of "the futurity of the Cuban queer body" (Ruiseco Lombera, no date), both on the island and through its diaspora.

Hala Kamal, a scholar whose work considers translation relative to the construction and lived experience of gender, writes that it "is not merely an act of transferring information, but a process of knowledge production" (Kamal, 2008, p. 254). Translators decide what to transpose from one text to another, which is then re-constituted on the terms of a different language and culture. In *Kothis, Hijras, Giriyas, and Others* (2013–) Charan Singh photographs India's "queer underclass, feminine and transgendered persons" (Singh, 2021), employing local dialect to account for the specificity of their positioning in relation to each other, and to India's class/caste system. *Kothi* is a "self-selected identity" which registers forms of male effeminacy, within which different regions of India use additional words to denote "cultural practices, origin stories, and mythological connections" (Singh, 2021). *Hijra* can include (but is not reduced to) trans and intersex, though Britain's imposition of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 conflated 'hijra' with 'eunuch.' As Singh notes, "while language has made it possible to express desire, love, and identity, it has also resulted in erasures" (2021), a colonial legacy further complicated by HIV/AIDS NGOs whose reach and efficacy have been limited by their failure to employ specific terminology in addressing Indian subjects. Singh's portraits are set against the unifying background of a rust-colored cloth, each sitter offering a different pose, expression, and style of dress. Neither 'queer,' nor 'trans' adequately holds them, and Singh writes that "to impose a global norm is to perpetuate colonial practices, which impose unsuitable categories on people who end up caught in the net of language" (Singh, 2021).

At the same time, Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba argues that translation can trigger a "linguistic process where meaning is put into crisis" (Domínguez Ruvalcaba, 2016, p. 12), as the movement of a word productively reveals its limits and assumptions. In Evan Benally Atwood's work 'queer' is held alongside the photographer's Diné/Anglo ancestry and their identification as *nádleehi*. While queer and third-gender identities in First Nations and Indigenous cultures are often referred to as 'two spirit,' this term (like queer) came into use in the early 1990s, as a pan-Indigenous descriptor within which there are "tribally specific understandings of gender and sexuality" (Driskill, 2010, p. 69). The Diné are the native people of America's Southwest (anglicized as Najavo), for whom nádleehi means a male-bodied person with a feminine self-expression, or "one who constantly transforms" (Matsuda, 2021). In a photograph from their series *As the Water Flows* (2020), Benally Atwood sits atop a stump of wood settled upright in a river, their long hair twisted into a *tsiiyééł*, a traditional Diné hairstyle. Their *shimá* (mother) stands behind them. The photographer stages queer/nádleehi subjectivity as a progression of matrilineage, bound up with

the natural world which nourishes all life. Here, 'queer' works adjectivally, held open and in conversation by nádleehi through a practice that generates what Wanda Nanibush describes as "visual sovereignty" (Nanibush, 2019, p. 77).

Even within a Euro-American context, 'queer' comes up against words like 'butch,' which became popular in the 1950s along with its counterpart, 'femme,' both rooted in the American working class culture depicted in Leslie Feinberg's urgent novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993). 'Stud' specifies butch identity in relation to Black and Latinx lesbians, for whom the visibility of gender non-conformance is re-doubled by that of race. Roman Manfredi's series *We/Us* pictures working class butches and studs in "very British environments" (Wilkinson, 2023), including council estates, terraced houses, and iconic locations like Margate's Dreamland funfair. Her subjects wear blue-collar uniforms, football kit, suits, and an Indian kurta. Translation is doubly at play, in the way that Manfredi's subjects parse the appearance of 'queer' (and dyke/lesbian) through their assertion of butch/stud identity, and in her effort to displace London as the singular backdrop of queer British life. Melissa M. González proposes that translation must mediate between "respect[ing] the untranslatability of some dimensions of local difference" and acknowledging that "translations can not only aid cross-cultural understanding but also help us perceive some commonalities in gender and sexuality enabled by globalised capitalism" (González, 2014, p. 123). The circulation of photographs performs this tension. Photographs are translated as they enter into language through a viewer's perception, and again through description and captioning. But a photograph can also complicate this process by bending away from the visual vocabulary which attends an idea or subject. The act of translation becomes self-conscious as the viewer is exposed to the limits of their interpretative position, or enters into a space of mutual recognition that generates, as Domínguez Ruvalcaba proposes, a "poetics of normalcy disruption" (Domínguez Ruvalcaba, 2016, p. 7).

