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BACHELOR THESIS

Liberal Arts and Humanities

A New Subject(ion): Dark Transformations, Bodies and Affect in Online

Erotic Hypnosis

Andrew Timothy Wilson

Supervisor: David Verbuč, M.A., Ph. D.

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DECLARATION

I declare that I have written this thesis myself and on my own. I have duly referenced and quoted all the sources and literature that I used in it. I have not yet submitted this work to obtain another degree. I will sign this declaration and consent by handwritten signature.

In Prague, Czech Republic, 11 July, 2022

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. K. H.', written in a cursive style.

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ABSTRACT

Online erotic hypnosis (OEH) is a novel and under-researched practice, yet it is one gaining considerable – and devoted – following. OEH provides a complex, digital mediation of sexuality and opens the possibility for participants to enact changes in their subjectivity, in both the long and short term. Research into OEH therefore offers a unique opportunity for glimpsing the affective capacity not only of new media, but of online communities, technics, practices, intoxicants, bodies – an assemblage of heterogeneous parts that relate and interpenetrate, composing OEH. Thus, my thesis incorporates an ethnography of this assemblage to not only map what OEH is, but to primarily inquire how online erotic hypnosis affects and transforms subjectivity. The question is both an anthropological and a philosophical one, inviting interferences from new media studies and contemporary philosophy to develop concepts that take shape between these disciplines. Using digital and sensorial ethnographic methods I engage human and non-human agents, immerse within OEH environments (that are both on- and off-line), and attune to the affective dimension thereof. Finally, I explore OEH's ethico-political reality – the ranging experiences of sexual affirmation, financial exploitation, addiction, isolation, solidarity, and the ways in which these typify the present forms of capital and control. Does OEH have the capacity to (co)constitute a radical desubjectification or a new type of subject – and a further subjection?

KEYWORDS

Online erotic hypnosis, new media, internet pornography, online ethnography, assemblage theory, affect, subjectivity

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1 INTRODUCING ONLINE EROTIC HYPNOSIS

1.1 Encountering OEH

I first heard of online erotic hypnosis (OEH) in April of 2021, after waves of pandemic isolation had intensified feelings of separation amongst myself, friends, and all those surviving the locked-down city of Prague. One of these people, a close friend of mine during the last 2 years, had been especially absent over recent months. His life had taken a notable turn inward, in what I had assumed was an effort to cope with the epidemiological situation (binge consumption of video games, weed, TV shows – standard means of self-medication). However, until he approached me one night for help, I had not known the nature of his isolation: in the span of little more than 3 months, he had been thrown into a spiral of heavy drug use, pornography addiction, mental illness, and what he described as acute transformations in body and mind, all culminating in near financial ruin. As he confided in me, his body had ceased responding to physical, sexual stimuli in the way he was accustomed to – to the extent that he was not experiencing orgasm (or at times, even arousal) during in-person sexual relations.¹ He disclosed to me addictions and fetishes that had been encouraged, or by his account, “implanted” from various online sources.² The eventual “wake up call” came by his observation of a deepening entanglement of sexual gratification and financial transactions; navigating an online Paypal terminal and “clicking a button” initiated for him heightened states of sexual arousal.³ He disclosed to me the force mediating this dark spiral (itself taking the shape of a spiral): a hypnotic, whirling, digitized cacophony of entrancing audiovisual media designed to affect a body at speeds and intensities beyond (or beneath) the control of cognition, intensifying or altering sexuality and arousal.

What I encountered proved to be far more complex than I had anticipated; thanks to the access to various platforms this informant provided, not only did I discover two primary “streams” of OEH media (one in which live hypnotism is mediated by webcams, another in which entrancing audiovisual moving-image media is produced and consumed), I also passed through a broader spectrum of online hypnosis that was more or less “erotic” in nature and designed to facilitate some willful (long or short-term) alteration in a person’s beliefs, bodily state, way of life. This wide spectrum of OEH media seems to facilitate experiences ranging from the affirmative (through the embodiment and performance of sexualities and identities that were otherwise inaccessible to users), to the exploitative (by pulling users into a variety of addictions or undesirable states resulting in destructive patterns, further intensifying their alienation). My preliminary research thus became driven by an urge to comprehend this spectrum of potential and work (in a mutually supportive way) with those who had – by varying degrees of complicity – found themselves somewhere on it (in no small way due to my personal friendship with someone who had themselves been profoundly affected by OEH). This preliminary research comprised several in-depth interviews (three with the aforementioned recovering addict, another with an OEH content creator and web designer); in addition

- 1 The early interviews I conducted were marked by the sense of shock and fear over realizing how “online” his sexuality had become, and in such a short time.
- 2 This information is lifted from a series of interviews conducted with the subject, “sources” were a combination of pre-produced “hypno” media (OEH pornographic clips) and (in a minor way) live webcam hypnotic “sessions.” – *Fieldwork 1*
- 3 Further, the intensity of arousal and sexual excitement seemed to be correlated with the amounts of money being spent in a given “session” – greater expenditures became immediately associated with more intense or pleasurable experiences, typifying what is known widely in online pornography (and notably BDSM) communities as “financial domination” (see Chapter 2). – *Fieldwork 1, Fieldwork 2*

to these interviews I employed *netnography* to conduct an affect-theory informed study of OEH's visual culture and moving image media, triangulating the aforementioned themes of affirmation, exploitation, and transformation. From these initial ventures I developed the topics and research questions which (together with my own theoretical interests) focus the direction of this thesis. For this purpose, I bring together theories of *assemblages*, *affectivity*, and *subjectivity* in order to produce concepts by which the transformative potential of online erotic hypnosis is not only comprehensible, but ethico-politically pertinent. Thus in order to properly reckon with the breadth of this topic implications, I argue that we must not simply ask *what* is OEH, or *who* are the agents involved (human and non-human alike) affecting and affected by it; rather, the research question guiding this project concerns *how online erotic hypnosis (as an assemblage of pornography, intoxicants, digital media, humans, and hypnosis) affects and transforms subjectivity*.

1.2 Theorizing Online Erotic Hypnosis – An Affective Assemblage

This direction – asking a difficult and rather technical question – I clarify here by outlining the theoretical approaches informing it. To start, I bring into play the concept of *assemblage* lifted primarily from Gilles Deleuze' and Felix Guattari's body of work. Next, I discuss the notion of *affectivity* within the framework of the assemblage. Finally, theories of *subjectivity* – held in balance with assemblage and affect – round off the theoretical approach with an ethical and political framework for reckoning with OEH. These concepts, entangled together and concretized in an ethnographic study, facilitate the work of dealing with both *what* OEH is and *how* it works.

To start, the concept of *assemblage* provides a practical, rigorous tool that does not fundamentally inflict ontological divisions between things belonging to the realms of “culture” or “nature,” “mind” or “body,” “subject” or “object” – all of which intermingle within the organization of an assemblage⁴ Rather, I employ assemblage theory as a broad framework for analysis, because it widens the sphere of constitutive relations, grafting splintered categories together in a decentralized network of technics and bodies and discourse and matter. The assemblage is precisely where, according to Deleuze:

“you find states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodes; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs... Assemblages exist, but they indeed have *component parts* that serve as *criteria* and allow the various assemblages to be *qualified*.”⁵

Thus the “criteria” which allow the assemblage of OEH to be “qualified” can be apprehended from its “component parts,” which are many and varied: an ethnography of such an assemblage involves an immersive process of exploring and engaging these components and qualifying the “whole” that their

4 Keith Ansell-Pearson nicely sums up the *ontological* disruption afforded by the concept: “An assemblage works through invention, and does not imply a relationship of anastomosis between its components. Rather, it connects and convolutes things in terms of potential fields and virtual elements, *crossing ontological thresholds* without fidelity to relations of genus and species...” – Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London, UK: Routledge, 2009), p. 139. Or on a more philosophical register, as Michel Serres would have it, “[n]othing distinguishes me *ontologically* from a crystal, a plant, an animal... we are drifting together toward the noise and black depths of the universe, and our diverse systemic complexions are flowing up the entropic stream, toward the solar origin, itself adrift.” – Michel Serres and Harari Josué V., *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore u.a., MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 1982), p. 83 (emphasis added in both quotes).

5 Deleuze, Gilles, and David Lapoujade. *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975-1995*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2007, 177 (emphasis added)

inferences produce (which I develop further in the section on methodology). This means that, while OEH certainly includes humans and cultural artifacts, these are always already bound up with practices, technical or digital or natural objects, relations, infrastructures, events, semiotics. Each of these parts are co-constituted with and modulated by the other, even while each is demanding of its own theoretical attenuation. Thus, by the application of Deleuze's (and other's) theory within the social science and humanities disciplines, I take the assemblage to be,

“a ‘gathering of heterogeneous elements consistently drawn together as an identifiable terrain of action and debate’. These elements include arrangements of humans, materials, technologies, organisations, techniques, procedures, norms, and events, *all of which have the capacity for agency within and beyond the assemblage.*”⁶

This definition, most significantly, distributes the capacity for “agency” to every component part therein; this necessarily begs the question, *what is agency?* As a growing number of scholars situate themselves within Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) and new materialism in order to decenter the human as the sole or preeminent actor (or actant) in the world (Latour 2005, Bennett 2009, Law et al. 2002, Tsing 2015, Oppenheim 2007), reckoning with agency has become the pivotal mode for doing so across disciplines. Simply stated, agency is “the ability to act in such a way as to produce particular results.”⁷ This act-ability is ontologically inclusive of things that are decidedly not human – in my case, a digital media file has agency in that it carries an affective force and propensity to (for instance) impede or accelerate the desire of a human, or move across infrastructures and multiply itself with shares. It has an individuation all its own that – while certainly bound up with the intentions of humans and the modulations of other technics producing and interacting with it – moves beyond the regime of will, desire and perception that can be relegated to a “human” domain alone. It is therefore in contingency with other things that agency not only takes effect, but is produced: “efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces”⁸ The assemblage is exactly the site of this interference of bodies and forces, so the components of OEH are not only heterogeneous and contingent with one another, but actively produce results “within and beyond” the assemblage.

How are results produced by these interferences? *Affectivity* is the word, following a corpus of philosophy and theory from the *Ethics* (Spinoza 1677, [2000]) to the *Politics of Affect* (Massumi 2015), that describes the capacity to receive and produce results, to bear a potential for change. To fit it concretely within the developing framework, the agency of the components within an assemblage resides in their *affectivity*, their capacity to affect and be affected. Affect therefore is something that,

“arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon... affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. *Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral*

6 Baker, T. & McGuirk, P. (2017). “Assemblage thinking as methodology: commitments and practices for critical policy research.” *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 5 (4), 427-428 (*emphasis added*)

7 Stacy Alaimo, ed., *Gender: Matter* (Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks, Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2017), p. 415.

8 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 21

forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations.”

To unweave this dense and sticky web of words, affect is not internal human emotion, but it can incite it. Affect has no singular originator, but sparks to life in relations in-between things. It is identifiable with intensities that radiate, and by radiation simultaneously pass through and generate change within bodies. For a human to be affected by, say, a “hypno clip” that is designed to bring the user to orgasm without the application of physical force, it means that a capacity is opened up for that human to be aroused. But this arousal, despite the obvious “intent” behind the video’s production, is not limited to the sexual domain. Arousal, in a broader sense, has more to do with the potential for action – for the embodiment or emplacement of this potential within a human. In *The Autonomy of Affect* (Massumi 1995), Brian Massumi concretizes the notion of affect by mapping such a flow of intensity, observing how it is registered in the autonomic nervous system (ANS) of humans when watching a television program. He notes that, according to the results of the study, the audiovisual media has a capacity to create heightened states of neurological arousal in the subjects before or regardless of the subjective qualities attached by them to their experience; in other words, the media affected the subjects before it was cognized, impinging on their bodies and creating a potential for action before it could emerge as emotion, before it could be rationalized as an “internal” response to an external stimulus.⁹ And here, very concretely, we encounter affectivity – agents impinging on one another in relation, and producing change by the enactment of that assemblage.

Why might this theoretical framework be indispensable for studying online erotic hypnosis? As the research question states, this project is concerned with *how* OEH affects and transforms subjectivity. The digital media at play within OEH is not unique in its affectivity, and is part of a more widespread development in the entanglement of sex and digital technologies. Luciana Parisi’s insightful work, which reckons with affectivity in new media, helps make sense of this:

“The emergence of media technologies... subtracts sex from sexual reproduction, the masses from identity, nature from the organic, capital from the unity of organic value... This deterritorialization of the forces of reproduction... is counteracted by a fascistic *reterritorialization of forces, masses and flows.*”¹⁰

Herein lies a functional approach for responding to the *how* question driving this project. As human sexuality is removed from the territory of biological sex and reproduction (*deterritorialized*), digital media’s affects (in my research, via the relations of erotic hypnosis) facilitate the *reterritorialization* of things such as capital (the aforementioned “forces, masses, and flows”) onto sexual pleasure or desire (Parisi’s “forces of reproduction”). A prime example of this process emerged early in my preliminary research, relayed in an informant’s account (the same introduced at the beginning of this chapter, who will be anonymized as “Ryan”) of attaining sexual arousal by the click of a button in an online Paypal terminal – a practice which was repeatedly used to purchase audiovisual clips and sessions with online erotic

9 Massumi, Brian. “The Autonomy of Affect.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 83–109. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354446>.

10 Parisi, Luciana. *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire*. London: Continuum, 2004, 134 (emphasis added)

hypnotists who, during those sessions, reinforced the addiction to their content by hypnotically suggesting (or in the user's words, "implanting") a fetish for the act of payment itself. Additionally, Ryan noted the loss of sexual desire when it came to physical relations with another person (a novel and unwanted development), further reinforcing their dependency on OEH for pleasure, orgasm, et al. Rather than rationalizing Ryan's behavior or pathologizing his addiction, an affect theory-informed approach (such as Parisi's) removes the human subject from the center of analysis and instead situates itself in the "in-between;" there is a flow of affect by which these changes were produced, and this web of productive relations may be mapped within a heterogeneous assemblage. Thus it becomes clear, especially when engaging with digital OEH content, which uses (moving) images and sounds to mediate hypnosis, just why affectivity is a necessary focus – as Patricia Clough so pointedly argues,

“the relationship of bodily affect and digitization requires that we rethink the image as informational... the image itself has become a process, which not only invites the user's interaction but rather requires the human body to frame the ongoing flow of information. New media require the affectivity of the body, just as new media allow for an experience of affectivity by expanding the body's sense of its own affective indeterminacy.”¹¹

The images (and sounds) of OEH media are not merely representational, but generative – as the above ethnographic example shows, OEH media “become a process,” which “invites the user's interaction” (via a hypnotic session, payment, etc.) and “requires the human body to frame the ongoing flow of information.” I argue that this framing of information *is* the transformation or change incited by affect, an impact that has been relayed by other informants and described as “alterations.” And, as Clough attests, this has indeed expanded informants' sense of “indeterminacy,” engendering the folk terminology diffused across the internet, coining new strings of neologisms which speak to users' experiences of ontological insecurity: “dronification,” “bimbofication,” “fractionation,” “transformation-play” (which are defined and analyzed throughout the following chapters). Any description of OEH media's impact in a biological body is nonsensical without attesting to the affective capacity of matter and bodies in general, and while affect is imperceptible as an object “out there,” it is viscerally perceptible – an attribute which invites empirical and embedded engagement.

The veritable “elephant in the room” by now, unavoidable in the midst of descriptions of bodies and affects and changes, is *subjectivity*. Up until this point I have followed theories which ascribe agency to things such as digital objects; however, within more traditional Western philosophy and anthropology, it is human subjects that are privileged, either supremely or even exclusively, with such agency. But with the conceptual expansion of agency to include non-human things, the notion of subjectivity this thesis deals with is decidedly different than that of Enlightenment and humanist thought (consider, for instance, how Descartes' philosophy “represents our inner life, our subjectivity, as if it were something independent and unsupported, as if our (my) conscious states, our thoughts and experiences, could somehow be the whole of what is real – without requiring the reality of anything else.”)¹² Instead, this work posits a subjectivity (the qualitative, self-conscious experience of existing) that is always *produced*, co-constituted with other actors, which follows a wider theoretical movement within today's “posthumanities:”

11 Clough, Patricia T. “The Affective Turn.” *The Affect Theory Reader*, January 2010, 206–225. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393047-009>, 212

12 Schwyzer, Hubert. “Subjectivity in Descartes and Kant.” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 188 (1997): 342–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9213.00063>, 342

“Subjectivity is not restricted to bound individuals, but is rather a co-operative trans-species effort... that takes place transversally, in-between nature/technology; male/female; black/white; local/global; present/past – in assemblages that flow across and displace the binaries.”¹³

Simply put, what the “post” of posthuman subjectivity implies is anything but a movement away from the issue of subjectivity itself, but rather thinking the “human” differently – acknowledging the historical and political contingency of “Man” (*anthropos*) as a totalizing figuration of human life.¹⁴ Let a researcher investigate a particular type of subjectivity – for instance, that of the individual, able-bodied, white, heteronormative Man – and its affectivity becomes apparent: not only is this subjectivity reproduced and reinforced within a world dominated by masculinist, ableist, alienating norms, it also has the recursive effect of materially propagating a world in which these things take on reality and produce further effects (such as anthropogenic climate change).¹⁵ By locating subjectivity in the transversal, imminent relations between things, it makes subjectivity itself an assemblage that exists within and beside other assemblages (a theorization which will be developed in depth in Chapter 3); suffice it to say here that observing and describing the production of a subject – *subjectification* – is crucial for analyzing how subjectivity is transformed in the assemblage of OEH. To sum up, all of these things – from OEH to climate change – may be extrapolated as assemblages interfering with other assemblages, constituting our contemporary moment (as Chapter 2 demonstrates).

Most importantly for my research topic, this framework asserts subjectivity’s permeability, its mutability, its immanence to other forces – this includes *technology*. As Deleuzian scholar David Savat summarizes,

“Subjectivity, in other words, *changes* depending on the numerous and varying forces and pressures that produce it, as well as those by which, importantly, it produces itself... Different technologies... [such as] the internet, can alter one’s sense of being an actor in the world because of the manner in which they enable a different doing, and in the process can come to *constitute and reflect, as well as require, a different sense of self*.”¹⁶

The capacity of the Internet (which is itself an assemblage) to “enable a different doing” is, in a word, its affectivity – one which is constituting a novel “sense of self” in today’s digital world. However, the questions this project deals with take this to be a starting point, not a conclusive statement. Does this altered sense of self signal toward a potential process of *desubjectification* – escaping the confines of an enclosed “subjectivity,” such as that of the individual (Foucault 1977, Deleuze 1990, Hardt & Negri 2000, Agamben 1993) – or is what is being produced a new form of *subjection*? Giorgio Grizzotti and Tiziana Terranova formulate and expand these questions to global contexts, noting that “technology has, in fact, broken what are considered intangible barriers and has now become part of living matter.”¹⁷ In the internet age, where digital mediation and affect reshape the world, the “depths” of subjectivity are rendered flat on

13 Braidotti, Rosi. “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (2018): 31–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418771486>, 33

14 M., Henare Amiria J. *Thinking through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2010, 7-12

15 Yusoff, Kathryn. “Politics of the Anthropocene: Formation of the Commons as a Geologic Process.” *Antipode* 50, no. 1 (2017): 255–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12334>.

16 Savat, David. “(Dis)Connected: Deleuze’s Superject and the Internet.” *International Handbook of Internet Research*, 2009, 423–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9789-8_26. 425-426 (*emphasis added*)

17 Grizzotti, Giorgio, Tiziana Terranova, and Jason Francis McGimsey. *Neurocapitalism: Technological Mediation and Vanishing Lines*. New York: Minor Compositions, 2019, 94

a single plane of immanence – accessible, malleable, transmissible – sharing the grid with other physical, technological or digital agents who may or may not have friendly intentions, or any anthropomorphic “intent” at all. Most pertinent to their work is the contemporary form(s) of capital which, thanks to de/re/territorializations, are no longer relegated to an economic domain but intertwining with biological and geological realities, recoding even the neurological:

“the capacity of cognitive capitalism to use technological mediations over time for the genesis of new subjectivities is evident. The implicit goal [of capitalism] is the structural integration of the free market’s economic form directly into subjectivity as the only and all-encompassing model for all social, economic and political relationships, including individual behavior.”¹⁸

Deleuze and Guattari, in a sense, saw this coming. They noted, even during the pre-internet 20th century, a subtle shift away from the enclosed, self-sustained, guarded subjectivity dominant throughout their lifetimes toward a different sense of being in the world – and by default, a different, borderless world with new relations productive of such difference. They called this new constitution of the world (according to Savat, in relation to Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary society) a *control society*:¹⁹

“what has really changed with control society is not just the institutional model that organises it, but its machinic form. Deleuze says that disciplinary societies 'mold individuals', while control societies 'modulate individuals' (Deleuze 1992: 4). The difference between a mold and a modulation is that the former is a rigid enclosure, the latter a fluid format, one that changes with the content to be formatted.”²⁰

As opposed to the “individual” subject, “dividuals” feel themselves fluid – changing “with the content to be formatted” (equivalent to Clough’s aforementioned notion of framing “the ongoing flow of information”). The “control society” they inhabit is productive, therefore, of a new subjectivity: humans no longer need to be disciplined into compliance, but insidiously managed by the process of subjectification itself; which interpolates the affects of (not only) the assemblages of capital and state (as discussed in Chapter 3). Subjection is not now simply catalyzed by an ontological difference between an outside and an interiority, the within and without necessary to conceive the individual. Its forces have become transgressive of all boundaries, and OEH is an important and poignant demonstration of this evolution – while OEH users display what may be seen as a radical, subversively “different sense of self” which is non-reducible to normative, universalizing constructs of identity or even biological limits, it must be asked not only how subjectivity is being altered, but also *subjection*. These two themes – subjectivity and subjection – are never far from each other, as my preliminary research (specifically regarding addicted informants) shows: many users experience both short and long term effects that deterritorialize their sexuality and subsume it under capital in various ways and to myriad effects. By the technics of digital mediation and the affordances of social platforms, this subsumption occurs by assembling with other agents who are themselves, for instance, vectors of capital – components in other assemblages. Thus, what may first appear as a movement of freedom, away from the dogma of heteronormative, physically interdependent sexual relations and toward an affirmation of marginal identities and ways of life, may on

18 Griziotti, Giorgio, *Neurocapitalism*, 93-94

19 Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control*.” *Surveillance, Crime and Social Control*, 2017, 35–39. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315242002-3>

20 Poster, Mark, David Savat, and Gilles Deleuze. *Deleuze and New Technology*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2010. 21-22

another scale show itself to also be new form of control – a new subjection. This complexity does not, of course, negate the affirmative potential of new capacities opening up, new subjectivities taking shape. It does, however, demand a more rigorous, political analysis (on the scale of Griziotti's, Parisi's, and others) on which to balance precarious political and ethical questions.

OEH is just one node by which we might investigate these issues, but it is a uniquely contemporary and socially exigent one. Some informants attest to the efficacy of safe practices in ensuring that forces of subjection, such as financial domination, are obviated. But these issues, and the rapid development of such media and attached communities, raise urgent questions we can no longer ignore, which would have in previous times been inconceivable. Yet the most relevant of these has always been with us, and we must ask it over again: what can a body do?²¹

1.3 Moving through the Assemblage – An Ethnographic Methodology

To make such a contribution, the practical work of research creation must adapt to navigating an intricate, knotted event – the point of contact between humans and technology, which churns up bodies and technics, online and offline worlds.²² Fortunately or unfortunately, there is not a mere physical community occupying a physical field, but rather a heterogeneous network of interferences which constitute online erotic hypnosis. Christine Hine, a notable scholar of digital and virtual ethnography, demonstrates that there is a process of construction that must be acknowledged and negotiated in constituting any “field” – physical, digital, or otherwise:

“The field, in this kind of study, is constituted through the ethnographer's agency in making choices about which connections to follow rather than through tracing out a pre-existing location or bounded set of connections.”²³

Hine is careful to stress connectivity and relational processes, while avoiding spacial metaphors and frameworks which imply fixity. This is because the new “field” is never merely representative of physical space: “[f]ieldsites are not easily located either online or offline... but involve tracing networks of connection through online and offline space.”²⁴ The field, as it relates to this research project, could thus be constituted as a matrix of connectivity that flows between the components interacting within the assemblage of online erotic hypnosis – which the researcher, through immersion and ethnographic interventions,²⁵ not only moves through but becomes a part. The “networks of connection” that are principle for my project pass through several heterogeneous yet interfering environments, both online and offline:

- Online social spaces and communication sites that are characterized by themes, events, and discussion forums – as well as subscriptions, hosting, or payment services – centered around erotic hypnosis (see Chapter 2 for a full description of these, which range from more public accessible, in

21 Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ed. & Transl, G.H.R. Parkinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

22 There is an increasing precedent for this type of work within anthropology, owing to the “growing number of ethnographic studies that have attended to embodied and sensory experience of new devices, media and content.” Pink, Sarah. *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016, 25

23 Hine, Christine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London: Routledge, 2020, 26

24 *Ibid.*, 25

25 “Sensory research through intervention” is “a participatory practice in which learning is embodied, emplaced, sensorial and empathetic, rather than observation” – Clough, Patricia T., “The Affective Turn,” 95

the case of OEH-designated Reddit pages and Twitter bios, to more exclusive, in the case of privately moderated Discord servers and Patreon pages)

- OEH media platforms (“camming” and clip sites, wherein hypnosis sessions are mediated by live hosts over webcam, or prerecorded audio and audiovisual content is distributed or sold)
- Shared (downloadable) media files that fall into the category of “hypnosis clips,” comprise image-based material such as gifs or memes, and pre-recorded audio or audiovisual files sourced by informants and encountered in online ethnography)
- Skype or other video calling services which facilitate hypnosis sessions (and long-distance informant interviews)
- Physical spaces of interviews and immersed observation (the living spaces which comprise home offices and bedrooms of OEH users, wherein their engagements with OEH take shape)

When it comes to practically engaging these nodes of OEH media and community, I engage a variety of qualitative ethnographic methods that are suited for exploring digital (and attached physical) environments (Whitehead 2012; Pink 2016; Hine 2020), the affective or sensorial dimension thereof (Thrift 2008, Pink 2015, Clough 2010, Blackman 2012), and the assemblage (Buchanan 2021, Rabinow 2003, 2008; Baker & McGuirk 2017; Marcus & Saka 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 1987; DeLanda 2006, 2016). The above theoretical framing, in lieu of the primary research question, invites an ethnography²⁶ of the assemblage – an empirical, inductive method of inquiry which, rather than interpreting a niche online subculture, observes and analyzes the relations between all the components of the OEH assemblage, as well as their interferences with other assemblages adjacent to OEH.²⁷ This methodology thus aims to treat OEH as a heterogeneous “whole” in which all of its components function together (be they humans or non-humans, material or discursive, real or symbolic, physical or digital) and impinge on one another in contingency. Therefore in constructing this approach, the forces which work to produce and transform subjectivity – their affects, as described in the preceding section – may be accounted for and situated in a productive web of relations.

In order to elicit information on and interact with the components of this whole – and the affective dimension thereof – I take semi-structured interviews²⁸ to be an appropriate starting point, and by organizing such interviews engage 7 sources that range from erotic hypnotists, hypnotic subjects or users, online community organizers, and media popularizers (who, in various roles, actively write or produce internet content about OEH for a wider audience). I ask these participants not only about their personal

26 At its most foundation, I take ethnography to be the “iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods... that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher’s own role.” O’Reilly, Karen. *Ethnographic Methods*. London: Routledge, 2009, 3

27 As Tom Baker says, “there is loose consensus around the value of assemblage thinking as a methodological framework. Anderson and McFarlane... contend that assemblage ‘suggests a certain ethos of engagement with the world, one that experiments with methodological and presentational practices in order to attend to a lively world of differences.’ Similarly... ‘the analytics of assemblage has come to pose important methodological questions for the social sciences,’ stressing that it is important to ‘make a distinction between assemblage as an object in the world and assemblage as a methodology.’ As otherwise trenchant critics of assemblage thinking... support a ‘primarily methodological application,’ which ‘retains the central concerns, concepts and analytical orientations of political economy within a methodologically expanded framework.’” – Baker, Tom, and Pauline McGuirk. “Assemblage Thinking as Methodology: Commitments and Practices for Critical Policy Research.” *Territory, Politics, Governance* 5, no. 4 (2016): 425–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2016.1231631>, 429

28 Punch, Keith F. *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. 2nd ed. London, UK: SAGE, 2011, 168-171

(ongoing) histories with OEH, but focus primarily on their experiences of embodied and subjective transformation (what informants perceive as changes in physiology, belief, lifestyle, or their sense of self), by inquiring what objects, sites, communities, media, or any of the various elements of OEH influenced or augmented such transformations (a line of questioning applicable to both users and hypnotists), how hypnotists' perceive their roles and navigate consent or safe practices (eliciting, also, their views on the ethics of media monetization), what organizers understand the function of online communities to be and how these may affect, reinforce, jeopardize or safeguard against various ethical issues, and why content creators and popularizers who are not themselves hypnotists (i.e., discord moderators, meme makers, etc.) work to foster a growing community and set of practices. In exploring the affective nature of these assemblages, I also follow Sarah Pink's notion of "sensorial interviews" by introducing OEH-related objects and events into the ethnographic event, to be discussed or brought into play during interviews with participants in order to observe their affectivity (without prompting the use of illegal or harmful substances and practices).²⁹ Just as Massumi observed heightened states of arousal in study participants during his research on affect, such states of disturbance or intensity may be observed in the reactions, language, expressions, descriptions and moods of the informants during sensorial interviews.³⁰ As to digital ethnographic practices, I follow digital objects (links, hypnotic media files, gifs and images, sound bytes, textual discussion themes, and hypnotist profiles) on their course through networks and across platforms (such as Discord, Reddit, Twitter, Fetlife, and private distribution sites) to analyze their content, the infrastructures they cross (from digital databases or web-platforms to screens or speakers or projections) and the impacts they make on users – all in order to create an ethnography of the "assemblage" that is not limited to humans but includes objects, practices, relations, events, semiotics, et al. This also includes engagements with Discord communities or other social platforms by way of person-to-person interactions in DMs (online private messages) or chatrooms, public participation in Discord role-playing or hypnosis events, and an analysis of language and discourse (occurring throughout all of these sites, productions, and events) as a component within the assemblage. The environments contingent with the activities of OEH – both digital and physical – are also included in the analysis, as components of the assemblage itself (such as the living room, desk or other technical objects engaged by a user).

While the strictures of the COVID-19 pandemic have conversely had a generative effect on the development of this research, they are also a limiting factor – although in-person interviews play a role, the exchanges and interviews occurring throughout the research process happen largely online (via Skype or video calling platforms, chatrooms, etc.). Using criterion sampling as a starting point, participants were selected based on their experiences with OEH (either as hypnotists or subjects), but snowball sampling – based on the suggestions and networks offered by interviews with informants – plays a greater role as access to a wider variety of actors within OEH develops through intensified and expanded relations. Anonymous or private interviews remain vital in exploring OEH; such a tenuous ethical situation, in which actors find themselves in censored or suppressed networks and practices (of varying degrees of legality) affirms the importance of discreet, autonomous correspondence (to say nothing of the sensitivity of such subjective experience). These are delicate topics, and to make public the engagements of any

29 These interviews are tuned to the "sensorial" dimension in that they constitute "a multisensory event... [in which] we might attend to participants' treatments of the senses in order to learn about how they communicate about and categorise their experiences, values, moralities, other people, things and more" – Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles etc., CA: Sage, 2015. 73

30 *Ibid.*, 94-116

person or collective entity (who does not expressly wish it) in this sphere is to put them at risk. Thus, the strictest measures of confidentiality and privacy (according to the updated standards of the American Anthropological Association) are maintained throughout every stage of data collection, analysis, and publication.³¹ Further, my own positionality – commencing the ethnography as a relative “outsider” (in not only OEH, but also the kink and BDSM communities informing it – see Chapter 2), familiarizing myself with a host of previously unknown or practices, themes, identities, media in a limited amount of time (a period of approximately 1 year) – means that not only do I risk misunderstanding the experiences and intentions of informants, but also, in an assemblage replete with role-playing and modes of performativity, I risk taking their accounts at face value. In order to negotiate this, I employ “thick” description to carefully triangulate the themes of my ethnography, paying attention to not only what is said but also what is done, and highlighting the contradictions and complexity of OEH (as well as my own moments of surprise, confusion, and acculturation – described in vignettes throughout the text).³² Thus, the data produced from the aforementioned interviews and (digital) ethnographies is be coded and analyzed for themes, and employed to further develop theory related to processes of subjectification and subjection, affectivity, and digital mediation in the present political-economic context. In these ways (supplemented also by my own immersion in the media, communities, and vectors of OEH), I hope to participate in research that does not seek to represent an online “group” or “subculture,” but produces concepts by which we might describe how – and more politically, why – the assemblage of OEH affects and transforms subjectivity.

Finally, by way of a practical overview, Chapter 2 begins with a vignette that introduces several of the components of OEH, as they relate to the scale of *producers* – hypnotists, creators, moderators, community developers and educators. By developing a diagram of this assemblage, I further theorize the functions and constitution of OEH, situating its components according to their respective domains, and showing how these interrelate and affect accordingly. Next, by following the paths of particular components of OEH (the shares and mentions of a collection of audio files) across the online infrastructures in which they emerge, I demonstrate – by way of a second diagram – how other assemblages infringe on that of OEH, modulating and shaping it, and conditioning the wide range of (often contradictory) experiences concerning its affects. Chapter 3, by further analyzing my engagements with Ryan, reintroduces the assemblage as it relates to *hypnotic subjects* – its committed users, consumers, enthusiasts, critics, and addicts who have all, in varying ways, assembled with OEH. By developing a third and final diagram, I move through the processes of subjectification and subjection that circulate within the (diagrammed) assemblage of subjectivity, as it is emplaced within the assemblage of assemblages described in Chapter 2. I show how, by way of ethnography, assembling with OEH opens a potential for transformations in the subjectivity of both *producers* and *hypnotic subjects*. Next, alongside a theoretical framing of desubjectification, I take up the experiences of other hypnotic subjects in order to plot out the potential for not only exploitative forms of subjection, but also possible, emancipatory experiences of desubjectification. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I offer my own reflections and concluding remarks.

31 Punch, Keith F. *Introduction to Social Research*, 100-101

32 Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973, 1-30

2 ASSEMBLING ONLINE EROTIC HYPNOSIS

2.1 Picking Up the Trail of an Audio File: A Vignette of an Ethnographic Interview

There was a hesitancy in her voice. Up until this point, Gabriele³³ had discussed even the most vulnerable, potentially awkward topics with enthusiasm. Now, nearing the end of a breathless two-hour Skype interview, we finally opened onto a theme which proved troublesome, inciting Gabriele's request for anonymity. If she was to detail examples of "bad actors" in the world of online erotic hypnosis, as I had asked, she wanted reassurance that what was shared would not further embroil her in potentially litigious conflict. I agreed; up until that point I had primarily heard from and observed OEH users who were not directly involved in the *production* side of things – as hypnotists, content creators, platform designers or moderators. However, Gabriele is a trained (erotic) hypnotist and for a time oversaw, as a moderator, the most well-known and widely utilized forum dedicated to OEH – the subreddit r/EroticHypnosis (a subreddit is a privately moderated forum hosted on the website Reddit, whereby people agglomerate around various hobbies, affiliations, interests), which boasts a membership of over 95,000 users. Gabriele explained that, during her time overseeing r/EroticHypnosis, she observed a troubling demographic shift away from a dedicated, "community" operation and toward a chaotic (and in her estimation, unsafe) mass of people, wherein everyone from casual "users" (people who consume OEH media or solicit hypnosis, but are not knowledgeable or contributing members of a larger hypno-oriented network) to "bad actors" (people who do not maintain standards of consent and accountability, attempting to use their content for financially exploitative practices):

"Reddit is its own area, where 50% of people are male subs³⁴ who are listening to files and they're like, 'I can't have hands free orgasms.' And the other 50% of people are either women selling their content, or *people who are not at all connected with the reality of what hypnosis is*. It's very much occupying this small corner of like, listening to files... And that's kind of their experience of it... *I think that's actually probably how a lot people come to know it...* But the people on the r/EroticHypnosis subreddit are just not the people that I know, that are actually engaged in the community. You know, it's 70%- 80% newbies, and then like, some tops,³⁵ and then maybe a couple people who know what they're doing, who only occasionally go on."

It was in this online (Reddit) context that Gabriele encountered firsthand the "true colors" of one particular "bad actor:" a professional male hypnotist (or "tist," as they are frequently called in OEH) who goes by several online pseudonyms, which I will anonymize as "GAN" on Gabriele's behalf, given that GAN has already threatened litigation against her (and several others – more on this later). Throughout

33 "Gabriele" is a pseudonym employed to anonymize the participant's identity by their request, due to the sensitive and potentially litigious nature of the information they elaborate. – *Fieldwork 3*

34 In OEH contexts "tist" (short for hypnotist) and "sub" (derived from "subject" and "subdominant") are terms used to denote the hierarchical positions constituted by erotic hypnosis: the tist, who typically commands a dominating position, and the sub, who typically occupies a receiving, subdominant position. – *Fieldwork 1, 7*

35 "Top" is a term used by insiders to signify the "higher" position of the erotic hypnotist: one who, in a relationship that echoes not only the hypnotist/subject dynamic constituted by hypnotherapy but also the power-play of BDSM, leverages a "dominating" position over an other – the "bottom." These terms overlap with the aforementioned "tist/sub" dyad, often used interchangeably (although, users who are more familiar with BDSM or kink contexts will generally favor the language of "top/bottom." – *Fieldwork 4*

2019, a scandal grew around GAN's actions and media productions – hypnotic audio files Gabriele characterized as “dark stuff,” but of a “very high quality... he knows what he's doing with audio editing.” These types of “files” – what insiders call the various types of audio, visual, or audiovisual media that are produced specifically for erotic hypnosis – represent a specific category of OEH content, one shared and discussed widely among redditors in particular: *audio files*. Such recordings are created and often sold by hypnotists, and designed for listener “programming:” the practice of facilitating cognitive change by repetitively subjecting oneself to hypnosis. In the case of GAN's work (as it is with many others), such programming is mediated by the implanting of certain “triggers:” words, phrases, objects, or events³⁶ used to induce a trance-like state and deepen it, to illicit temporary amnesia, arousal, bodily movement or emotion, to “trigger” a mood, thought pattern, belief, or behavior, or to enact an erotic fantasy. Often, professional erotic hypnotists will describe or advertise the triggers they work with, creating propriety linguistic and symbolic systems which promise to habituate their users to a particular hypnotic practice, condition them by a host of different things, and allow them to become more rapidly and deeply entranced over time – and to greater effect. GAN's files also verbally lead listeners through visualizations, in conjunction with post-produced effects: the addition of droning musical tones, soundscapes, or beats; clicks or chirps serving as auditory queues within the dramaturgy of the hypnotic performance; ASMR;³⁷ or the layering and panning of all of these combined with fine-tuned equalization, modulation, and distortion. The types of alterations such media presume to induce range from cognitive and behavioral to physiological and lifestyle changes; for example, “bimbofication” files promise hyperfeminization, intelligence reduction, increased libido, and heightened sexual gratification³⁸ – factors which combine to elicit corresponding changes in bodily comportment, from the restyling of hair, makeup, or wardrobe to breast or buttock augmentations. While Gabriele does switch to the hypnotist side occasionally, she herself engages with bimbofication as a “sub,” and attests to experiencing and performing several of these changes as part of a robust erotic hypnosis practice – one in which GAN's work had previously played a part: “for me personally, before I knew about any of this, he and I were like on decent terms and I enjoyed his content.” However, thanks to Gabriele's role as a moderator, a “big post” published on the subreddit condemning GAN for exploitative, harmful behavior came to their attention. GAN, knowing Gabriele to be one of the subreddit's oversights, wasted no time in making contact:

“He messaged me and said, ‘Not that I would do this, but this could get you into a lot of legal trouble if you allow this post to stay.’ Like, my dude, you have just shown me your true colors. And this is a constant pattern... if he's threatened he's always like, ‘I have friends who have lawyers who could really make your life miserable.’ This is his deal.”

I was intrigued by Gabriele's descriptions of GAN and his work; her allusions to his exploitative, “threatening,” and “not super kosher” practices clashed with her insistence that “he's not doing something absolutely, egregiously, rape-y bad,” not to mention her admiration for the quality of his content. But what

36 A triggering object could range, using GAN's productions as an example, from a feather to a ticking clock; an event could be noticing or touching one's breasts or lips (as it is with GAN's bimbofication content – more on this further on). And phrases or words can range from common (such as “deep sleep”) to proprietary (as it is with many professional erotic hypnotists, who often list their trigger words and phrases as a promotional example of their work). – *Fieldwork 3*

37 ASMR stands for “autonomic sensory meridian response,” a proliferating style of audio (and audiovisual) media which typically uses the highly compressed, high-frequency sound of a whispered voice to lull the listener into a relaxing, tingling, euphoric, or sedative experience.