Archives

Laura Doan describes how queer history and queer memory, formations which are twinned but often held apart by methodological approaches to writing and conceiving history, can be brought together in "practices that continually rub one against the other" (Doan, 2017, p. 116). Photographs remain widely understood as objective and are easily entered into archives as historical documents. But they can also be amassed and re-imagined through the work of queer memory, which merges feelings with facts.

Archival exclusions dramatize the homophobia, transphobia, racism and misogyny on which institutions of knowledge are built, what Robb Hernández describes as "the inadequacies of empiricist archive methodologies predicated on authorial objects, salient chains of custody, and authenticated whole documents arranged in self-evident record bodies" (Hernández, 2015, p. 71). Discussing the dearth of information pertaining to queer Arab and Middle Eastern histories, Mohamad Abdouni explains that they "have not been well documented and preserved, nor do we have access to much information about our past as queer communities" (Dugan, 2020). Abdouni publishes the magazine *Cold Cuts,* and in 2022 released a special issue titled 'Treat Me Like Your Mother.' Abdouni interviewed ten *tanteit* living in Beirut, a word which means 'aunts' or 'ladies,' and which was preferred by his subjects to 'trans.' Interspersed between their oral histories are the glamourous studio portraits which Abdouni made of each collaborator, some of whom also contributed their personal photographs to the publication (Figure 14.2). He notes his surprise in encountering these archives, having

Figure 14.2   Mohamad Abdouni, double-page extract from the book *Treat Me Like Your Mother: Trans* Histories from Beirut's Forgotten Past*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

"never seen images of gender non-conforming people in public spaces [in Lebanon] before the 2010s" (Abdouni, 2022). Each subject's testimony runs in a vertical column across the publication, alternating between Arabic and its English translation. This allows for the reader to follow each history as a through-line, or to proceed page-by-page and access the intersecting voices of all ten tanteit, "a horizontal reading in which the worlds of these women collide, just like they have always done in the space of the city" (Abdouni, 2022). Its availability as an open-access download resonates with American artist Juliana Huxtable's suggestion that "social media is expanding the possibilities for both archiving the present and finding ways of revisiting and rereading the past so that we can try to form something that we could perhaps analyse and use to approximate a 'tradition'" (Gossett and Huxtable, 2017, p. 40). Abdouni enters a new archive into circulation, sidestepping the authentication demanded by 'empiricist methodologies,' and constituting what Ann Cvetkovich calls a queer counterarchive, formed from "a creative approach to archiving, an openness to unusual objects and collections, and an acknowledgement of that which escapes the archive" (Cvetkovich, 2011, p. 32).

Laura Guy describes how the institutionalization of absence renders "reading a form of detective work, a kind of searching that seeks to uncover, or recover, either by looking for clues, [or] engaging methods of over-interpretation" (Guy, 2019, p. 324). This can also look like a practice of archivally situated invention, a strategy that has been deployed in projects like British photographer Tessa Boffin's 1991 series *The Knight's Move*. Boffin's work mines the lack of lesbian representation across historical records and cites the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who asks whether, given the erasures wrought by colonialism, practices should seek to 'unearth' what has been hidden, or instead gear themselves towards "not the

rediscovery but the *production* of an identity…the act of imaginative rediscovery" (Hall, 1998, p. 224). This recuperative archive-building has continued in contemporary practices. In her series *ANTI-ICON*, American/Mayan artist Martine Gutierrez poses as mythological and historical figures including Aphrodite, Mulan, and Cleopatra. Commissioned by Public Art Fund and installed on the sides of bus shelters in New York, Chicago, and Boston, Gutierrez's self-portraits replace the advertisements which usually occupy these spaces, echoing the activist group Gran Fury's use of bus advertising for its infamous 1989 *Kissing Doesn't Kill* campaign, which depicted a diversity of kissing couples in a bid to counter mis-information about HIV/AIDS. By unfixing 'icons' and heroines from representational conventions, Gutierrez "make[s] the pedestal bigger" (Gutierrez, 2021), re-figuring their stories through her Indigenous, trans, femme body. The photographs attend to the imaginative potential of re-working where and how trans identity appears, illustrating Boffin's claim that "we [can] go beyond our impoverished archives to create new icons" (1991, p. 49).