38 Sleepinggirl, whose participation in the next chapter, attests to the efficacy of such media in facilitating these effects: for them, the most acute change involved progressing from “gray-asexual” to heterosexual. – *Fieldwork 4*

was GAN actually doing, and what triggered the scandal that had led to his expulsion from several platforms, including r/EroticHypnosis? Later that evening, having ended the interview on a more cheerful note, Gabriele sent me a follow-up email with a link to a post on FetLife (a group-based, kink-oriented web platform)³⁹ from “a prominent creator” who – thanks to their work compiling and cross-examining the many allegations against GAN – gave a lengthy account of GAN’s behaviors and practices. It was this very post that had been shared laterally on r/EroticHypnosis (initially as a link, then subsequently copied and pasted in the comments); the subreddit post still remains, along with an expansive, tangled web of vitriolic comments, indicating Gabriele’s non-acquiescence to GAN’s demands for its removal. Eager to follow the trail of this link, and the controversy surrounding GAN more broadly, I embarked the following day on an investigation that proceeded from the Skype interview to FetLife, Reddit, Discord (a site hosting private, invite-only group servers for text-based and live audio or audiovisual correspondence), Patreon (a subscription-based membership platform for content creators), and Soundgasm (a small, BETA audio-hosting site); throughout that netnography and other subsequent engagements, these sites and infrastructures appear as influential components of OEH itself, facilitating and shaping communities, events, sessions, dissemination, distribution, education, promotion. In general, Reddit serves as a catch-all for content sharing and promotion, FetLife serves as an insular node of communication and organization for those interested in erotic hypnosis, Discord functions as a site for targeted self-organization and group activities, Patreon hosts content and facilitates monetization, and a multitude of small “homegrown” sites (such as Soundgasm) operate between the main tributaries of distribution and dissemination, often illegally or quasi-legally generating access-points for paywalled content; digital objects (such as a file) and information (links, shares, tips, warnings) thus traverse across these platforms, often from hosting or distribution sites and into smaller group-based platforms, then out from these into the larger forums and sites (while this flow can be reversed or modulated, this models the way in which GAN’s content moved throughout the OEH online world). And in the case of GAN, while forums and groups often foster systems of care, safety, and support, they also appear as sites of conflict, bullying, coercion, exploitation, and exclusion. Gabriele’s characterization of subreddit and the more publicly accessible OEH sites is therefore apt: a “wild west” wherein close-knit, dedicated communities offer inclusion and affirmation for otherwise marginal forms of sexuality, while “bad actors” prey on “newbies” for financial profit or coerce vulnerable newcomers into self-interested hypnosis sessions (with varying degrees of consent), and casual users and creators lurk with more consumeristic, or “transactional” intentions.

2.1.1 Mapping the Assemblage of Erotic Hypnosis

The vignette with Gabriele serves to introduce several components of the OEH assemblage (such as files, hypnotic practices, hypnotists), which will be picked up again and explored in more detail in this chapter’s second vignette. Together, they give an account of an ethnographic journey that commences with a semi-structured interview, passes through several communities and platforms, and culminates in a database of pirated audio files. The path follows a collection of audio recordings (and the controversy attached to it) around these networks, encountering its users, victims, advocates, collaborators, and ultimately, its author

39 FetLife is a (free) membership-based website that serves as a social hub for people who identify as “kink:” a sexuality attuned to less conventional activities and interests, those involving explorative, experimental fantasies and practices (being erotically hypnotized, either on or off-line, certainly falls within its purview). – “FetLife Is the Social Network for the BDSM, Fetish & Kinky Community.” FetLife. Accessed August 15, 2021. <https://fetlife.com/>.

– all of whom were, for better or worse, affected by its content and distribution. Additionally, the second vignette deals with OEH-related sites and infrastructures, as well as the objective and discursive components therein – all of which, I argue, constitute OEH and make it “work.” This work – affecting, transforming subjectivity – engenders a continuum of affirmative and exploitative concepts and practices; even specific digital objects (such as the audio files discussed above) stretch across this continuum, as suggested by Gabriele’s own conflicting opinions of GAN’s work – powerful, “high quality” productions she “enjoyed” personally, that are also “very much not within the realm of what you would think of as consensual or informed play.”⁴⁰ The notion of “community” – its development, protection, preservation, conflicts – features heavily in Gabriele’s intuitions about how such polar experiences may subsist together: the presence or absence of community, depending on its values and structure, modulates the affects of OEH. For instance, Gabriele herself eventually abdicated the “subreddit moderator” position and, in turn, redirected her time and resources into developing a smaller Discord server (which is an individual group-chatting or event-based network designed and controlled by private users seeking an online “home” for various social groups, such as those agglomerated around OEH interests – or more traditionally, gaming);⁴¹ this group, significantly, retained the involvement of certain “pillars” (people who maintain a long-term, well-informed commitment to erotic hypnosis) who had since abandoned the subreddit, and thus strengthened the possibility for a safe, balanced experience of OEH for newcomers, according to Gabriele.

Thus, this chapter not only engages the virtual potential of OEH media, but also that of other elements in the assemblage (such as community-hosting platforms), demonstrating how these interfere and cohere together. *Diagramming* this assemblage, within which various actors, sites, practices, concepts, and objects emerge, allows not only for a chance to observe its affective components, but also a comprehensive understanding of how these give shape to OEH as a whole; further, proceeding from the vignettes, this chapter diagrams the assemblage as it emerges on the “scale” of what I will term *producers*: hypnotists, content creators, community moderators, educators, and platform designers, such as Gabriele and GAN.⁴² By reckoning with this particular scale of the assemblage, which accounts for material, subjective, and symbolic regimes, I draw together dualities which are (classically) presumed to be ontologically divided (digital/physical, matter/discourse, inside/outside), in a network that – while distinguishing these – *articulates them together*. In this way, individuated components are analyzed but not segregated by transcendent categories, which advances an empirical understanding of how disparate things – such as fictional imaginaries, audio files, corporate entities, and psychoactive drugs – come together and affect in the assemblage. Hypno-users or subs are not the only people embedded with, and subjected to, these affects; on the contrary (as is shown below in the cases of Gabriele and HexLatex), observing creators and hypnotists themselves offers another, broader view of how subjectivity is produced in OEH. I demonstrate in this chapter that, by investigating the assemblage according to the scale of producers, the interferences of other, larger assemblages may be duly observed – having a profound effect on the processes of subjectification that are theorized in Chapter 3. Thus, following the second vignette, this chapter offers another diagram, one that maps the imbrication of other assemblages (such as capital, kink, BDSM, internet) with OEH, and analyzes the instances in which one assemblage overlaps with another. This adds

40 *Fieldwork 3*

41 A Discord “server” is a group’s private communication and event platform, which is usually structured according to several “channels,” each designated for a particular purpose or subdivision of the server’s membership. – *Fieldwork 4, 6*

42 Verbuč David. *DIY House Shows and Music Venues in the US: Ethnographic Explorations of Place and Community*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022. 175-178

complexity, demonstrating how both affirmative and exploitative practices or networks may infringe on one another or order disparate experiences of subjectification. Therefore I argue that, while the affectivity of particular components in OEH functions to transform subjectivity (for example, an audio hypnosis file from GAN), the ways in which these may themselves be taken as assemblages or as parts of other assemblages is paramount to understanding the variation of OEH's affects and transformations (GAN's monetized files exist as a part of the assemblages of, for instance, capital and the internet, conditioning their modes of production and distribution, as well as the intents of those involved in their creation).

2.1.2 Diagramming Online Erotic Hypnosis

As this subchapter proposes a diagram of the assemblage of OEH, it therefore must be asked, what is a diagram? What purpose does it serve? As an abstraction, how does it relate to the real? There are many methods and concepts pertaining to the diagram – from schematics of wiring circuits to visualizations of social spheres – all imbued with their own practical and epistemological approaches; thus crafting a diagram is not a neutral endeavor. Ushering in a structuralist mode of representation would be erroneous, to say the least, when theorizing in a more post-structural register (i.e., assemblage theory); but there are, again, manifold notions of the diagram, and Deleuze and Guattari (both separately and conjunctively) elaborate one that pertains to the assemblage, which is “neither an infrastructure that is determining in the last instance nor a transcendental Idea that is determining in the supreme instance.”⁴³ Instead, the diagram of the assemblage “plays a *piloting* role. The diagrammatic... does not function to represent, even something real, but rather *constructs a real* that is yet to come, a new type of reality.”⁴⁴ Thus according to Deleuze and Guattari, a diagram of the assemblage is productive – it “pilots” and “constructs,” which are *pragmatic functions*. In piloting, it functions as a framework for action; in this case, a trajectory by which this chapter moves through the assemblage of OEH. As for constructing, a diagram presents one perspective out of many, shaping reality for its observers by skewing the viewpoint toward a given scale or event (in this case, that of producers in OEH). Simon O’Sullivan enumerates this functionality, positing that diagrams are to be “drawn for particular kinds of purposes (not a tracing—reliant on a predetermined given—but a map that is always open to revision),” and they may be drawn by asking, “What diagram do I need here to get me out of this impasse?”⁴⁵ Therefore, the diagram I “need” gets me out of one primary impasse: the problem of visualizing the proximity of disparate things that, by their very entanglement, are key in understanding how OEH transforms subjectivity. It does not presume to substantiate or signify a thing in itself, but rather drops forms, substances, contents, and expressions (which will be described in the following section) onto a plane together and assembles a partial picture, a “speculative” one as O’Sullivan would have it.⁴⁶ Thus, the following diagram serves to draw a speculative map and pilot this chapter through it by “picturing”⁴⁷ the emplacement of affective components in a novel configuration – according to OEH:

43 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 142

44 *Ibid.*, emphasis added

45 Burrows, David, and Simon O’Sullivan. *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. 20

46 *Ibid.*, 21

47 *Ibid.*, 16

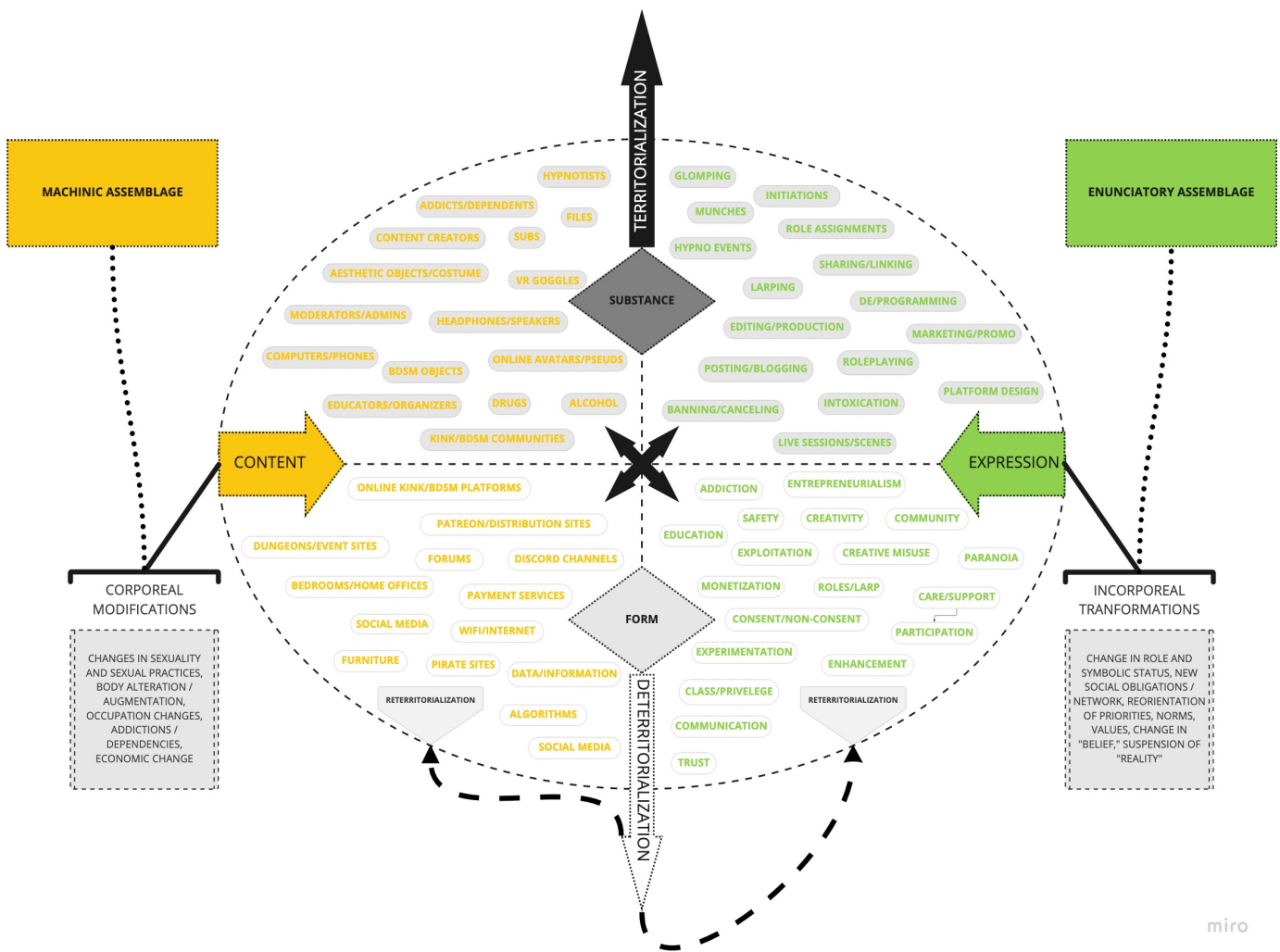


Figure 1: The Double Articulation of the OEH Assemblage

In the assemblage (reviewing the concept as it was introduced in the first chapter), various parts tangle together in a novel, affective network – diagrammed with *Figure 1*.⁴⁸ This analytic foregoes interpreting or representing a culture (or sub-culture) in order to immerse within the OEH assemblage and illicit an emplaced, emic understanding of its affects and transformative potential. Recall that its components are not only kinds of objects or bodies or infrastructures, but also elements more traditionally relegated to “cultural” or “symbolic” realms – practices, themes, concepts, events, language, values, roles. This gestures toward what I describe below as a *double articulation*, the way in which an assemblage converges upon both these realms – from material/objective, to symbolic/subjective. Thus, diagramming the OEH assemblage brings to the fore the complex intra-actions⁴⁹ within, those interferences and

48 This diagram is by no means a fully elaborated configuration of the dynamics at play in assemblage theory, nor does it – as it relates to OEH – give a full account of the components therein. Rather, it stands to 1, situate components in relation as parts of a whole and 2, align these according to a theoretical analytic as it concerns the modes of their existence within the assemblage (i.e., as formal content and expressions, or substantive content and expressions, and to imply a scalar/transversal movement among all of these situations). Further, the axis upon which de/re/territorialization is inscribed is not a fixed vector – rather, such processes should be conceived of as potentially occurring in all directions and throughout the entire diagram.

processes which are not proprietary to one realm or another, but which rather knot together what is material and discursive, physical and digital, real and fictional.

In *Figure 1*, there are a host of points, lines, fields, and words which all require explanation, beginning with the yellow and green arrows. These arrows indicate a spectrum upon which components emerge, between the planes of “content” and “expression,” while each of these in turn take on varying dimensions according to the levels of “form” and “substance.” First, the term “content” does not describe *matter* in its elementary form, but rather “formed matters,” those things which are actualized or individuated (like a human hypnotist, a set of VR goggles, digital objects,⁵⁰ or WiFi systems and computer hardware). Secondly, the term “expression” does not reduce to pure immateriality, but is used to denote “functional structures,” those things which afford and condition (like the ordering of relations around “bimbofication,” or a creative practice of recording audio).⁵¹ Second, both contents and expressions range between “form” and “substance;” for instance, a Discord server functions as a *form* of content, the individual people participating (and the files they share) make up the *substance* of content, the ethos of a safe (kink) community serve as a *form* of expression therein, and role-playing or LARPing⁵² emerge as the Discord server’s *substance* of expression. Third, content and expression indicate the two aforementioned articulations of the assemblage: the “machinic” (the assemblage of formal and substantive content, on the left side of *Figure 1*) and “enunciatory” (the assemblage of formal and substantive expressions, on the right). On each of these planes, components (like those mentioned above) are circulated and brought together by *difference*; both the *machinic* and *enunciatory* levels of the assemblage function by this heterogeneity, in that formal and substantive elements come into contact with others, forming up and folding together, and undergoing processes of mutual transformation.⁵³ Lastly, in *Figure 1*, the arrow marked *territorialization* indicates the degree of homogenization or organization given to components or assemblages, and *deterritorialization* points to the disorganization of these, into liquidity or entropy; likewise, *reterritorialization* denotes a reformulation or reconfiguration out of this state of flux and into another function or emplacement; all of these will be placed into context and concretized further below.⁵⁴ While Deleuze and Guattari reserve this terminology for describing the (intra)activity of substances –

49 The “intra-action” neologism is used here to gesture back to Chapter 1’s discussion on the agency of components within the assemblage. Having been coined by Karen Barad, the term problematizes an uncritical repetition of “interaction,” which implies the preexistence and predetermined separability of those things that are “acting” on one another. Rather, intra-action “signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies... [and] recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action.” (33) In such an ontology, humans (for instance) do not relate to their surroundings (and vice-versa), but rather intra-act: they co-constitute one another by way of their entanglement, emerging together in what (on one scale) might be called an *assemblage* of the environment. It is in this register that it is used here and elsewhere, to denote the way in which causality in the assemblage does not flow unilinearly, and therefore cannot be traced to a given, preformed agency. – Barad, Karen Michelle. *Meeting the Universe Halfway Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

50 A practical, working rubric for classifying the objective components of an assemblage may be found in the writings of Yuk Hui, who differentiates between *natural*, *technical* and *digital* objects, the latter of which denote “objects on the Web, such as YouTube videos, Facebook profiles, Flickr images, and so forth, that are composed of data and formalized by schemes or ontologies that one can generalize as metadata.” In this way, their objectification is not merely consigned to electric traces or blocks of binary code, but is also contingent on their “metadata” or form (in how digital objects appear as, for instance, downloadable audiovisual hypnosis files). – Hui, Yuk. “What Is a Digital Object?” *Metaphilosophy* 43, no. 4 (2012): 380–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9973.2012.01761.x>, 380

51 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 43

52 “LARP” stands for “live action role playing game,” wherein (IRL) participants design and don costumes, simulate an environment or scene or fantasy, and perform characters.

53 Buchanan, Ian, *Assemblage Theory and Method*, 33

54 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 40-41

employing others (coding, decoding, overcoding) to describe that of forms – I opt for the language of de/re/territorialization in an effort to simplify the jargon.⁵⁵

But what do all of these levels and dimensions look like in OEH, and how might *Figure 1* help pilot through them? Consider, for instance, a cluster of seemingly discrete components: GAN's audio files, internet sites, a human listener, headphones, a bed, a bedroom – all content, ranging from the more “formal” to the more “substantive.” Now, several of GAN's programming audio clips are demarcated “for night listening and night orgasm,”⁵⁶ in which a person, typically by the use of headphones, falls asleep to the voiceover of a hypnotist on a loop. This practice is predicated on the scientifically evidenced understanding that the ear, in sleep, still receives and transmits information: while the words of an audio file may not be recalled by the listener, they are nonetheless processed and *reacted to* by the brain, even up to the point of decision, inciting the neurological preparation for a motor response; they thus affect, impinging on the hearer and opening a new capacity for action, even if no action is physically carried out in sleep.⁵⁷ Therefore, in this event all the aforementioned components are brought together in relation – the listener, the file, the headphones, the bed, the bedroom – as a machinic assemblage (which is a temporary instantiation – or territory – within a broader assemblage, that of OEH). The affordances of the formal content situate the listener – the comfort of the bed relaxes the body, the privacy of the bedroom affords the opportunity for “night listening and night orgasm.” The intensities of the substantial content affect and arouse – the sound waves of the headphones interfere with the neurology and chemistry of a sleeping body, the audio file modulates that interference by dictating commands and injunctions. First, a process of *unmaking* occurs: the bed is no longer a sleeping device, the bedroom is no longer a sanctuary of silence, the listener is no longer a mere body at rest, the headphones are no longer calming sleep aids, and the audio recording is no longer just a “file” – bytes of downloadable digital information, physical vibrations mediated by the headphones. Next, as the event unfolds, so does the process of *remaking* these components: the bed becomes a virtual hypnotist's couch, the bedroom becomes an overnight kink space,⁵⁸ the body of the person becomes an orgasmic object, the headphones become a sexual device, and the file loops to become a pattern of electrochemical signals in the brain, an erotic programming technology. What is *made* is a new assemblage of machines: the interferences of these components emerging together, unmaking and remaking by their affects, function to organize a novel whole – the overnight programming-machine. These three movements correspond to those indicated by the black and white lines and arrows on the diagram: the processes of deterritorialization (the “unmaking”), reterritorialization (the “remaking”), and territorialization (the “making”).

Next, on the level of expression, the aforementioned “functional structures” are also articulated with the assemblage, and may be duly observed. Looking once more at the above example of hypnotic programming, an audio file of GAN's – named “Feather,” one of those which incited the scandal mentioned in the vignette – was marketed on his distribution site for its “heavy themes of dependence,

55 This follows the tactic employed by David Verbuč, in his work *DIY House Shows and Music Venues in the US* (2021), in which “to avoid confusion, I rather use terms territorialization and deterritorialization in this book for all levels of social assemblages.” – Verbuč David. *DIY House Shows and Music Venues in the US*: 201 (fn 16)

56 *Fieldwork 3*

57 Andriillon, Thomas, Andreas Trier Poulsen, Lars Kai Hansen, Damien Léger, and Sid Kouider. “Neural Markers of Responsiveness to the Environment in Human Sleep.” *Journal of Neuroscience*. Society for Neuroscience, June 15, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0902-16.2016>.

58 All the variations of “hypnodom,” “hypno-domme,” or “dom,” are routinely used to denote this role. – *Fieldwork 1, 2, 7*

obedience, and mind control.”⁵⁹ The audio itself contains instances of a collaborating vocal performer, Mistress Magenta (a professional dominatrix and hypnotist), saying, “I like you forgetting things that aren’t me... you don’t need those other women in your life... you don’t need to remember their names.”⁶⁰ The discursive and cultural elements at play extend, however, beyond the file’s voiceover or its marketing, and signal a wider enunciatory assemblage, teeming with a host of symbols and practices; for instance, Mistress Magenta’s Twitter bio opens with the injunction, “Worship, serve, & obey” and includes an additional online handle and pseudonym, “Goddess_Wolf,” the imagery of which connotes a specific subset of OEH discourse – designated by insiders as “goddess worship,” belonging to the realm of “femdom” (submission to a female-dominant person).⁶¹ Femdom is a subset of erotic hypnosis characterized by the discourse and thematization of humiliation, emasculation, sadomasochism, and cultic adoration – which are bolstered by acts of devotion (or goddess worship), often via financial expenditure. Significantly, the Goddess_Wolf handle is listed in the Twitter bio alongside several links to external websites wherein her secondary profile is active: links to OnlyFans,⁶² as well as CashApp, PayPal, Venmo. The latter three websites are all web-based, third-party, person-to-person payment services (Venmo and CashApp being specifically designed for quick and easy monetary exchanges via mobile devices). In the assemblage of OEH, these function as *formal content* whereby the monetization of digital objects and erotic services occurs, transactional relations are negotiated, and *expressive functions* – like “devotion” or financial domination – are realized. These financial, infrastructural sites, affect both the “producers” and “subjects” of OEH by interpolating the wider assemblages of capital and the internet (which will be discussed in this chapter’s final section) into erotic hypnosis, mediating the transformation of a “hypnodom” (a hypnotist-dominatrix, such as Mistress Magenta) into a *financial* dominatrix, and her hypnotic subjects into *financial* slaves; such sites, therefore, provide a service by which acts of payment might be reterritorialized as symbolical gestures of submission.

All of these symbolic, discursive, or cultural elements, along with the social structures they implicate, come into contact in the enunciatory assemblage: from the more *formal* expressions, like the themes of “humiliation” or “devotion,” to the more *substantive* expressions, like online payments as acts of adoration or the strategic (and as several informants attest to, even “artful”) compositions of audio or audiovisual files.⁶³ All of these components are articulated *with* the *content* level, in that the machinic assemblage (of the previous example) emerges alongside them: the goddess’s injunctions enunciated within the audio file, the emasculation and humiliation enacted by the listener’s devoted submission, the process of programming mediated by the headphones. Thus, by the emergence of these expressive components, the hypnotic subject is changed *incorporeally* – what is termed in *A Thousand Plateaus* as “incorporeal transformations” – in that a new relation is enacted in which the *symbolic* status of the listener is disrupted and overwritten, and emplaced within new networks of social obligations; further, by the double articulation of the OEH assemblage (the intermingling of the machinic with the enunciatory levels described above), the hypnotic subject is also affected physiologically, or *corporeally* – whether by arousal or orgasm, an entranced or altered state, or more long-lasting effects (like the withdrawal

59 *Fieldwork 3*

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Fieldwork 1*

62 OnlyFans is an online payed subscription platform which provides access to (often pornographic or erotic) audiovisual content created by private individuals. – “Onlyfans.” *OnlyFans*. Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://onlyfans.com/>.

63 *Fieldwork 1, 4, 7*

symptoms described by an informant when discussing the changes brought on by the programming of “addiction” hypnosis, discussed further in Chapter 3)⁶⁴

Both of these types of transformations or modulations (enumerated in *Figure 1*) are mediated on their respective levels, yet also function together, reinforcing one another, via the double articulation of OEH. In the case study above, what takes place beforehand (the purchasing and downloading of a file), and what takes place after (the erotic-hypnotic use of that file), are what Deleuze and Guattari call “actions-passions affecting bodies:” the assembling together of components, by which “bodies” (in a more-than-human sense, i.e., those of the listening human, the bed, the bedroom, and all) are affected and affecting, being unmade and remade together, *corporeally*.⁶⁵ However, the transformation of the listener into a “feather boy” (one who is sexually devoted to and dependent on the erotic hypnotists light, “tickling” locution – as stipulated by the audio file’s name, description, and dramaturgy), is *expressed* in the injunctions of the hypnotists and the responses of the subjects. Once unmade and remade *symbolically*, the “feather boy” is implicated in an entire network of social, aesthetic relations and obligations (and is thus, incorporeally, transformed). To demonstrate how this works, I turn momentarily to my netnography of a popular website for OEH (the pornographic platform *IWantClips*) where several popular “goddess” hypnotists routinely distribute their productions, which are sold as single clips or accessible via subscription.

“Princess Miki” is one of these, whose erotic hypnosis, similar to that within GAN’s work, enacts a fantasy of cultic goddess-devotion. On a webpage hosting one of her files, called “Erotic Paralysis: Caught in My Web,” a preview video plays automatically on loop: Princess Miki appears in an assortment of outfits and positions, moving her body and gesticulating while staring, fixedly, into the camera. The scenes transition rapidly, every 1-3 seconds, all with Miki in the center of the frame (often distorted with double exposure, mirroring, shadows and “glitches,” and kaleidoscopic effects). There is a constant flow of hypnotic, pulsing VFX – a spiderweb-like 3D animation that radiates from the middle of the screen to the periphery, pulling in the viewer to its central figure, Miki. Words and phrases overlay the scenes in a minimalistic, all-caps font. They blend or merge with the background, with varying degrees of opacity, or “strobe” so rapidly that the viewer may only consciously pinpoint one or two out of its sequence at any given time: “THIS IS REAL,” “LET THE VENOM SINK IN,” “STUCK,” “BOUND,” “THE WEB IS YOUR HOME,” “CLOSER,” “STROKE,” “PUMP,” “COME CLOSER,” “WORSHIP,” “OBEY,” “SEDUCED.” A smooth and sensuous voiceover loops, layered with a repetitive drum beat; ascendent melodies and chord progressions hum, substantially lower than the voiceover in the mix. Cascading over this soundscape, multiple layers of ASMR whispers dictate commands or statements – barely-audible repetitions of words and injunctions, only perceptible when straining to hear it. These are hard panned between left and right, and become enmeshed to the point that the voiceovers blend into a wash of affirmative, pejorative, humiliating, encouraging, and barely discernible utterances: “You’re sick.” “You’re stuck.” “Come deeper for me.” “You feel so good.” “You’re becoming sedated.” “This feels so good.” “Sink deep.” Ultimately, one stream of injunctions emerges triumphant from this din – those of Miki, saying: “You are bound. Trapped. Paralyzed. And you can’t do anything but watch me... right? You’re too

64 Buchanan argues that such changes in symbolic status, “should be understood as incorporeal transformations – they transform us but not in the manner of one body colliding with another. It goes much deeper than that. When someone says ‘I love you’ the transformation it brings about in you, the recipient, applies to your body, ‘but it is itself incorporeal, internal to enunciation’.” – Buchanan, Ian, *Assemblage Theory and Method*, 68

65 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 80-81

sedated by the pleasure to want to do anything else, anyway...” The purpose behind producing this content (as the webpage overtly states) is to change Miki’s subjects into devoted “Good Boys,” an incorporeal transformation demanding a high price, evinced in its payment instructions: in the clip’s description, Miki expresses how this transaction leads to mutual fulfillment, financial on her part, erotic on the part of her devotees. For those under the “spell” of Miki’s “sweetly venomous words,” there is a straightforward requirement:

“This October, good boys will use the markup code BIRTHDAYMIKI2020 at checkout. REALLY good boys will use the markup code BIGHAPPYBIRTHDAYMIKI at checkout.” A markup code is exactly as it sounds: a chance to markup the \$11.99 price tag for the clip via the enumerated, “CODES FOR GOOD BOYS: 50% markup: MIKI50, 100% markup: MIKI100, 200% markup: MIKI200, 500% markup: MIKISGOODBOY, 1000% markup for the truly devoted: ILOVEYOUMIKI.”⁶⁶

This is a common way in which content creators perform and deploy language – in both hypnosis media and in broader representations of their work – to impose a potent fiction or fantasy in which the symbolic statuses of devotees implicate them within a system of social or financial obligations that, in turn, further invest the users in such platforms, media, or the fictional imaginaries themselves: both “Good Boys” (for Miki) and “Feather Boys” (for GAN) are compelled to either subscribe or buy more content, and immerse themselves deeper in the corresponding Discord servers (as is the case with GAN, whose Patreon subscription includes membership in a private Discord), communities on Twitter (like with Mistress Magenta, as discussed previously), or on personal websites (as it is for Miki, whose own website invites email subscriptions, one-on-one webcam bookings, or private, payed-by-minute correspondence via text). Thus, the enunciatory assemblage of OEH functions to deploy language, signs, concepts, and cultural practices to incorporeally transform human actors not only by the verbal or textual mediation of hypnosis in files and live sessions, but also by marketing and promotion, social media and forum-based discourse, the creation of symbolic and fictional imaginaries, and the enactment of new or intensified relations between producers and hypnotic subjects. While this section offers a general overview of how both the machinic and enunciatory levels of OEH work to affect one’s symbolic status and physiological state (respectively), a full account of how OEH engenders longer term transformations in subjectivity yet remains to be detailed; this will be taken up in Chapter 3. For now, I will draw the diagrammatic section to a close in order to further contextualize the emergence of not only components within the OEH assemblage, but of the OEH assemblage as one among many others.

2.3 Moving Through the OEH Assemblage – A Netnographic Vignette

Gabriele’s link had served as a portal to more than just a simple FetLife post – it was a window into the wider network in which OEH exists, the ways in which other assemblages imbricate with OEH – for better or worse. I spent three long evenings following the mentions and shares of GAN’s controversial body of audio productions across several sites – *FetLife*, *Discord*, *Tumblr*, *Patreon*, *8Kun*, *Soundgasm* – ending up in a far-flung beta site hosting an OEH enthusiast’s private cache of pirated hypno audio clips, only accessible thanks to an invitation link I found buried in an archived thread on the “Hypnochan” page on 8Kun (a sociopolitically controversial website for privately created and moderated message boards, with

66 *Fieldwork 2*

notoriously little administrative oversight).⁶⁷ Among these were many of GAN's files, complete with descriptions and content advisories (or "CAs," which exist as components within the enunciatory level of the OEH assemblage – detailed further below). While the netnography culminated in listening to and analyzing GAN's files themselves, the winding path I took getting there proved even more eventful, and enlightening; I became increasingly struck by the vast ecology within which OEH took shape.

I started on FetLife – a social networking platform offering an online home to "BDSM, Fetish & Kinky Communities" – by completing its membership application (a process necessary for accessing the link shared by Gabriele), and encountered familiar themes of transformation, change, evolution, and experimentation; these, however, appeared in a broader milieu – not as proprietary to OEH, but emerging with other erotic practices, fantasies and networks. The notable affirmation of sexual, subjective change and fluidity throughout FetLife– from individual user profiles expressing "fluctuating/evolving" sexual orientations and "exploring" roles,⁶⁸ to entire groups dedicated to "modification" (of bodies, behaviors, genders, genitals) or "transformation" (into a variety of animals, machines, slaves, objects, mythological or fictional creatures) – appears as a key theme across FetLife; the variation in *kind* between these transformations speaks to, again, the double articulation of the assemblage – the machinic (corporeal, bodily), and the enunciatory (incorporeal, expressive). But, as my movement through this and other sites progressed, so did my understanding of other, less affirmative variations on these themes.

The post Gabriele shared (titled, "Report to the group") had been written by the founder of the self-designated "oldest and largest erotic hypnosis group on Fet," and posted onto that group's page – the "Erotic Hypnosis" group, developed and moderated by HypnoMaster_D (HMD), who was listed as a hypnotist, popularizer, and 65 year old "straight" male.⁶⁹ This was the "prominent" figure in OEH Gabriele had previously described (in the opening vignette), who had conducted a thorough investigation into the GAN controversy – evidenced by the post's lengthy, detailed, and thoughtful text, which included testimonies from several GAN's "victims," as well as GAN's own rebuttal. The dispute, in summarized form, did not implicate the content of GAN's audio productions *per se*, but rather the (intentional or unintentional) omission of advisories pertaining to its themes.⁷⁰ HMD carefully weighed the accusations against GAN's defense, cross-examined in a case study involving, "the contents and content warnings on his audio files; his general response to critics and accusers; and his being banned by several

67 Baele, Stephane J., Lewys Brace, and Travis G. Coan. "Variations on a Theme? Comparing 4chan, 8kun, and Other Chans' Far-Right '/Pol' Boards." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (2021): 65–80

68 The listed options available to users for enumerating their "sexual orientations" and "roles" (performative interests and identities, typified by the parts played in BDSM or kink relations) are profuse – 13 designations for sexual orientations, 79 for roles; the former are inclusive of both marginalized (such as "fluctuating/evolving," "intersex," "genderqueer,") and more normative orientations ("female," "male"). The list for roles was exhaustive – from those common to OEH (such as "sadosomochist," "sub," "domme") to others I had no familiarity with ("bootblack," "primal predator," "leatherboi"), in addition to more liquid categories ("exploring," "evolving"). I noted, in particular, the inclusion of "fluctuating" and "evolving" and "exploring" modes, which were expressed also in informants' accounts of their own morphing sexual orientations, identities, and interests. – *Fieldwork 3*

69 Below the group name on the "About & Rules" page were basic stats: "20,399 members, 3,863 discussions, 44,780 comments; CREATED ON April 28, 2008." It did indeed appear to be the largest and oldest group dedicated to hypnosis on FetLife. – *Ibid.*

70 HypnoMaster_D gives the history and context behind GAN's exposure, crediting another hypnotist with first breaking the news: "About a year ago, @SecretSubject, a New Zealand domme [short for dominatrix] who used to provide voices for some of _____'s recordings, went public with a warning about his files, specifically one called Feather on his Discord server. Feather included language encouraging the listener to forget the other women (or men) in their life... This message was not described up front." – *Ibid.*

conferences.”⁷¹ Given what HMD perceived as a growing “distrust” in GAN’s character (and the mounting evidence to justify it), the post concluded with the moderator confirming that he did, in fact, ban GAN from the group. While the controversy detailed in the post concerned several of GAN’s files, as well as his reportedly threatening, manipulative, and “stalking” behavior, one file in particular featured throughout the FetLife post – the audio clip titled “Feather,” discussed in the previous subchapter.

Picking up its trail, I clicked a Tumblr link in HMD’s post, and progressed to the OEH related blogosphere – wherein hypnotists and subjects share their advice, experiences, or recommend creators and content (including their own). The link brought me to “Kallies Hypno Den” (an OEH-dedicated Tumblr blog produced by Kallie, a “Trans lesbian hypnodomme [sic] and professional erotica writer”); it was here that I first encountered a detailed analysis of the audio, complete with the original timestamped transcripts, as well as copied and screenshot information from GAN’s private distribution site on Patreon. Following Feather deeper into Tumblr, I also observed erotic subjects’ blogs offering accounts of their own experiences with GAN and his work, most significantly from a “submissive” named “Mistigirl” who, according to the Tumblr bio, remains a “bimbo in training.” Both of these blogs – Kallie’s and Mistigirl’s – effused enthusiasm over erotic hypnotic practices, but took care to account for the fact that (in Kallie’s words) “Hypnosis can hurt people. It can cause negative reactions.”⁷² In the screenshots provided by Kallie, GAN’s Patreon promotion promised that the Feather file was “designed to produce automatic obedience and orgasms while you sleep,” encouraging users to listen to it “every night for a week,” but – as Kallie pointed out – made no mention of the presence of triggers meant to induce forgetfulness or disinterest in real life relationships (which the file’s voiceover characterized as “pointless” and unnecessary). While the original description for GAN’s “Feather” file did give warnings about “mindfuckery” (hypnotically altering the thought processes, beliefs, moods, or sensibilities of the user), this warning does not necessarily constitute a proper “advisory” – detailing the risks and specific triggers involved – but rather a basic enumeration of its themes. The problem, for Kallie, appeared to lie in the issue of consent; her blogpost argued that a hypnotized subject could not be expected to “resist” unwanted influences while undergoing sleep-hypnosis, or “set limits” without understanding the particularities of what hypnotic suggestions the content contained.⁷³ Mistigirl echoed this sentiment in her blog, detailing her experiences with not only Feather, but 17 of GAN’s other audio clips lacking either CA’s or detailed descriptions: “This is a large part of what caused people to get addicted to his files and wanting out, having gotten more than they bargained for. These files are *powerful*, and when you’re just goofing around and wanting to explore some hypnosis files, it isn’t what you’d expect.” However, Mistigirl also took issue with a different problem: the use of certain types of “triggers” for “conditioning” (a term synonymous and used interchangeably with *programming*, described in the previous subchapter): she shared a post in which GAN listed the “triggers I promote,” designed to make the user “constantly keenly conscious of the slave patterns,” triggering submission by common, everyday activities and objects (in his words): “counting,” “blinking,” “noticing your tits,” “noticing your own mouth.” Similarly, the Feather file presumed to enlist such everyday objects or events (“and when you see a feather you need it...”) to trigger memories,

71 Hypno-oriented conferences, or “munches” as they are known throughout OEH, are typically small-scale, in-person events centered around community building, resource sharing, education, support, and networking – the Erotic Hypnosis group has its own page designated to the promotion of these, several of which annually occur (in a handful of larger cities throughout the US and UK). – *Fieldwork 4*

72 *Fieldwork 3*

73 *Ibid.*

feelings, thought patterns, beliefs, behaviors. The prevalence of such objects and occurrences, according to Mistigirl, makes it “hard to escape [GAN’s] conditioning.” Lastly, the broader problem Mistigirl perceived was to be found in the irresponsible sharing of such files “across the net as mp3’s... put into videos and in places such as soundcloud... across different websites... unrelated to each other.”⁷⁴ Thus, while certain producers and “communities” involved in developing and safeguarding OEH-related platforms (such as Gabriele and HypnoMaster_D) make efforts to balance inclusion and safe practices, the very proliferation of OEH-related groups “across the internet” appears to, contradictorily, compromise the effort to reduce harm.