Returning to translation, we might consider how the phrase 'reading' a photograph positions the medium as being intrinsically bound up with language. Archives often fail to register queer life, which reverberates across photographs and documents in ways that are felt, but which might not announce themselves as queer to the passing eye. Queer's instability sits uneasily within such sites, which are organized through naming. This poses a challenge for artists and researchers. But it can also open space for imagination, interpretation, and identification. The act of reading a photograph becomes one of reading between the lines, or, as Tina Campt puts it, of "listening to images" in order to "challenge the equation of vision with knowledge" (Campt, 2017, p. 6). Campt's careful attention to photography through "other affective frequencies" (2017, p. 9) models an approach that sidesteps archival demands for the kinds of visibility which facilitate classification, and which attach 'queer' to particular looks, styles, and assumptions.

Visibility

The poet Joelle Taylor describes being photographed on London's Old Compton Street, once a hub for gay nightlife and now a queer afterthought in Soho's commercialized geography. She writes: "the small bang/when my picture is taken/where is it taken to?/who will it become?" (Taylor, 2021, p. 25). Taylor betrays the extent to which representation can surpass affirmative visibility. Allan Sekula's canonical 1986 essay "The Body and the Archive" charts how, from its inception in the late 1800s, photography became bound into the procedures of modern policing, which utilized it to classify and typologize 'deviant' subjects and submit them to intensified surveillance (Sekula, 1986). The subsequent development of photography alongside systems of networked communication underscores the importance of Sekula's point. CCTV, facial recognition, biometrics, algorithms and data harvesting have contributed to the fraught meaning of 'visibility.' American artist Lorenzo Triburgo's series *Policing Gender* (2014–) 'depicts' incarcerated queer subjects, with whom they corresponded for over three years. Concerned that figurative representation "might make their pen pals vulnerable to outside perceptions, or associate their sexual identity with criminality" (Triburgo, no date), Triburgo instead pictures deeply lit swathes of draped fabric, evocative of Renaissance portraiture. These are paired with aerial photographs of the landscapes around—but not including—the prisons in America's Pacific Northwest to which Triburgo's letters were directed. Installed with these alternating modes of photography are audio recordings. Through their strategy of 'representational refusal,' Triburgo lit-

eralises Campt's suggestion that we listen to images, compelling the 'viewer' to hear rather than see their subjects, and summoning a powerful reminder of their absence from the unincarcerated queer community (Triburgo and Van Dyck, 2022).

The visibility which has been achieved through the entangled industries of film, television, fashion and advertising has become synonymous with queer, and increasingly trans, inclusion. This conflation of visual representation with rights-based liberation is what philosopher Luce deLire terms "representational justice," which stakes 'being seen' as a political end, when what it engenders is "merely nominal, not material emancipation" (deLire, 2023). As scholar Che Gossett clarifies, "one of the traps of trans visibility is that it is premised on invisibility: to bring a select few into view, others must disappear into the background" (Gossett, 2017, p. 183). Increased media representation has at best "present[ed] trans identity as a viable alternative" (deLire, 2023), and at worst exposed it to attack, often with fatal consequences for trans women of color and gender-nonconforming people, whose visibility fails to align with the binary image of trans identity that has been neutralized by celebrity figureheads.