For instance, back on Reddit, members of the r/EroticHypnosis group appeared to assist users negotiate unwanted hypnotic effects; during my netnography, I discovered several posts in which users requested help “deprogramming,” seeking out potential “reset files” – hypnotic audio or audiovisual productions wherein a hypnotist, the very same who implanted the unwanted triggers, works to remove them.⁷⁵ One of these posts, wherein the user expressed that the “effects” of their OEH use “are starting to take a toll on my self esteem,” described feeling that “all my sexual desires have been warped and I am not okay with it,” and named the specific hypnotist whose work they used most frequently: “I can’t have any pleasure without thinking about her and her hypnosis files.”⁷⁶ The comment section was full of other users recommending free-access “trigger removal audio files” and links to “video to remove all hypnotic conditioning.”⁷⁷ However, while these displays of care appear to bolster safe practices by providing exit strategies, the issue is more complex. In an interview with Sleepinggirl – a well-spoken, highly-invested educator, writer, podcaster, and practitioner who switches between roles as a hypnotist and subject – they described online spaces, namely Discord and Reddit, as part of a

“virtual world where different spaces all have different rules and behavior expectations... everybody actively creates this sort of shared hallucinatory narrative... For example, if everybody's buying into it, you might see “Hey, everybody, I'm a puppy, Woof woof, Pet Pet Pet”... And nobody questions it. If somebody walked into that space and was like, “I think this is bullshit,” like, it's just not allowed. You're not supposed to do that... And you would get eviscerated.”

Sleepinggirl described how this shared hallucination, sustained by the interactions of online communities, helps to facilitate a change in “beliefs,” saying that her own “beliefs have changed to really, really, really buy into this idea that the hypnotist can change you, can control you, can alter you.” This, in turn, promotes a more suggestible and submissive state in the hypnotic subject, intensifying the affects of hypnosis and widening the possibilities of what sort of fantasies may be entertained therein. The online communities – which she characterized by using Foucault’s concept of “heterotopias”⁷⁸ – are spaces in which the discussions and testimonies which take seriously the power and influence of hypnosis (even its negative or potentially harmful aspects), but by doing so, function to make that power and influence seem

74 Soundcloud is a website hosting (typically freely accessible) mp3s, utilized primarily by musical, recording artists or podcasters, and in a more minor way, by producers of OEH content. – “Stream and Listen to Music Online for Free with SoundCloud.” SoundCloud. Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://soundcloud.com/>.

75 *Fieldwork 3*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*

78 Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” Edited by Neil Leach. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, 1997, 330–336

all the more potent, real. Thus, while users may plea for access to “reset” or “deprogramming” files or rush to aid those who describe their addictions and traumatic experiences, these may not be helpful to hypnotic subjects who are seeking an “escape,” but rather serve to redouble the notion that they are (to borrow from Miki’s aforementioned video) *caught in the web*.

However, Discord’s less publicly accessible infrastructure appears to promise a potential way around some of these dangers – thanks to the high level of administrative control (leveraged by servers’ respective moderators, administrators, and the AI “bots” designed to assist or take over these positions), and its general programability and adaptability. OEH Discord platforms, such as the popular role-playing server “HypnoNexus,” give users channels for direct, private access to human moderators for reporting harassment, unwanted solicitation, or seeking help; additionally, the server is heavily striated, with over 95 different channels (a server’s subdivided forums for communication or live chatting over voice or text), each with their own clearly demarcated codes of conduct – some for NSFW interactions and file sharing, others for role-playing and live hypnosis, others where one or a combination of the above are banned. I followed a link to Discord from Tumblr, but ended up in a deleted server – what had hosted GAN’s own, previous, group of devotees (the reasons for its deletion are unknown to me). However, after searching through the 13 other OEH-related groups I had previously joined, I picked up on the trail of the Feather file and its controversy, along with other related audio clips from GAN. In one server designated to roleplaying and educational events, a user with a femme, anime-style avatar responded to a thread on a “voice-text” channel (in which members participate in live hypnosis via audio or text), detailing their “dangerous” experiences while “under” (a term used by insiders to describe the state of being entranced or mesmerized in hypnosis): “I remember a bad tist spammed me with [GAN] when I was under and it fucked me up bad,” claiming that after receiving undesired results, they “just never wanna remember they [GAN’s files] even exist.” This echoed Mistigirl’s fears that the propagation of such media raises issues of consent and, in the worse cases, can lead to harmful experiences, but again – as it was in the “deprogramming” example from the subreddit – other members responded by suggesting and sharing reset files; thus, while the emancipatory potential of such discourse remains ambiguous, on Discord it is (more often) relegated to channels designed to place members in a small, specialized network of both producers and hypnotic subjects. However, the discussions and shares of GAN’s files were relatively limited on the Discord servers for which I had access; thus I ventured out from Discord to Patreon, where GAN still publishes his work. I was curious to see what impact, if any, the FetLife ban and widely publicized scandal had made on GAN himself.

As GAN’s Patreon account was only accessible through a paywall, I was left to analyze the information on his homepage, the details of which made his general statistics public: 479 patrons pay GAN \$6238 a month by their subscriptions, amounting to (at the time of my netnography) a salary of \$74,856 USD/yr from Patreon alone. Thus it seemed that, despite the accusations leveraged against him, the actual “impact” had been minimal – but not unfelt, as suggested by his “About” section: “Thank you for your support! This page helps me create intricate and intimate erotic soundscapes. Any themes explored here are in the context of CONSENSUAL practices...” However, without the money to invest in moving beyond the paywall, I was unable to explore how GAN was negotiating this new prioritization of consent. What I did embark on, however, was a journey backtracking through the aforementioned platforms, ending up on r/EroticHypnosis and following links from there to 8Kun, where I searched individually through every 10-day archive of the site, from the beginning of 2018 to the beginning of

2020, to find shares of Feather and other files from GAN. Finally, on the aforementioned beta⁷⁹ website called Soundgasm, I reached a private collection of GAN's work: by cross-referencing Mistigirl's list of 17 files (which she described as "dangerous"), the database yielded the search results I had hoped for: an hour long audio file by GAN bearing the name "MindMelter." I opened the file.

2.3.1 From Kink to Capital – Situating OEH with other Assemblages

While the above vignette does not elaborate a description of the contents of GAN's Soundgasm files, it serves two purposes: first, it explores several of the components on both the machinic and enunciatory sides of the assemblage (from web platforms and financial infrastructures, hypnotists and moderators, to cultural and discursive elements like inclusion, consent, and conditioning); secondly, it explores the overlapping of several other assemblages emerging with that of OEH (from the Internet, Kink and BDSM assemblages, to capital itself). This is to argue, with Manuel DeLanda, that "at all times we are dealing with assemblages of assemblages," and that in "a materialist social ontology... communities and organisations, cities and countries, are shown to be amenable to a treatment in terms of assemblages."⁸⁰ In other words, even the Internet itself may be theorized as an assemblage: it takes on *formal content* in WiFi or mobile broadband systems, and *substantive*, in the vast "internet of things;" it is *expressed formally* in datafication, and *substantively*, in online dating. On a different scale, individuated components in a given assemblage themselves comprise assemblages. Take subjectivity, for instance:

"Deleuze and Guattari... view what is called subjectivity not only as a component within a larger assemblage or set of assemblages but also as an assemblage itself... Subjectivity, in other words, changes depending on the numerous and varying forces and pressures that produce it, as well as those by which, importantly, it produces itself."⁸¹

This conceptualization is key for understanding how something like OEH affects and is affected by subjectivity; but just as there is an assemblage of "forces" and "pressures" producing it (as it relates to the double articulation of OEH), so too do the interferences of other assemblages modulate and co-constitute OEH. Thus, in such a framework, OEH emerges as *an assemblage with others, constituting further assemblages*; its functions and components are not simply organized by a double articulation of *machinic* and *enunciatory* levels inhering within, but by articulations of the same kind infringing from without (see *Figure 2*). Thus, I offer a second (albeit simplistic) diagrammatic speculation:

79 "Beta" denotes the limited or restricted publishing of a website during its development, which allows time for the fine-tuning and testing of bugs, as well as its software and script.

80 DeLanda, Manuel. *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. 5

81 Savat, David. "(Dis)Connected: Deleuze's Superject and the Internet," 425

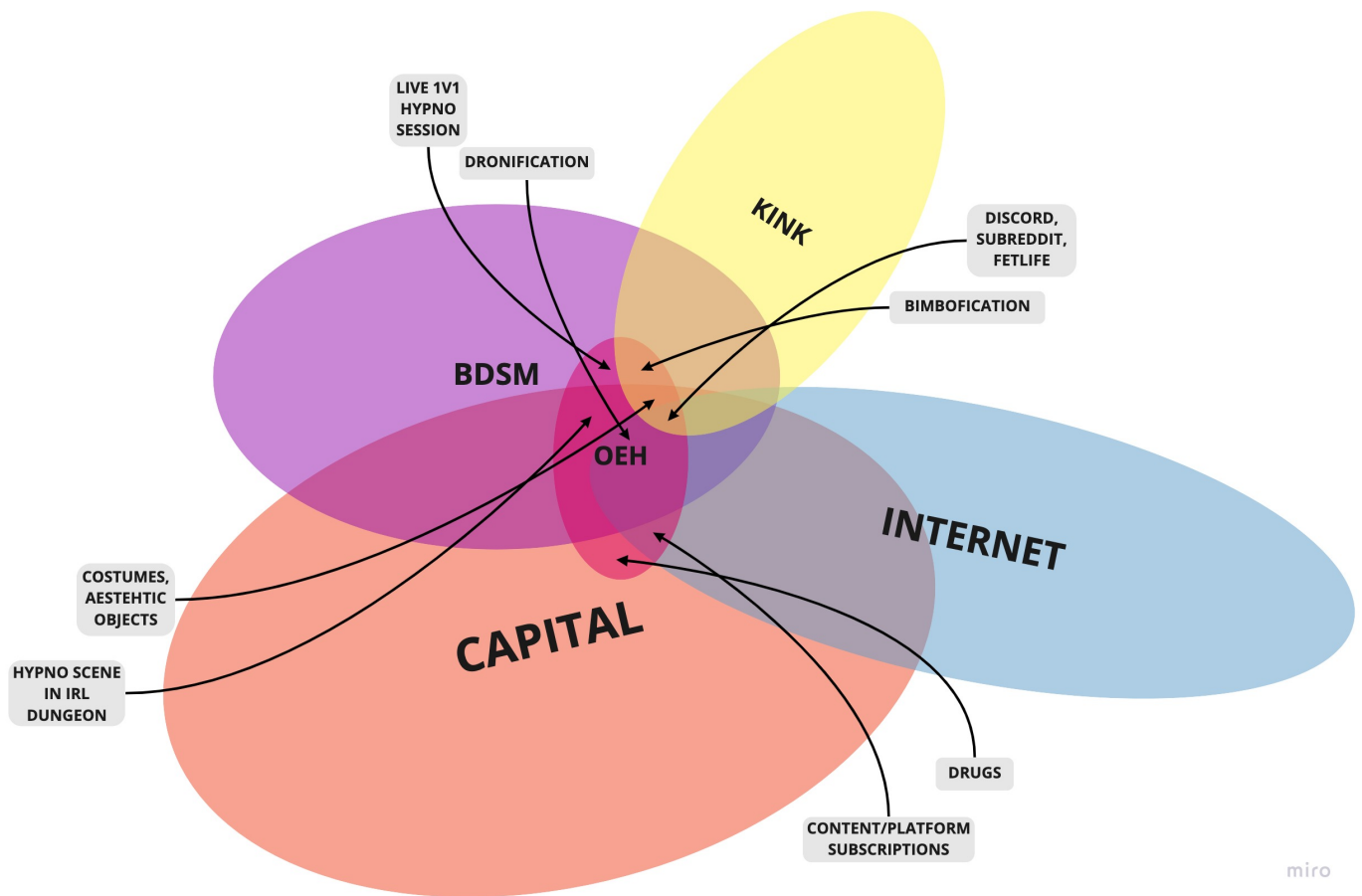


Figure 2: OEH within an Assemblage of Assemblages

In *Figure 2*, the construction of several overlapping assemblages pilots the following analysis through OEH components and the mass of related assemblages these components concurrently inhabit. As this chapter focuses on the interactions, activities, and networks related to *producers*, several of the themes present in the second vignette are taken up in the following section and contextualized within an assemblage of assemblages – what I will term the OEH *niche* – to show that the relations and processes of OEH do not exist within a vacuum, but rather bear broader ethico-political weight; for instance, Patreon is not proprietary to OEH, but is constituted in the assemblages of “internet” and “capital,” wherein things like monetization, paywalls, and data logically cohere and shape the emergence and attribution of digital media. In demonstrating this, the production of another assemblage – that is, subjectivity – may be properly situated: observing *how* OEH transforms subjectivity also discloses the reason why such transformations are imbued with ethico-political consequence – either as novel forms of emancipation, or further subjectification.

2.3.2 Building Worlds out of Worlds: The Assemblages of Kink, BDSM, Internet, Capital

This section selects several of the components introduced in the preceding subchapters, triangulates their affects these with other OEH fieldwork, and maps the respective assemblages with which each of these emerge. By exploring components from each of the quadrants designated by *Figure 1*, I develop a balanced analysis which does not privilege one level of the assemblage over the other, but rather holds

them together; further, this allows diverse “encounters” with the other assemblages that comprise the OEH niche. They feature as the assemblages of *kink*, *BDSM*, *capital*, and *Internet* (shown in *Figure 2*), but while these occupy the focus of this subchapter, they are by no means an exhaustive list of those that cohere in the niche: while the enfolding of many other assemblages is evidenced in both vignettes,⁸² these either play a minor role, or are enveloped by other assemblages, or carry over (for instance, the components within the assemblage of pornography relevant to OEH also emerge between the assemblages of Internet, capital, and kink/BDSM). Thus, beginning in the upper left quarter of *Figure 1* and moving through the diagram counterclockwise, this analysis passes through a selection of components from OEH’s substance/content, form/content, form/expression, and substance/expression levels. To start, I engage the creators and erotic hypnotists themselves, drawing from ethnographic interviews with two in particular (Sleepingirl and HexLatex), alongside the accounts of GAN, Gabriele, and others.

Returning to my interview with Sleepingirl, she detailed her so-called “origin story” as it relates to erotic hypnosis – stemming from an early childhood fascination with cartoon representations of hypnosis (in Disney movies, namely *The Jungle Book*) which seeded a fetish that she would only begin to explore more openly in the context of her first, sexually-active relationship; while her teenage insecurities over kink contributed to a “big sense of shame,” after discovering and “diving headfirst into the online community,” Sleepingirl described what was a profound revelation:

“I had been fantasizing for a long time about like, “Oh, what if there were these events where people went to? And they did hypnosis on each other? Like, Wouldn’t that just be the best thing?” Well, it turns out that totally exists. And I was maybe an hour away from one of the bigger events of the time which was being held at a kink space in a dungeon. And so the moment that I was old enough, I went to the dungeon, I met some people that I’d played with online... I met one who’s now my current partner, who’s not into hypnosis very much. But we’re in a kinky relationship together. Me and him and his wife are in a polyamorous triad.”

Thus a practice that began tentatively online came to fruition offline, in an assemblage wherein *dungeons*, *polyamory*, *kink events* (referred to by Sleepingirl as “*munches*”), *in-person community*, *shibari* (erotic binding via rope), and *hypnosis* all came together in a transformative way, as elements of the *kink assemblage*. Kink may therefore be further particularized as,

“a spectrum of sexual or erotic activities outside normative versions of sex, undertaken for sensory, emotional, or intellectual pleasure. It tends to include a combination of the exchange of power, or perception of this, the infliction/receiving of pain, the wearing of gear, or the fetishization of body parts or objects. Kink can be practiced individually or in groups and can be organized into communities and subcultures. It is consensual, with a shared understanding that the activities are kinky.”⁸³

While these various “non-normative” fetishizations, aesthetic relations, and erotic acts are overt hallmarks of “kinky” people, many individuals or groups who identify as such also place emphasis on “consensual” activities, built on informed and educated affiliations. Sleepingirl’s positioning within this assemblage set her on a trajectory that she has continued to maintain throughout her adult life, shaping her career, habits,

82 These include the assemblages of pornography, roleplaying/LARP, web-development, film and entertainment, gaming, self-improvement, hypnotherapy, marketing and advertising, mind-alteration/drug use, sex. – *Fieldwork 2*, 3, 6, 8

83 Wignall, Liam. *Kinky in the Digital Age: Gay Men's Subcultures and Social Identities*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022, 66

and relationships. While Sleepinggirl's interests are, these days, generally directed toward *offline* erotic hypnosis (in person, primarily with her polyamorous partners), she nonetheless remains active in the intersecting lines between the kink assemblage and that of OEH. Additionally, in an interview with HexLatex – who is a multifaceted content creator, platform designer, and hypnotist – “Hex” (as they are called) indicated their indebtedness to pop-culture fantasies, citing the influence of Dungeons & Dragons (a fantasy and narrative based, traditionally in-person role-playing game), sci-fi, and LARP (“live action role-play,” in which participants portray and perform their characters in behavior and dress) in their productions. The use of such imaginaries as part of a fetish (most important of which, for Hex, is the idea of hypnotically turning a human into a “mindless, identity-less drone connected to a hive mind”), as well as Hex's routine donning of tight, black, latex bodysuits and various gas masks or “high-tech” cat ears – are likewise at play within kink assemblage, which constitutes aesthetic, roleplaying objects or themes involving fantasy-based fetishes. Other components which are produced in this assemblage have had a marked impact on the conduct and content production of both Hex and Sleepinggirl: Hex's commitment to building safe online spaces that foster communication and experimentation for their members (inspired by the DIY ethos enacted in LARPing and other forms of creative roleplaying), alongside Sleepinggirl's dedication to “tight communities” (both online and offline) and practices of safety, trust-building, accountability, education, and consent all set their work apart from many others involved with OEH – such as content creators who threaten, harass, or coerce others in affiliations condemned by Sleepinggirl as purely “transactional.” However, the actions of such people also implicate the affects of another assemblage – namely, the *assemblage of capital*.

Moving to the *formal content* of OEH (the bottom left quadrant of *Figure 1*), online components materialize as social media and community platforms, and content distribution sites. In observing these, the imbrication of OEH with capital becomes more overt. Starting with the statistics of GAN's Patreon page, it is easy to observe the monetization of OEH media and “communities,” which adds significance to the omission of content advisories in files which were designed, through hypnosis, to promote a dependence or obsession with the hypnotists involved – “conditioning” the user to be compelled back to their productions by noticing or coming into contact with various, everyday events and objects (reterritorializations of the machinic assemblage), or by the social and financial obligations conferred through incorporeal transformations (reterritorializations of the enunciatory assemblage). Not only is this the evidence of various expressions of capital (such as the problem of *exploitation* in the examples of financial domination, or the activities of *entrepreneurialism* by producers who monetize content and capitalize on the interests of both a growing mass of curious outsiders and a committed, practicing core of OEH users), but also of the excessive forces of de/reterritorialization therein: the remaking of *eyes*, *breasts*, *lips*, *clocks*, or *feathers* into fetishized objects, trigger-machines which compel users deeper into the hypnotic program. Even within the “tight” OEH spaces like Discord servers, wherein tists and subs agglomerate around a shared sexual orientation or fascination (without a required subscription or fee), “Rules” channels frequently warn that solicitation for profit constitutes grounds for removal, signaling, as it is within the assemblage of capital, to a desire to *dissociate* from it (as was also evident in Sleepinggirl's condemnation of the “transactional” side of OEH, and the mass “monetization” of kink culture): anticapitalist or socially alternative *ideas* and *sentiments*, even when catalyzed by a drive for “collectivity” or “community,” must always be interrogated critically, because (as Hardt and Negri point out), those who advocate,

“a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity in order to challenge the binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty have been out flanked by the strategies of power. Power has evacuated the bastion they are attacking and has circled around to their rear to join them in the assault in the name of difference. There is no need to doubt the democratic, egalitarian, and even at times anticapitalist desires that motivate large segments of these fields of work, but it is important to investigate the utility... *in the context of the new paradigm of power*. This new enemy not only is resistant to the old weapons but actually thrives on them, and thus joins its would-be antagonists in applying them to the fullest. Long live difference! Down with essentialist binaries!”⁸⁴

The FetLife platform, with its overt, affirmative celebrations of “difference, fluidity, and hybridity” must be perceived not only as online social infrastructure within the OEH, Kink, or BDSM assemblages, but also for its emergence within the Internet and capital assemblages – whereby the “new paradigm of power” remains undisturbed by such challenges. This new political-economic paradigm brings with it, according to Mackenzie Wark, its own antagonisms and class divisions, which conceal themselves within the very modes of production by which such seemingly radical, cultural resistances are mediated; as she elegantly states, “if you are getting your media for free, this usually means that you are the product. If the information is not being sold to you, then it is you who are being sold.”⁸⁵ For Wark, information is the force of production in the new paradigm (information which is nothing less than the quantification of, say, the desires of an online hypnotic subject or the habits of an online hypnotist, harvested and sold by corporations); thus, online communal or “localized” organization may appear moot, when,

“Google, Paypal, and so forth all get their cut. Their power may take form of a vectoral infrastructure that enables them to extract informational asymmetries from both capital and from subordinate classes and to accumulate asymmetric information about all of these activities now subordinated to the vector. Thus, where Wright [sic] says, ‘I assume that an exit from capitalism is not an option in the present historical period,’ I think we have to question that assumption, but not in a good way. Maybe this is already not capitalism, but something worse. This is an era not just of... ‘aggressive affirmation and enforcement of private property rights’ but of the creation of new forms of private property and new antagonistic relations over it, particularly in the form of intellectual property.”⁸⁶

The digital sites (discussed throughout this chapter) which acquire information – in the form of data produced by registering the activities or patterns of behavior, communications and interests of people within OEH – exist for profit, within the assemblage of capital, and as such engender a class division, between a so-called “hacker class,” who “produces new information... whatever intellectual property law recognizes as new,” and the so-called “vectoralist class,” who own the means for “the extraction of what you might call *surplus information*, out of individual workers and consumers, in order to build predictive models which further subordinate all activity to the same information political economy.”⁸⁷ Thus, while on one level private hypnotists such as GAN, Miki or Magenta (who produce and sell content online) appear to be subordinating a lower caste of hypnotized consumers, both *producers* and *hypnotic subjects* share the

84 Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. 1st ed. Paris, FR: 10/18, 2000. , 138 (emphasis added)

85 Wark, McKenzie. *Capital Is Dead*. London, UK: Verso, 2021. 1

86 *Ibid.*, 95 (emphasis added)

87 *Ibid.*, 43, 11 (emphasis hers)

same class – that of a hacker – in that, on a wider scale incorporating the OEH niche (which involves capital), they are both, equally, *producers of surplus information*; as per the above fieldwork, there is no sense of contradiction for hypnotists who also identify, or “switch,” to subordinated, consuming roles. Rather, the antagonism remains between producers and *owners* – those who, thanks to the Internet assemblage wherein *algorithms* subsist, wield predictive, computational power to extract and exploit – as will be demonstrated in Ryan’s case in the following chapter.