The question of whether visibility leads to violence and criminalization or to awareness and empathy dovetails with the discourse of what were, in the 1980s and '90s, referred to as 'positive images.' Amidst the AIDS epidemic, some lesbians and gay men sought to disseminate imagery depicting queer subjects in a positive light, which "frequently meant sanitized, desexualized, normative, whitened, lightened, or otherwise well-behaved folks accommodating to a liberal embrace" (Villarejo, 2007, p. 390). Activists, artists, and theorists conversely argued for a 'politics of representation,' and for work that might intervene in the conditions which simultaneously require and exploit images of queer subjects. The opposition between a 'politics of representation' and the 'representation of politics' allows us to ask how photography can be moved away from attempts to picture identity and instead contribute to the material work of eradicating dispossession and violence. Canadian performance and visual artist Cassils utilizes photography's materiality to interrogate how the demand for visibility is projected onto trans bodies. In their 2021–22 performance *Human Measure*, Cassils worked with choreographer Jasmine Albuquerque and a group of trans and non-binary dancers. Employing movements inspired by self-defense and de-escalation techniques, and evoking the range of emotions experienced by trans subjects finding ways to live in hostile environments, the dancers proceed across a piece of chemically treated muslin lit by the red glow of a darkroom. Exposed by the intermittent flash of a light box, they create a large-scale cyanotype that indexes their sweaty outlines. Questioning the capacity of documentary photography to adequately 'capture' the depth of lived experience, *Human Measure* allows its subjects to "wield the double-edged sword of representation in a collective process of empowered labour" (Cassils, no date).

Ongoing arguments against the 'representation of politics' have made documentary photography an uneasy strawman, especially given, as Nat Raha offers, that "in an ongoing context of anti-trans political backlash from the far right and transphobic feminists, the stakes of transfeminist herstory and stories remain significant" (Raha, 2022, p. 202). Describing the archives of trans lesbian life in the UK during the 1970s, Raha suggests that "documentary fragments and traces…are a means to hold up and affirm what was experienced, lived and what might have become" (Raha, 2022, p. 202–3). While Raha is not explicitly referring to photography, her point can be extrapolated to position documentary-based work beyond the demand for 'representational justice,' positive images, or an exploitative, pseudo-anthropological gaze, and to understand it as contributing to

the creation of collective memory that resists the material precarity of both trans life and archives. *Aperture*'s 2017 "Future Gender" issue, guest edited by artist Zackary Drucker, includes "as many photographic approaches…as there are gender expressions" (Drucker, 2017, p. 23), from work which is documentary, like Josué Azor's photographs of queer Haitian nightlife, to that which is deliberately constructed, like Nelson Morales's posed and stylized portraits of *muxes*, a third-gender expression in Mexican Zapotec culture. Also included are images from Kike Arnal's book *Revealing Selves: Transgender Portraits from Argentina* (2018), which registers the collective trans joy precipitated when Argentina passed its Gender Identity Law in 2012, legalizing gender self-determination.

The exuberance of Arnal's photographs can be held alongside documentation of the UK-based activist group Pissed Off Trannies (POT). Together, these examples illustrate Susan Stryker's contention that "whatever future gender's transformation might hold for new modes of life that can expand our agency and extend our creative potential, that future is ours precisely because of the resistance offered, the lives surrendered, and the strategies explored by those who came before us" (Stryker, 2017, p. 35). In September 2022, the POT assembled outside the offices of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in London, where masked members deposited clear plastic bottles filled with urine. Earlier that year, a leaked report by the EHRC proposed that trans people in the UK would be barred from single-sex spaces, including bathrooms, unless they were in possession of a gender-recognition certificate, which entails a lengthy and invasive vetting process. The protestors are photographed pouring these bottles onto the ground and themselves, and the yellow liquid is caught mid-air by the camera's shutter. The piss speaks back—if you deny us bathroom access, where do we go?—while tapping into prejudiced readings of the queer body as abject and connoting the erotic charge of piss play. For Stryker, these are the kinds of images which, in their resistance, anticipate 'future gender.' The affective distance between Arnal's euphoric subjects and the fury of the POT indexes two ends of the same struggle. These photographs, which are documentary but not 'positive,' and oriented in their respective elation and rage towards a future where gender self-determination is safe and attainable, underscore queer's political frontline. While certain rights have been attained, in certain places, for some subjects in the 'queer community,' for others they remain distant, or immaterial given the continued experience of subjugation and abuse. These images work to illustrate the chasm between the lip service paid to visibility through the rhetoric of 'representational justice,' and a politics of representation that understands the *burden* of representation as the ongoing task of asserting what is lived and what might yet become possible.

Materialities

In 1988, Boffin wrote that her photographs aimed to create "utopias of multiple differences, of subject positions *not* determined by gender" (Boffin, 1988, p. 159). Her desire for multiplicity, to live and lust through her identification*s*, rather than from a singular identity, has been mirrored in recent fiction such as Andrea Lawlor's 2017 novel *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl*, and auto-theory like McKenzie Wark's 2020 memoir *Reverse Cowgirl*. In these texts, the stability that visibility presupposes is undone by the mutability of their narrator. Or, put another way by writer Maggie Nelson, "you can lose a lot of fluidity in the effort to make certain things visible" (Nelson, 2017, p. 110). The language of photography demonstrates its complicity with the processes of containment that representation can facilitate: photographs 'record' the presence of a body in time, or, more nefariously,

Figure 14.3   Anya Gorkova, *Photographic Object 67*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

'capture' it. This begs the question of how a medium which claims to still motion can address protean states of being. Anya Gorkova works with the *stuff* of photography, such as darkroom chemicals, exposed film and paper, and objects like developing trays and drying hooks (Figure 14.3). With these materials, Gorkova makes sculptural, camera-less objects that privilege the processes of photography rather than the outcome of a final image, with an attention to durationality that is co-extensive with their own non-binary identification. Experimenting with different chemicals, they achieve new colors and tones apart from the prescribed black and white, effecting a non-representational move towards the utopia that Boffin anticipated.

Describing the photogram, made when an object is placed atop light-sensitive paper and exposed, Geoffrey Batchen offers that here "photography is freed from its traditional sub-servient role as a realist mode of representation and allowed instead to become a searing index of its own operations, to become an art of the real" (Batchen, 2016, p. 5). American artist Joy Episalla has adapted this process to make 'foldtograms,' submerging exposed photographic paper in "the wrong order" of developing and fixing chemicals (Tang, 2022), and then crumpling, scrunching, bending and folding it while both wet and dry. The foldto-grams exceed flatness and framing, their pliability pulling the viewer's experience towards feeling the artist's active, physical maneuvers. Episalla's work vexes staid conceptualizations of darkroom photography, resulting in objects that are continuously re-configured through-out the process of their creation and with each installation of the work, such that they "end up bearing traces of their previous iterations. They contain their histories and pull their

histories forward into the future" (Soboleva, 2022). The 'real' contained within Episalla's foldtograms is something akin to the time of queerness, which, like queer subjects, exceeds the meaning offered by a singular, controllable referent. In Episalla's work, this excess *is* the referent, albeit one which refuses to be pictured and demands instead to be felt, as the "sensation of asynchrony" (Freeman, 2007, p. 159), through forms of relationality, or as the refusal be marshalled by the reproductive time of capitalism and the nuclear family.

Conclusion

Writing in 1992, around the time of queer's defiant reclamation as a countercultural politics, British art historian and AIDS activist Simon Watney explained that

> the main conflict is not simply between older 'gay' assimilationists … and 'queers' asserting their 'queerness'. Rather it is between those who think of the politics of sexuality as a matter of securing minority rights and those who are contesting the overall validity and authenticity of the epistemology of sexuality itself.
>
> *(Smyth, 1991, p. 20)*

While there may be no such easily definable thing as 'queer photography,' Watney's claim remains relevant to how we study and understand queer *uses* of photography, and their effects.

Beginning with the question, 'what's queer about queer photography now?,' or more precisely, 'what's queer about photographic practices now?' this chapter has assessed some of the ways that contemporary photographers continue to employ the premise and promises of 'queer,' and to challenge the mainstream visibility which divests queerness of its disruptive, worldmaking potential. By remaining formally and representationally mobile, and facilitating modes of engagement which exceed the expectation of an uncomplicated visual encounter, recent photographic work has both attended to and expanded conceptions of gender and sexual identity.

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