Therefore, online distribution sites indicate the ways in which the creation and dissemination of OEH content invests producers (and hypnotic subjects) into a capitalist system and ordering of relations; their characteristically “immaterial” labor – labor that “produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity”⁸⁸ – is thus predicated on being “independent and able to organize both its own work and its relations with business entities.”⁸⁹ However, the enterprising independence or mobility of those involved in erotic content production speaks also to their precariousness: they yet remain subjugated within the informational or “vectorial” economy, as “the separation between labor and life is increasingly unstable and confused, resulting in the passage from an industrial worker’s ‘producing to live’ to today’s precarious cognitive worker ‘living to produce.’”⁹⁰ These political-economic, bio-digital dynamics are neatly (if not somewhat disturbingly) placed into the context of sexuality and subjectivity in Parisi’s *Abstract Sex*:

“This increasing diffusion of mediated sex has been accompanied by contrasting views about the new blurring of the boundary between artificial and natural sex... Artificial sex calls for the ultimate separation of the mind from biological limits, the simulated experience of being free from physical constraints in the immersive matrix of information celebrated by the cowboys of cyberspace.”

The reframing of sex in this “matrix of information” via digitally-mediated “cybersex” – which includes the pornographic engagements of OEH – remains, therefore, caught between “two poles creating an impasse between disembodiment and embodiment highlighting... the socio-cultural disappearance of natural or material difference in cybernetic capitalism.” Thus, the ethico-political contradictions engendered in OEH: the affirmation of sexual, subjective “fluidity” and transgressions that oppose dominant figurations of selfhood and lifestyle, and the concurrent smoothing-over of sexualities and subjectivities as they become atomized, monetized, and flattened into information; the dramatically hierarchical, performative spectacle of the producer-user (or hypnotist-subject) relationship, and their implicitly shared status as unilateral members of an emergent underclass, subjected to the reticulations of biodigital control. In this way, no online erotic hypnotist or hypnotic subject exists outside of the assemblage of capital, but rather every level of their production and consumption is ordered according to it – whether they are portrayed as circumstantial victims or exploitative perpetrators.

Next, *formal expressions* of OEH, like the aforementioned concepts surrounding *safety* and *informed consent* in sexual practices, point to the intermingling of another assemblage. Consider the chat from a Discord channel (which I joined during a different ethnography, inquiring about drug use in OEH).⁹¹ The conversation began with a hypnotist describing their experience of “violation” by hypnotizing

88 Virno, Paolo, Michael Hardt, and Maurizio Lazzarato. “Immaterial Labor.” Essay. In *Radical Thought in Italy a Potential Politics*, 133–50. Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010., 133

89 *Ibid.*, 138

90 Griziotti, Giorgio, Tiziana Terranova, and Jason Francis McGimsey. *Neurocapitalism*, 16

91 *Fieldwork 6*

a sub who had not disclosed to them that they were high (until remarking in the middle of the session about how the hypnosis was interacting with their “trip”). Several hypnotists joined in and echoed the concern over what they perceived as problematic (and not uncommon) infringements on the delicate, trust-based dynamic between hypnotist and subject, especially when it comes to the involvement of mind-altering substances; as another hypnotist remarked, they have had

“a fair bit of experience with hypnosis and substances as well. Mostly from the bottom but a little with topping. And if it were me tripping, it might honestly be impossible to tell I was high, dose depending... But I’m always forthcoming about my drug use when I play. I just mean that not everyone looks high when they are)”

The hypnotist detailed further that being entranced in this context speaks to “an enormous power that I’d only allow the people I trust the most to wield over me... if I ask for/need clarity I don’t want to be (consensually) gaslit any longer... That’s what I consider risk aware at least.” Many of the practices and themes listed here – *bottoming/topping* (folk terminology referring, respectively, to submissive and dominating roles performed in sex), *play*, *wielding power*, *risk awareness*, *consensual gaslighting* – are components belonging to the *BDSM assemblage* (which overlaps significantly with kink, but within which the notions of power-play, domination, and vulnerable, trust-based communication take on their most definitive roles). As researcher Charlotta Carlström says of her own fieldwork concerning BDSM, “power exchange, discipline and security [are] key factors, where the significance of consent is central.”⁹² These factors do not, however, hold practitioners back from a lively and experimental approach to sexuality; despite the reticence of the aforementioned hypnotists in the Discord chat, they all ultimately embraced the usage of drugs as technical objects in mediating deeper, more affecting hypnotic experiences. Carlström affirms that this attitude is a core subjective disposition for people within BDSM, which itself (similarly to OEH) can be “understood as a process of increasing expansion, creation and connection, in which desire is seen not as something we lack or need but rather as a process of striving and self-enhancement.”⁹³

In OEH, such methods of “self-enhancement” are not limited to the intra-activity of technological or digital media and hypnosis, but are inclusive of intoxicating, narcotic, and psychoactive interventions (as evidenced in the Discord discussion about “psychedelics,” and further in Ryan’s own practices – detailed more closely in Chapter 3). While the intoxicants themselves belong to the *substantive content* of OEH, the social and private practice, thematization, and resulting addictions or dependencies feature as *formal expressions* within the genres of “addiction,” “intox,” and “brainwashing” media discussed in the following chapter (which often, to varying degrees, solicit the use of drugs or alcohol in tandem with hypnosis, including the ingestion of substances within the hypnotic dramaturgy). These also have a place in other assemblages, such as those of BDSM and Kink; but remain marginalized relative to the conspicuous role drugs play in OEH; sociological research exploring the role of drugs within BDSM and Kink suggests that, while it is a present and influential component,

“The use of alcohol and other drugs within a kink context is much less frequently discussed. One reason for this is the stringent focus on safety, consent and control of many kink communities, whether through the most well-known phrase ‘safe, sane and consensual’... or other more recent adaptations, such as “risk aware consensual kink” and the ‘4Cs’ framework

92 Carlström, Charlotta. “BDSM, Becoming and the Flows of Desire.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 21, no. 4 (2018): 404–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2018.1485969>, 408

93 *Ibid.*, 404

(consent, communication, caring and caution)...Within these frameworks, excessive consumption of alcohol or other drugs and the resulting loss of self control could be seen as threats to these rules—most notably of safety, given that some psychoactive drugs may lower inhibitions, change perceptions and affect the ability to fully and freely provide informed consent, putting oneself and other people at risk in such a context.”⁹⁴

Thus notions of *consent*, *safety*, and *care* are troubled not only in the contexts of sleep-hypnosis (GAN’s night-programming) or in the complex negotiation of online power-play and “shared hallucinations,” but conflict with other pervasive, forms of expression, like *intoxication*, *addiction*. These contradictions belong not only to the OEH assemblage, but rather intensify those already at play within BDSM and kink.

Lastly, this subchapter turns to the cultural processes and techniques within the final quadrant of *Figure 1*, concerning *substantive expressions*; among these are *programming* (or *conditioning*), which I will analyze within the context of the OEH niche, and thereby draw the section to a close. Returning finally to Sleepinggirl, she characterized (during an ethnographic interview) the types of people who feel drawn to erotic hypnosis (and who incorporate it in their sexual activities) as those who, “feel that they are so porous and very moldable and changeable. And it’s because there are spaces that allow them to be that way and be encouraged in it.”⁹⁵ Likewise, Hex leads their users through a process of behavior “molding” and cognitive “changing” called *dronification*: a distinct category of digital media and corresponding platforms, communities, aesthetics, and personas all agglomerating around the central premise of becoming-drone – enacted by employing a model (the figure of the robotic, hyper-productive drone) and using hypnosis files to assist in users’ transformations, which may serve both erotic and more pragmatic ends.⁹⁶ The aesthetics of the website centralizing their work, called “HexCorp,” is designed as part of a “world-building” project engendering an online space wherein members (fictitiously) enter into a computerized, automated, AI-controlled factory in order to become, among other things, “motionless” and “machine-like,” following “the orders they are given,” supremely “focused on their tasks.” Where else could such a “programming” project exist but within the assemblage of the Internet? Hex admits as much, and mentioning that it should be “obvious to point out that none of this happens in reality, as this would all be very expensive to pull off.”

Hex’s deployment of coding, utilizing digital technologies and infrastructures to craft an entire virtual world, produce videos formatted for VR goggles, and promote across social media platforms is entirely contingent on the components of the *internet assemblage* – in the same way as GAN’s downloadable audio programming files, which implicate further technical objects and mediations reliant on the internet. These activities are not only productive of online spaces or content, but are also cultural processes in themselves – *substantive expressions* of the DIY ethos of niche internet communities. But furthermore, the notion of a human agent as “programmable” data – a biological database of genetic and neurological code, waiting to be unlocked and recoded or plugged into a “hive mind” echoes Sleepinggirl’s own observations of how hypnotists and users in OEH perceive themselves and pattern their lives, and demonstrates once more the imbrication of Internet and capital assemblages informing the aforementioned “new paradigm.” The practice of mediating bodily or neurochemical states with digital or computational

94 McCormack, Mark, Fiona Measham, Maria Measham, and Liam Wignall. “Kink in an English Field: The Drinking, Drug Use and Sexual Practices of English Festival-Goers Who Engage in Kink.” *Sexuality & Culture*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09968-4>, 4

95 *Fieldwork 4*

96 *Fieldwork 3*

technologies proliferates throughout OEH, but more broadly in the OEH niche as *biomediation*. Eugene Thacker details the etymological implications of what he terms “biomedia,” which point to its historical conditions: thanks to the increasing imbrication of the biological and the technological in contemporary scientific developments (such as bioinformatics and biocomputing, which render “code” as a material substrate, and genetic and data sequencing as equivalent to one another), there is a diffusion between the inherent logics of complex systems that was not, traditionally, presumed interchangeable.⁹⁷ Rather than conjuring the grizzly, oozing images of speculative fiction and cyber-culture fabulations, he offers a concept more generic, seemingly mundane, yet all the more pervasive:

“By contrast, what we find with biomedia is a constant, consistent, and methodical inquiry into this technical-philosophical question of “what a body can do”... [Biomedia] proceeds via a dual investment in biological materiality, as well as the informatic capacity to enhance biological materiality... the recontextualization of a “body more than a body.”⁹⁸

This recontextualization of the human body affected by biomediation as “more than” a body does not negate its status as biological – rather it reaffirms it, positing a corporeality that interacts and meshes with the digital, and vice versa. When the body or cognition of a hypnotic subject is *mediated* in this sense, what transpires is not an act of metaphysical puncturing or wounding. Rather, the media themselves become increasingly *immediate* with regard to our own sense-perceptions, making their devices transparent and enfolded with our engagements in the world.⁹⁹ There is a subtlety here, a suggestion in Thacker’s formulation that, while the preoccupations of many “new media” theorists may not be exaggerated in the claims they make (about the “hyper” nature of today’s media, as it seems to indiscriminately saturate and overcode the terrain), the point yet eludes them: the peculiar cunning of biomediation is to be found in its covert *nearness*. OEH, as this chapter shows, draws ever nearer to the hypnotic subject; all of its techniques and sensory trickery manifest, only to be obscured by their own effects – a hypnotic gravity which begins in visual or auditory barrage only to withdraw into murmur, disappearing its own hand just as it takes grip: “I didn’t know I was in a trance,” said Sleepinggirl when describing one of her most physically and mentally “powerful” experiences with erotic hypnosis – one in which *the recognition that she was being hypnotized dissolved completely*.¹⁰⁰ In the same way, the affectivity of biomedia is all the more powerful thanks to its furtiveness; like this “covert hypnosis” (the process of hypnotizing a subject without their conscious recognition of entrancement), the inhering of biology and technology in biomediation makes *its* presence covert. Suffice it to say, for now, “the use of such technologies, media, and techniques is specifically geared toward enabling the biological domain to technically operate in novel contexts and articulated conditions.”¹⁰¹ The “biological domain” as it manifests here is the human engaged with OEH – what is, indeed, a “novel context,” one that spans not only physical spaces but also online platforms and social networks. The media therein allow such a body to “technically operate” in the event of erotic hypnosis, a dynamic “articulated condition” indicative of its emergence not only with an assemblage, but an assemblage of assemblages. But the notions of programming and deprogramming a person in hypnosis not only indicates the infringements of bio- and

97 Thacker, Eugene. *Biomedia*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 1-6

98 *Ibid.*, 6

99 *Ibid.*, 8

100 *Fieldwork 4*

101 Thacker, Eugene. *Biomedia*, 15

computational technologies leveraged in capital and diffused across the internet, but novel developments within another assemblage, the *assemblage of subjectivity*.

2.3.3 Toward Assembling Subjectivities

While the previous section analyzed the interferences of four other assemblages, this account is by no means an exhaustive representation of the vast assemblage of assemblages which give OEH shape; on the contrary, rather than serving to represent, the second diagram functioned to once more guide an analytic path through the mesh. Culminating at the assemblage of subjectivity sets up the following chapter's shift in focus – away from the point of view of *producers*, and toward that of the *subjects*; this word denotes a double meaning, in that it indexes to the “submissive” or “subdominant” role, that of the hypnotic “sub” or “subject,” while also signaling the turn toward the assemblage of subjectivity and concordant processes of subjectification. This, again, is not to instantiate a binary between “production” and “consumption” – as Marx demonstrated already with *Grundrisse* in 1857, “production is consumption”¹⁰² – but rather to cast these two scales of the assemblage into an active framework of interaction, between the creative activities of a tist's hypnotic productions and the *equally* creative activities of a sub crafting out of these, “new modalities of subjectivity in the same way an artist creates new forms from the palette,” as Guattari would have it.¹⁰³

102 Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1973, 39

103 Guattari, 1995, p.7

3 SUBJECTIFICATION & SUBJECTION IN THE ASSEMBLAGE

3.1 Pleasure and Paranoia: The Danger and Allure in OEH

It was May of 2021, and it had only been one month since I first heard of erotic hypnosis. Now, sitting in my flat on an internet call listening to Ryan describe his complicated history with OEH, my curiosity began to intensify. I had heard about his isolating and costly addiction and felt its effects secondhand, but was searching for a picture – a way to visualize not only the results of several long “lockdown” months of heavy drug and erotic hypnosis use, but the details of how he had reached that point. Ryan graciously agreed to walk me through all of it, step by step, in a downward descent from what nudged him toward OEH in the first place, *marketing*: “the first time that I actually saw this stuff was on PornHub, before it was banned.” This ban, it should be noted (which began in 2020), was initiated not by pornographic platforms themselves, but due to financial pressure from credit card companies (Mastercard and Visa)¹⁰⁴ who temporarily withdrew their services from MindGeek, the parent company owning (at the time and still to this day) many of the large, mainstream pornographic web platforms and production companies (including PornHub, RedTube, Xtube, YouPorn).¹⁰⁵ Leading up to this, Mastercard had been lobbied by a conservative, U.S.-based non-profit – the so-called National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) – who campaigned against what they perceived as the financial industry’s complicity in the production and dissemination of illicit or criminal content across the websites within MindGeek’s domain.¹⁰⁶ Thus, in order to comply with these demands and regain access to credit card and banking services, the targeted websites incited a censorship campaign which reviewed and removed content, search queries, and more strictly enforced control over uploads: PornHub released a new list of “Regulations,” stating that, “Due to payment processor regulations, the rules are a bit stricter,” enumerating “a list of words you can't use in your video titles. Also, if your videos contain any content that matches these descriptions, they'll be taken down as well;” among these words were “hypno, hypnosis, hypnotism, hypnotize, hypnotized, hypnotizes, hypnotizing.”¹⁰⁷ However, before the ban, Ryan detailed that he would, if viewing “BDSM or power-play related” porn on the aforementioned sites, “see it advertised... they were like clip thumbnails.” While the ads looked “trippy” and “interesting,” it took some time before he decided to “have a crack at this,” clicking on a video offering a “hands-free orgasm.” I was surprised to hear that, as someone who had spared no detail describing the mesmerizing power and gravity of OEH media, his first experience was less than a revelation: “about 15 to 20 minutes into it, I was like... yeah, this is not really doing anything for me.” It was not until he decided to try another type of hypnosis clip – advertised for its themes of “power” and “teasing” and “taking control” – that Ryan described first starting to feel an interest in OEH, given the clip’s engagement with what, for him, were already “preexisting sexual triggers” and “fetishes.” I could relate to this part of Ryan’s experience with OEH media – the allure of its images, sounds, and hypnotic techniques had not been enough to draw him in. But for him, a host of other factors combined to give him that nudge – a trajectory that would ultimately take him beyond the limits of his own “preexisting” interests.

Ryan took a breath and collected his thoughts, noting that it was difficult to communicate some of these processes and feelings, especially for the first time. First, he pointed out that his interest grew in

104 Klar, Rebecca. “MasterCard, Visa to Stop Allowing Their Cards to Be Used on Pornhub.” The Hill. The Hill, December 10, 2020. <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/529730-mastercard-visa-to-stop-allowing-their-cards-to-be-used-on-pornhub/>.

105 “MindGeek Corporate Grouping.” OpenCorporates. Accessed July 1, 2022. https://opencorporates.com/corporate_groupings/MindGeek/companies.

106 “Statement - Mastercard Adds New Rules to Confront Pornography Tube Site Abuses.” NCOSE, July 1, 2021. <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/statement-mastercard-adds-new-rules-to-confront-pornography-tube-site-abuses/>.

107 “Regulations for Selling Videos.” Pornhub. Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200411200909/https://help.pornhub.com/hc/en-us/articles/360002736174-Regulations-for-selling-videos>.

clicking OEH ads not because hypnosis became more appealing, but because, as the *algorithm* caught up with his activities and traced his interests, the ads themselves adapted to suit his fetishes, gender, sexual orientation: “there’s plenty of [online] erotic hypnosis that will be marketed *differently* for people who are either LGBTQ or women or whatever it is.” Second, one thing in particular made erotic hypnosis feel open and accessible for him – something to be experimented with, learned, practiced: his understanding that OEH is fundamentally “roleplaying:” a “two way street,” wherein a degree of effort and performance is required from both the sub and the tist, who cooperate through filling their roles to enact a power dynamic (both in live scenarios, and by participating in pre-produced video or audio content). As the ads transported Ryan to a host of other websites (he mentioned some of the “more famous ones” in the assemblage of OEH, like ManyVids, IWantClips, or Clips4Sale),¹⁰⁸ he encountered a wider array of “sub-genres” and “sub-fetishes” of hypnotic content. Becoming familiarized with not only these subdivisions but also the creators and formats of content he preferred, Ryan began subscribing to websites with “higher quality” content, and following individual creators themselves (typically “hypnodoms” – dominatrix hypnotists – self-styled as “goddesses”), who often had their own private platforms or Patreons. It was during this process that Ryan described, with some difficulty, an intricate phenomenon he termed “blending” – a mixing together of preexisting fetishes or triggers with new ones, which served to reinforce one another and heighten the experience of hypnosis and afford hypnotists greater control.¹⁰⁹

Ryan explained that, by finding more forms of OEH that resonated with his interests and proclivities, he was, conversely, opened up to others: “It will blend those existing triggers... attempting to implant, either subconsciously or consciously... and give the person things such as new triggers, new things that will make them susceptible to the hypnotic state that they’re trying to create.” I did not quite understand – it was obvious that Ryan perceived a specific process at work, fundamental to his experience of OEH, but it was obscure and unwieldy. He settled on a concrete example, articulating how he had developed a fetish for *addiction* itself (to both drugs and to OEH content) from his fetish for power-play. By assuming a subdominant and suggestible position – a practice that he had developed with OEH over time, noting that “not everyone can do it” – Ryan embodied a role “useful for the scenario;” in this way, the files hypnotized him into more engaged roleplaying. However, he went on to detail how many of the clips oriented for such power-play began reinforcing, by using “a number of hypnotic methods, those things that you will act out in role-playing in a more and more intense way, *blurring* that line of reality.” He explained how went on to detail how this occurs, giving the example of “edging” or “gooning:” a practice in which a hypnotist (or top) “encourages you to keep masturbating for extended periods of time.” By using this practice as a method of temporally extending and deepening an entranced state (into hours-long sessions), adding to a general sense of disorientation, “you will inevitably end up consuming more of this content than you intended to.” The hypnotist will then “add another layer on top of this,” by pointing out the very fact of what already occurred: humiliating and mocking the user for the *over-consumption* of their content, a lack of control, and so on, “despite the fact that it was the clip that made you do that.” Next, the injunctions of the hypnotist, using trigger words like “addicted loser” and “relapse,” reinforced Ryan’s feeling of *powerlessness*. This sense of powerlessness, which was part of Ryan’s original “kink” as

108 All pornographic websites which specialize in amateur and fetish porn, which sets them adjacent to the more mainstream (and rigorously controlled) platforms discussed above. – *Fieldwork 1*

109 *Fieldwork 1*, 7

it relates to submission and domination, was thereby conflated with the state of being *addicted*.¹¹⁰ Thus the “real” experience of overusing content (by way of the content’s own performative of “role-playing”) became tied in with the fetishization of submission, lending itself to a new fetish for being addicted. Ryan, who was by that point actively engaging this type of “addiction” media, was therefore primed for another “layer” (as he expressed it) to be added “on top of this:” a fetish for financial domination (findom).

“It’s not ever been something that I have been drawn to or found sexually arousing,” Ryan said, describing how findom has recently become “massive on the internet.”¹¹¹ He had never understood why, until it began to be “blended” into his own kinks through erotic hypnosis. Through addiction media, the blending process repeated itself; Ryan described how, after having paid for their clip, a hypnotist would overtly mock and humiliate him for *buying their content*, calling him an addicted loser – wanting to quit, trying to quit, but heedlessly giving them more of his money nonetheless. Once again, the line between reality and role-playing “blurred” for Ryan, and the reality of paying for a clip or subscription was reframed as a performative act, a part of his role – his fetish – as a subdominant. Payment was thus fetishized as an erotic act in itself, something he needed in order to feel aroused. Hence, the scenario described in Chapter 1: sexual arousal over the act of online payment alone, and a simultaneously diminishing ability to feel equally aroused in physical relations. This compounding cycle did not stop there, however. Other adjacent sub-genres – such as “intox,” in which the addiction or use of illicit substances is fetishized – became integrated as well, serving to reinforce the other fetishes, as well as contribute to his exponentially rising use of OEH, and depleting bank account.

It took hours to unpack these nuanced and vulnerable details, often veering into discussions about specific sub-genres of OEH, or the interactions of drugs and hypnosis. However, what I was left with was not only an overview of Ryan’s spiral into addiction, but also an image of what the practice of online erotic hypnosis looked like for him. At the peak, Ryan characterized his use as “binging,” using drugs and erotic hypnosis for hours, sometimes days at a time with little rest. It began with “sesh” (session) preparations: perusing and downloading interesting files – typically ranging from a 30 minutes to an hour – and creating an environment in his bedroom. Candles lighting the bedroom, laptop on the desk, headphones for the hypnosis audio, alcohol, lines of ketamine, spliffs, bottles of poppers, a comfy chair, a robe. Next, smoking weed or taking ketamine (at the peak, Ryan did away with the inconvenience of preparing lines and opted instead for mixing and “drinking that shit”). Then, the hypnosis. The addiction files would tell him that, no, this was not good for him, and yes, he wanted to quit, to not be addicted. But, in order to “reinforce this” as a part of his subdominant role, the hypnotist would emasculate and humiliate him for the fact that he was, indeed, still using OEH content – despite his own hope to be free of it. Even the notion of quitting was thus fetishized and made yet another “trigger.” At times, the binging ended suddenly – once, after taking too many drugs and feeling a nearly “total loss” of his sense of self, Ryan screamed out his name repeatedly, trying to pull himself back into reality. At other times, it ended gradually – either way, Ryan said, it would inevitably result in him “feeling like shit,” hollowed out and alienated, standing in the shower to bring himself back and swearing never to do this again. But of course, even this could be fetishized.

110 The confluence of addiction and fetishism has been noted in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis for some time, noting the instances in which drugs may become fetish objects for users and addicts (Keller 1992, Glover 1928/1984, McDougall 2016, Winnicott, 2016).

111 Yang, Nelson. “Fintech/Findom: On Emergent Sex Publics and the Anthropology of Desire,” 2018. (unpublished)

3.2 Diagramming The Subjectivity of OEH

As was the case in the previous chapter, this section proceeds from an ethnographic description into a diagram; this time, the mapping of the assemblage of subjectivity, following Deleuze and Guattari's theory of subjectification. Subjectivity's centrality in the following diagram does not represent its position within the actual assemblage (a network without a stable core) but rather the opposite: its layout establishes the scale of this chapter's analysis, which scrupulously explores the lines, flows, forces, and relations of subjectivity in order to understand not only its emplacement within the assemblage, but how it is (co)constituted by the fact of this very situatedness. Lisa Blackman, in this respect, encourages us to "read subjectivity as decentred, as a part of an assemblage, an emergent conjunction and an evolving intertwining of self-ordering forces and diverse materialities;"¹¹² in this way, she suggests not only the contingent relation of subject and assemblage, but points to the emergence of the subject as a process of "evolving" and "intertwining" – the flows of subjectification under examination in this chapter. By following Deleuze and Guattari's framework for subjectification (drawn out below, in arrows and intersecting lines; see *Figure 3*), this "emergent conjunction" may be concretized and particularized. Thus this chapter moves toward an understanding of how the OEH assemblage's processes of subjectification are borne out for the actors within, what forces modulate these (in the context of the OEH niche posited in the previous chapter), and what are their results. While the preceding fieldwork primarily integrated the point of view of *producers*, the remainder of my analysis begins from engagements with *subjects* (as in, "hypnotic subjects" or "subs"). However, while many of the components described in the vignette and in the following ethnography pertain to this different point of view, the focus is on subjectivity *in a broad sense* – as it is affected not only for users of OEH (subjects), but also for those involved in producing its media, infrastructures, cultural elements, sites, hypnotic sessions, (producers). First, I present a theory of subjectification relevant to the Deleuzian framework thus far employed (pertaining to assemblages), and use *Figure 3* to construct this frame and pilot through the following section, which positions the subject in a milieu of *affects*, and *acts* that correspond to the actualization of *identity* (defined further below). Lastly, taking into account the engagements with both Ryan and Sleepinggirl, I detail the ethical and political non-neutrality of OEH – in other words, the possibilities for both exploitation and emancipation that are engendered by the operations of subjectification, subjection, and *desubjectification*: the diminishment or destruction of a subject position, a destitution or emptying out of subjectivity.¹¹³ It is helpful here to invoke Foucault's reflections on these processes, as is done throughout Gerald Bruns' work on the subject, which portrays desubjectification as:

“...trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the ‘unlivable’;’ it ‘has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution.’ What Foucault has in mind is something more radical than a mere ‘critique of the subject’... ‘Such an operation would be meaningless if it remained limited to speculation. Calling the subject into question means that one would have to experience something leading to its actual destruction, its decomposition,

112 Blackman, Lisa, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos, and Valerie Walkerdine. "Creating Subjectivities." *Subjectivity* 22, no. 1 (2008): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2008.8.> , 15

113 Lund, J. "Biopolitical Beckett: Self-Desubjectification as Resistance." *Nordic Irish Studies* 8 (2009): 67–77.

its explosion, its conversion into something else’—something inaccessible to definition, or maybe even to any intelligible narrative.”¹¹⁴

While Deleuze and Guattari’s theories suggest how one might undergo such “experiences” in practice, Ryan’s and Sleepinggirl’s (and others’) own descriptions of the transformative force of OEH evidence not only the subjectifying, but also desubjectifying affects of a form of mediation that, at times, “explodes” a self-conscious mode of being. However, the organization of the assemblage and its positioning within the OEH niche also factor into whether such “destruction” or “conversion” opens up a sustained, socially and sexually emancipatory trajectory, or ends in disaster; this chapter ends by exploring both of these potentials. But first, I will begin by mapping the process of subjectification in the assemblage, using the diagram in the same constructing, piloting capacity as before – plotting a way through the fieldwork:

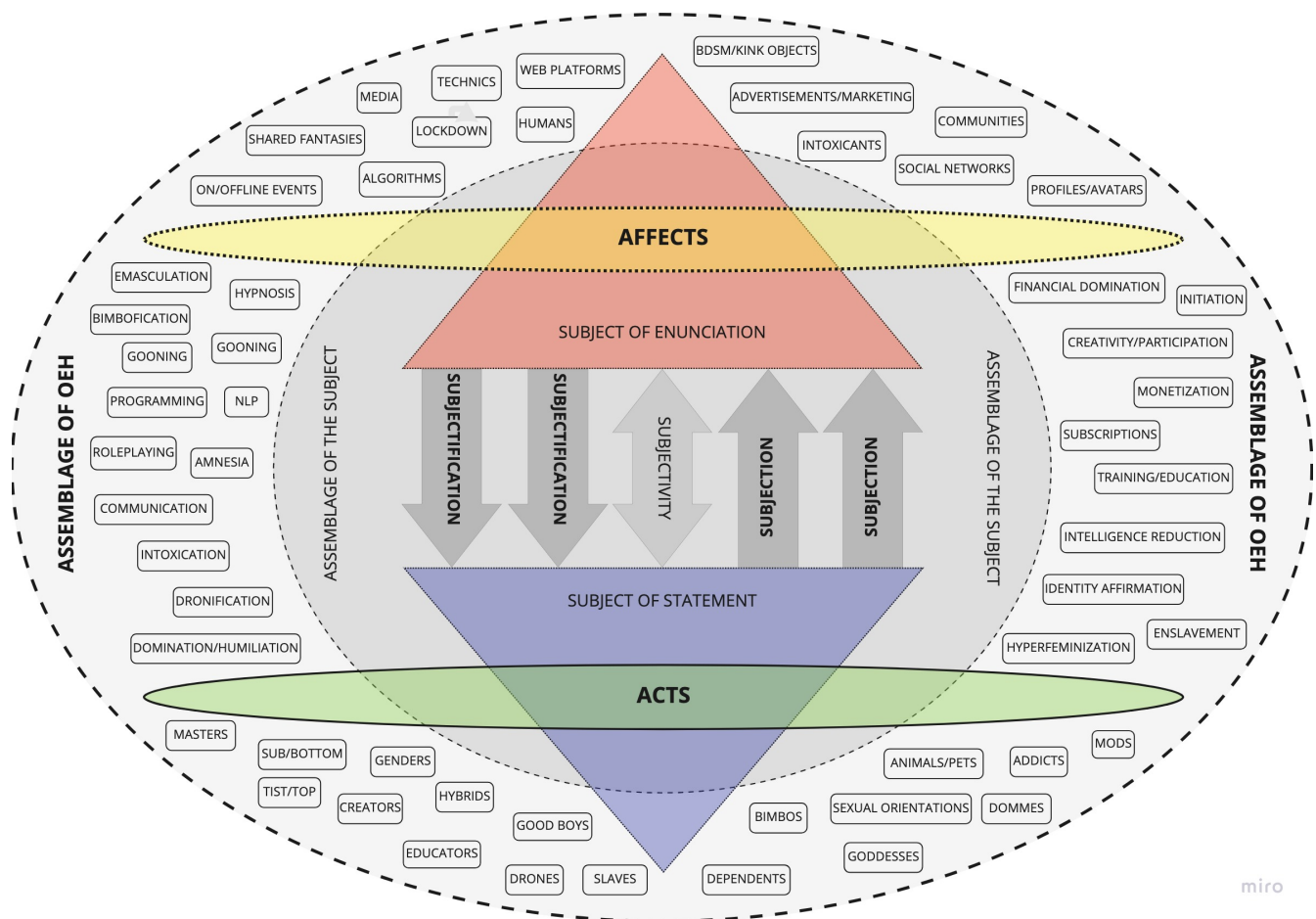


Figure 3: The Assemblage of Subjectivity

3.2.1 Between Affects and Acts: The Functions of Subjectification in the Assemblage of OEH

As stated, this section presents a conceptualization of subjectification by moving through *Figure 3*; beginning from the outer sphere and moving in, first is the assemblage of OEH (and as the ending of the previous chapter showed, it is not *only* this assemblage, floating in isolation, but one interpenetrating with many others). Here the components, several of which (such as intoxicants and files) feature in the above

114 Grun, 57-58

ethnographic description of my engagements with Ryan, offer potential “points of subjectification,” which Deleuze and Guattari argue are and can be, “anything...A dress, an article of underwear, a shoe are points of subjectification for a fetishist... A thing, an animal, will do the trick.”¹¹⁵ This notion of fetishization derives from disciplines other than philosophy; for instance, throughout the psychopathological research of fetishism, there are (in general) three types of fetishes: an “inanimate object, usually with a sexual connotation,” “a body part that is clearly still connected to a complete body, dead or alive,” and “a reified trait, usually a deformity or idiosyncrasy that implies inferiority, helplessness, or dependence;”¹¹⁶ which may be regarded as “triggers, akin to objects that promote flashbacks and panic attacks in the post-traumatic stress disorder.”¹¹⁷ This comparison of fetish objects, body parts, or traits with *triggers* is especially apt for reckoning with the accounts of informants and OEH users, who (like in the previous chapter’s analysis of erotic programming files, as well as Ryan’s testimony of the fetishization of drug use and addiction) describe them exactly as such: triggers, implanted or reinforced via hypnosis.¹¹⁸ But how do such “trigger-points” or fetishes function as points of subjectification? Deleuze and Guattari continue further:

“Several points coexist in a given individual or group, which are always engaged in several distinct and not always compatible linear proceedings. The various forms of education or “normalization” imposed upon an individual consist in making him or her change points of subjectification, always moving toward a higher, nobler one in closer conformity with the supposed ideal.”¹¹⁹

In this conceptualization, an assemblage makes its components potential points by which a person undergoes subjectification, which is true of every assemblage – as Chapter 2 demonstrates, OEH is just one assemblage within an entire network or “niche” of others which themselves relate or overlap with more, all the way up to wider assemblages, such as that of the *state*; consider, for instance, the aforementioned role of the NCOSE (a 501c3 political body), which emerges as a component of the state assemblage along with the *formal expressions* of conservative or “family” values, as well as the aspects of criminalization, censorship, and human rights. The infringement of the state assemblage with that of OEH constitutes, for instance, censorship or corporate financial coercion (as was the case in the interactions between the NCOSE, Mastercard and Visa, and MindGeek), and the reterritorialization of hypnotic content as “fringe” and quasi-legal. All of this is to point to the fact that, while subjectivity is contingent on actors and forces not bound within the body or mind of a human, humans within OEH are brought into its assemblage already subjectified (back to the examples of capital and the state, the subjectivities of HexLatex or Gabriele were already, to some degree, conditioned by these – by the very fact of their citizenship in the UK and the US, where the state and capital cross over and produce subjects). Thus, it is not a misnomer to speak of the *transformation* of subjectivity in OEH while also analyzing the *production*

115 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 129

116 Vaknin, Sam. “The Psychopathology of Fetishism and Body Integrity Dysphoria (BID).” *Journal of Psychology and Clinical Psychiatry* 11, no. 5 (2020): 123–25. <https://doi.org/10.15406/jpcpy.2020.11.00685>, 123

117 *Ibid.*, 124

118 In accordance with the three aforementioned types of fetishes, there are, “Objective fetishists, for whom the inanimate fetish stands for and symbolizes a desired whole that is out of reach. Somatic fetishists, for whom the body part stands for and symbolizes a coveted human body (and, by extension, a relationship) that is unattainable. Abstract fetishists, who latch on to a trait or a characteristic as a means to indirectly interact with their “defective” bearer and thus fulfill the fetishist’s grandiose fantasies of omnipotence and innate superiority (pathological narcissism).” – *Ibid.*, 123

119 *Ibid.*

of subjectivity by the affects of an assemblage – the transformation *is* inherently a production, in that what transpires is the exchange or amalgamation of one (or several) types of subjectification for another. Assembling with OEH means, for producers and hypnotic subjects, the possibility of new points of subjectification (recall the files, hypnotists, symbols, or fetishized objects, sounds, sights, noticings, events of the *conditioning/programming* genre), and the opportunity to assemble new ones by way of things like “education” (as is made available in social platforms such as FetLife,¹²⁰ negotiated by live or live-streamed events,¹²¹ and disseminated in books and publications¹²² as well as podcasts¹²³), and “normalization” (as described in Chapter 2, the incorporeal transformations, such as those which “remake” a user into a *drone* or a *good boy* and thereby serve to bind the subject to a network of social and financial obligations which, in turn, acculturate them, habituating goddess worship or assimilating them into niche Discord communities).

Therefore, the components of OEH *affect subjectivity* in that they function as “points” that set a new process of subjectification into motion (these are to be found in the text bubbles throughout the outer sphere of *Figure 3*). Further, components which appear most conspicuously affective – like erotic-hypnotic media – are not preeminently so, but converge with the affects of other, more covert agents. In Ryan’s case, an algorithm may be understood as equally significant for his process of subjectification: the “power” of the media itself was not, at first, a sufficient point of subjectification, but only emerged as such through a process initiated by the algorithm’s modulation of online ads, which adapted to the axes of his prior subjectification (Ryan mentioned his proclivity for “power-play” and “domination,” components of the BDSM and pornography assemblages). Points of subjectification are not the only things that affect subjectivity, but also the organization of the assemblage within which this constellation takes shape, and the infringements of other assemblages. But what remains is a concrete understanding of *how* these points function, which involves the triangular fields denoting two “subjects” – a theoretical outline of subjectivity Deleuze and Guattari adapt from Lacan (Lacan, 2002 [1966], 1998; Haute, 2001), which posits a *subject of enunciation* and a *subject of statement* (or *utterance*), which together constitute a subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari detail the interactions of these two, in relation to the “points” discussed above:

“Then from the point of subjectification issues a subject of enunciation, as a function of a mental reality determined by that point. Then from the subject of enunciation issues a subject of the statement, in other words, a subject bound to statements in conformity with a dominant reality (of which the mental reality just mentioned is a part, even when it seems to oppose it).”¹²⁴

Thus the subject of enunciation, conditioned by a point of subjectification, equates to a generic *self* (or in psychoanalytic terms, the unconscious; i.e., the “mental reality”), whereas the subject of statement is the signifying “I” (or again, in psychoanalysis, the ego; i.e., a subject belonging to a social, “dominant reality”).¹²⁵ This speaks to the *doubling* of the subject: firstly, in the function of subjectification, a person is

120 *Fieldwork 3*

121 *Fieldwork 3* involved analyzing not only the controversy surrounding GAN, but also the sites in which it appeared (namely, FetLife). It was on FetLife I encountered an entire, up to date page detailing both live and in-person erotic hypnosis events hosted in a handful of (typically urban) locations across the US and the UK.

122 Sleepinggirl. *Kinky NLP: Neuro-Linguistic Programming for Erotic Hypnosis*. Sleepinggirl, n.d., 2021

123 Sleepinggirl, and CCKitten. *Twohypchicks.simplecast.com*. Accessed July 1, 2022. <https://twohypchicks.simplecast.com/>.

124 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 129

125 Jeong, Boram. “Theory of Subjectification in Gilles Deleuze: A Study of the Temporality in Capitalism.” Doctoral Thesis, Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/170>, 2017. , 155-156

emplaced within an assemblage, wherein components or “points” *affect* their body-brain, the intra-action of which conditions the “mental reality” of a self; secondly, because of its double articulation (which does not only include machinic elements, but also symbolic, cultural, and discursive expressions), the assemblage is also a *social* assemblage, wherein the realm of signification affords an “I” – a subject of statement – which issues from the subject of enunciation, as constituted in the utterances of the person and performed in *acts*. As Judith Butler argues, we should “understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief.”¹²⁶ Thus, identities are performative “illusions” of the self – enacted by the “I” which utilizes them to self-actualize and express: therefore, *Figure 3* juxtaposes the sphere of (pre-personal) *affects* and subjective *identities* on opposite ends of the spectrum in order to emplace subjectivity between these – not as an identity (or essence), but as a doubled subject which, on one end, performs identity in accordance to a “dominant,” social reality.

In order to utilize this framework (and put it to work), I argue that the abstract “blurring” or “blending” Ryan reported (between reality and fiction) which, among other things, fostered a change in his sexual interests and capacities, should be described precisely as elements of OEH’s process of subjectivity transformation itself: Firstly, from a point of subjectification (in this case, a hypnotizing “addiction clip”) issued a *subject of enunciation* (the self belonging to the entranced, affected body-brain of Ryan); secondly, from this subject issued a *subject of the statement* (the fabricated “addict” addressed by the hypnodom in the clip and performed in his “overuse” – an act in accordance to this identity) – a doubling wherein one “subject” folded into another, effectuating a new self-conscious state emanating not from an a personal interiority, but from a line between affect and identity. The “fiction” become “real” for Ryan; the subject of enunciation and the subject of statement *folded* together – the “identity” or “I” appearing as an individuation of the “self” or “unconscious” – as he felt himself “lose control,” and slip toward patterns of addiction. To understand why Ryan (and others) feel OEH media to be so “powerful,” consider the point by which Ryan’s subjectification commenced: a clip, one that interpolated Ryan into a particular “mental reality” relative to its affects – submissive, entranced, intoxicated, “consuming more of this content” than “intended.”¹²⁷ The erotic hypnotists in such addiction clips (as is the case with several of the files shared with me by Ryan), encourage the user to “say it,” to respond to their injunctions with a compliant, “yes, I am an addict” or “I’m a loser,” which is then reinforced by the hypnotic confirmations: “good,” or “you’re pathetic, useless.”¹²⁸ Through this performance, Ryan becomes “bound” to these statements in “conformity” with the dominant reality (the role-playing dynamic wherein Ryan is hypnotically dominated by a hypnotist), effectuating the instatement of an addict: “*I am an addicted loser.*”

Thus, in summary, the OEH assemblage generates components (“several points,” such as the computer screen, the mediated file, intoxicants, a credit card) and circulates affects (new intensities and capacities opened up in Ryan in relation with these components, an embodied potential for arousal, heightened or divergent sexual experiences, sustained periods of fixation), which enact a new mental state (Ryan’s allusions to “not thinking straight,” time slippage, suggestibility and submissiveness, feeling “trippy” or “fucked up”) which issues a subject of enunciation. Next, by the subjectifying process described above – the vector between affects and identity, the downward pointing arrow in the diagram –

126 Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.”

Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre, no. 2 (1990), 271

127 *Fieldwork 1*, 7

128 *Fieldwork 3*

the subject of enunciation “recoils” into the subject of statement, the “addicted loser”, “*to the point that the subject of the statement resupplies subject of enunciation for another proceeding.*”¹²⁹ This recoiling happens by the two being folded together, the “addicted loser” (an illusory identity) becoming actualized as the “guarantor” of Ryan’s “I am” or the hypnotist’s “you are:” the fantasy of Ryan’s addiction thus makes itself real *by transforming subjectivity*. Further, this ultimately corresponds to a new “subjection” (the other, upward vector in the diagram), resupplying possibilities for Ryan to assemble with additional affects and points of subjectification, which addict the “addict” to more (ketamine, financial domination), further up and further in, on to the “supposed ideal:” the identity of an addicted slave, financially and sexually devoted to the hypnodom.

The second ring of the diagram, that of the assemblage of subjectivity, is therefore (necessarily) a dotted line – the affects of the wider OEH assemblage pass freely between its dashes, as do the identities acted out. Thus, a slight turn on my original research design, which set out to investigate how OEH *transforms* subjectivity: a response can be hazarded that what subjects and producers perceive as “transformations” and “change” happen on the level of *identity* – the constructed fictions of the self, which proliferate throughout all corners of OEH and take effect by manifold, overt forms of alteration. But by analyzing OEH as an assemblage, it becomes clear that something more radical, more pervasive is set into motion: the *production* of new subjectivity. As Isabelle Stengers says, “to tell about a force, or to feel it, to be affected by it, always means that an assemblage has been produced, or fabricated – a matter of art, or artificiality, never a testimony of wild authenticity.”¹³⁰ Subjectivity, as such an assemblage within others, does not preexist the forces that produce it and by assembling heterogeneous components together into a novel configuration, bodies are affected and new subjectivities are produced: the “transformation” interrogated by this research is not a visible shift from one determinant mode of being to another, but is instead covert, *dark* – a mediation between affects and acts, an *exchange of one subjectivity for another*. Simply put, subjectivity is transformed in this way: by *assembling differently*. How OEH transforms subjectivity is owed to the fact that it is an assemblage, replete with affects and identities, content, expression, forms, substances, and processes of subjectification by which all of these things constitute the *subject of OEH*.

3.2.2 Beginning from the Middle: Positioning (De)subjectification

The question remaining to be asked is, do these transformations necessarily gave way to subjection, or might the assemblage of OEH engender a new, emancipatory path for its *producers* and *hypnotic subjects* – a trajectory away from controlling or enclosing territorializations, identities captured and subsumed in the assemblages of state and capital? In the case of financial domination, what is observed is a process of subjectification that gets,

“transformed into subjection: on the one hand it involves being 'subject to someone else by control and dependence', with all the processes of individuation and modulation which power installs, acting on the daily life and the interiority of those it calls its subjects; on the other it

129 *Ibid.*

130 Stengers, Isabelle. “Experimenting with Refrains: Subjectivity and the Challenge of Escaping Modern Dualism.” *Subjectivity* 22, no. 1 (2008): 38–59. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2008.6>, 43

makes the subject 'tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge... Simultaneously, sexuality becomes organized around certain focal points of power.'"¹³¹

This notion of subjection draws from Foucault's work on subjectivity, wherein subjection denotes becoming "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge... a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to."¹³² As Deleuze and Guattari note above, there is a certain "power" at work within the processes of subjectification and subjection; Foucault makes this "power" plain by arguing that subjections are "merely the consequences of other economic and social processes: forces of production, class struggle, and ideological structures which determine the form of subjectivity."¹³³ Thus, the types of assemblages wherein subjectivities are produced also condition the possible modes of subjection. However, Ian Buchanan (writing in *Assemblage Theory and Method*)¹³⁴ posits that the affirmative or emancipatory life never surpasses or exceeds its affective emplacement within assemblages – there is no full and final, ecstatic passage beyond power relations and the forces (re)producing subjectivity (such as the present forms of capital) that does not end in death; rather, "life occurs in the middle," as we find ourselves,

"always in the middle of things – our job, our love life, our interests, our passions and so on – such that any attempt to grasp contemporary life must find some way to take account of the way we are gripped (by multiple sets of double pincers, that is, assemblages) on all sides by the things we choose and (as Žižek says) the things we are forced to choose. Deleuze and Guattari are not voluntarists; they don't think one can simply opt out of a difficult situation. Rather, for them, it is always a matter of engineering escapes, of finding the means to build and execute the assemblages one needs to de-stratify, just a little, and make one's getaway. But we cannot escape everything, all at once, because that too is a kind of death. So we must choose our lines of flight carefully. Whatever we retain after we have made our getaway is our strata: it is the bedrock of our existence."¹³⁵

While the potential for subjection is a clear and present danger, something like financial domination via hypnosis could never occur (for Ryan, or anyone else) were it not for the layering in of the assemblages of capital, pornography, addiction – as diagrammed in the previous chapter – which, as noted above, articulate their own "forces of production, class struggle, and ideological structures." But could the assemblage of OEH yet be a means to "make one's getaway," into a (more) emancipated "bedrock of existence?" Given the niche of assemblages imbricating with OEH, there are other possible mid-points (*vis a vis* the layout of *Figure 3*; different mediations of subjectivity) between affects and identities that differ those Ryan assembled with. Thus, the following vignette returns once more to case of Sleepinggirl, who attests to numerous, visceral changes enacted throughout their (decade long) involvement in erotic hypnosis – ranging from alterations in sexuality, in belief and worldview, in lifestyle and career, in social relations, in body. While these are mediated by the very same dynamics of power-play and hypnosis – even domination – which shaped Ryan's experience, they do not appear to end in the same subjection.

131 Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777–95. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448181>. , 103

132 *Ibid.*, 781

133 *Ibid.*, 782

134 Buchanan, Ian, *Assemblage Theory and Method*,

135 *Ibid.*, 53

3.3 Distinguishing Between Empowerment and Exploitation in OEH – A Vignette of Domination as Affirmation:

“We do all sorts of stuff, we do pet play, we do cow play, we do kitty play, we do really intense bimbofication stuff where I can like barely form words and stuff like that, and we also have hallucinatory experiences. We do some amnesia stuff, but not a ton of amnesia stuff (it’s like, really difficult). We do some orgasm things, like mental orgasms and stuff. And I could keep just listing off activities, but those are not as exciting for me as just going into a really really, really deep trance. That is where a lot of my sexuality lies, that’s where my desire is; I want to feel like my ego is being destroyed or like my identity is being stolen.”

Sleepingirl smiled from my laptop screen, unabashedly describing the details of their history with and practice of OEH. She described the destabilizing process of discovering “where” her sexuality lies (beginning from her earliest sexual experiences), to the vulnerable, revelatory process of finding ways to express it. However, as she articulated these experiences my mind kept recalling Ryan’s relationship with OEH; it seemed that Sleepingirl had “assembled” with erotic hypnosis in a radically different way. The power-play which had, for Ryan, culminated in his financial domination (mediated by an unknown, unaccountable agglomeration of hypnodoms); the same sort of power-play (which Sleepingirl specified as “addiction and dependency... part of my core fetish”) resulted in a positive, productive form of “dependence.”¹³⁶

“dependency is a key, unavoidable ingredient in any kind of hypnotic relationship that is intimate and committed. Like, I just think that dependency is a part of it. And that dependency is part of normal relationships also, it’s just that hypnosis facilitates this kind of quality of desire that is very strong.”

A desire for dependency, leveraged by the power-play between a dominant and a subdominant, mediated by hypnosis – the same kind of thing which for others ends in harm and exploitation has been sustained as a sexually-affirmative, creative act by Sleepingirl (and the two others “kinksters” in her polyamorous relationship, as well as her relationships with other “masters” or male-dominant hypnotists). I was struck with not only this point of difference, but also the quality of her experiences of change and transformation; by subversively employing imaginaries and points of subjectification which would typically be construed as “objectifying” or misogynistic, she was able to acquire what was, for her, an unprecedented sense of “being more in tune with my own body and being more confident, I think that has been like really amazing part of the play that we’ve been doing.” Even bimbofication – among the most cartoonishly objectifying fantasies in erotic hypnosis, predicated on becoming an unintelligent, sex-obsessed, hyper-feminine caricature of patriarchal beauty standards – had proven empowering for her:

136 In a sexological study, using ethnography to reorient popular conceptions of power-play and the notion of “dependence” on BDSM toward an emic understanding, Charlotta Carlström notes that “[o]ften we think of desire in terms of deficiency: if we desire something, it is because we lack it. But Deleuze reconfigures the concept of desire by contending that what we desire is a social formation, and in this sense, desire is always positive. Rather than seeing desire as the effect of something we are lacking, we can instead see it as a creative process, permeating everyday life.” In analyzing informants’ portrayals of their “dependency” on BDSM (often characterized with drug or addiction metaphors), Carlström perceives not a negative experience of deficiency engendering a pathological condition akin to substance abuse, but a creative process of becoming which the informants craved, and found inexhaustible. Carlström, Charlotta. “BDSM, Becoming and the Flows of Desire,” 407, 412

Bimbofication is one of my absolute, most favorite things in this world... It has produced a lot of very visible, real changes in my life and my appearance and my mannerisms. And that's one of me and Mr. Dream's shared, core kinds of fetishes – about both the intelligence-reduction kind of thing, and the hyper-feminization, to sort of focus on looks over smarts... there is an actual change in focus, I would say, and there are moments where you could markedly say about me that, 'Oh, her, she's less smart.'"

Thus bimbofication has, for Sleepinggirl, enacted a process of subjectification not unlike the one described in the previous section, wherein a "doubling" occurred, by which a mental reality came into conformity with a dominant reality, folding and reinforcing, making fantasy real by showing it to be so: "like, I'm not as good at math as I used to be... and is that a result of brainwashing? Or is that a result of me not being close to college anymore? It's probably not being close to college anymore, but we adopt that into the feeling of not being smart." Further, this overall sense of change – transforming into a "bimbo" – was doubly reinforced by what Sleepinggirl described as physical changes, and modifications in sexuality:

"getting me to be not just okay, but *very* enthusiastic about certain sex acts. Like, oral particularly. When we were first starting our relationship [that between Sleepinggirl and her hypnotic partner and "master," Mr. Dream] I remember we had a conversation and I told him, "I'm really not interested in doing sexual things..." For me personally, I feel that my identity is somewhere in the asexual-ish spectrum. Grey asexual. I'm usually pretty sex repulsed, and really don't tend to like penises. That's not my jam. And so I told him, "This is not something I really want to do in our relationship. But if you can change my mind on that, if you can brainwash me into wanting to do it, that's fair game." And yeah, it took like two years, but we're there. We're there, to the point that it's a big focus of my own sexuality now – pleasing him sexually. That's one of those huge changes."

Now, not only had the themes of addiction and dependence been recast for me, so too had the problematic of consent and non-consent in OEH. By framing the power-relations of submission-domination as aspects of a trust-based, dependent relationship, Sleepinggirl was able to negotiate a sort of informed consent of non-consent: she explicitly gave her partner permission to change her mind into wanting what she, at the time, did not want. This signaled to the overlapping of another assemblage, one that had been adjacent to Ryan's experience of OEH, but which had not shaped it: the assemblage of BDSM, wherein balanced, trust-based practices feature heavily. Her emphasis on "community" – its care, safety, need for protection – as an inherent part of her experience of erotic hypnosis matched with her commitment to deeply involved, long-term relationships: "Recently – it was a really exciting, big deal for me – I was able get to orgasm with just nipples and no other simulation, and that was something he's been working on with me for a long time." Such experiences – those that Sleepinggirl said people on Reddit often complain they cannot achieve – are for her, *hard won*, contingent with other people, lifestyles, ethics. For Sleepinggirl, they are not "transactional," to be marketed and monetized and exchanged as part of a hyperinformatic, bio-capitalistic media regime; they are not "destructive," as they had been for Ryan; they are rather part of a (non-financial) commitment to sustaining a process:

“We were doing this scene,¹³⁷ and I was very, very deep. And by the time that I realized it was happening, I was on my back, eyes welled up, with lots of fractionation (so lots of going in and out), to the point that every time he was bringing me out I was heavily doubting reality. And there was something he said. I think it was like, “Can you imagine? Can you believe you are the person that you always dreamed of being as a little girl?” And for him to say that to me in a moment where I was already like, super fucked, caused me to dissociate in such a way that suddenly I thought, “Nope, what’s happening isn’t reality – this is not real, this is a dream, I am not me, he’s not real, I must be hallucinating this.” It’s not often that I get to a point where all of my faculties at once are telling me, the world around you is not what it seems to be. But I was there. And it took me a really long time to come out of that place. I remember opening my eyes and seeing him and just like trying to touch him and trying to figure out what is going on and what is real. And if you look up online what was happening to me you get results like psychosis – and I’m like, ‘am I fetishizing psychosis?’ I have this experience of truly being completely detached from the real world, and that’s really exciting to me, yes – that is my sexuality, for some reason. And, you know, I’m gonna remember that experience for a long time... So I would say those are the kinds of experiences that, for me, are most exciting: when I really get to a place where I feel like, ‘I’m gone.’ That’s what I want.”

3.3.1 Bimbofication without Misogyny – The Possibility of Desubjectification in OEH

Elizabeth Rigal defines Deleuze’s *desubjectification* as “an abolishment of the alienated form under which the individual is constituted in a subject, for the benefit of a subjectivation [sic] without subjections.”¹³⁸ The description of Sleepinggirl’s hypnotic experience in the final paragraph of the vignette – getting “to a place where I feel like, ‘I’m gone’” – is echoed in a statement from *A Thousand Plateaus*: “The power of this affect sweeps me away,” so that “the Self (Moi) is now nothing more than a character whose actions and emotions are desubjectified.”¹³⁹ This is all done for a singular purpose:

“To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. *We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied.*”¹⁴⁰

In this way, desubjectification does not mean exiting or escaping subjectification, but rather finding ways in which the processes of subjectification do not end in subjectation; in other words, the “self” is still there, but its actions and emotions are not performed or engendered in relation to a dominant identity. The “I” – the subject of statement – is no longer required for actualizing the potential of an assemblage’s affects, and identity does not recoil into the self. Thus, in Sleepinggirl’s case, an affirmative potential presents itself: bimbofication without misogyny, domination without subjugation, dissociation without alienation, subjectification without subjectation – the erotic hypnosis Sleepinggirl assembles with is not subsumed by the assemblages of capital, pornography or the Internet. Rather, in the expression “I’m gone,” there opens a

137 An erotic role-playing event, that pertaining to hypnosis or more broadly, any of the fetishes expressed within BDSM and Kink. – *Fieldwork 4*

138 Souladié, Yannick. “15. Nietzsche, Deleuze: Desubjectification and Will to Power.” *Nietzsche and the Problem of Subjectivity*, 2015, 394–410. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110408201-018>, 75

139 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 365

140 *Ibid.*, 3 (emphasis added)

void of identity that informs a singularity of presence – the “I,” that subject of statement, is “gone,” but the enunciator remains. This gestures toward what Agamben posits of desubjectification:

“if instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the already improper and senseless form of individuality, humans were to succeed... in making of the proper being-thus [subjectification] not an identity and an individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity – if humans could, that is, not be-thus in this or that particular biography, but be only *the* thus [desubjectification], their singular exteriority and their face, then they would... enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects.”¹⁴¹

Agamben’s argument, however, remains premised on a philosophical (and poetic) postulation – OEH, even as it exists for Sleepinggirl and her partners, does not constitute a utopian “community without presuppositions,” just as it does not entail a permanent, transcendent “singularity” of existence. For instance, the next statement (following the words “I’m gone”) could imply the folding in of a subject of statement, and a movement toward identity – “that’s what *I* want.” There is not a simple binary within the assemblage of OEH – between processes of exploitation or subjection, and emancipation or desubjectification – but rather a *continuum*; thus I will point to a third ethnographic case which further highlights the ethical ambiguity of subjectification in OEH, before returning to the cases of Sleepinggirl and Ryan.

3.3.2 Solicited by a Sub: A Vignette of Text Hypnosis

Late one night I discovered a text message that had sat buried in my Discord DMs, unnoticed for months, and I felt a twinge of pain upon noticing my mistake; it is not often that someone reaches out to me, asking about erotic hypnosis – almost always the other way around. I typed out an apologetic reply as soon as I opened the chat, hoping that they would still be interested in talking. I wondered how they found me, and why they were reaching out with a direct message:

“Hi, how are you? When did you get interested in hypnosis? I’m a guy, so you might be more interested in my girlfriend haha”

Strange. What connection did we have? I checked the profile and saw that we shared 3 mutual servers, all related to OEH. I opened up the servers and discovered that, on one of them, there was a mandatory introduction channel (wherein users become verified by filling out and sharing a questionnaire detailing their interests, “kinks,” bios, etc.). There, I had expressed my intentions to join the server in an ethnographic research capacity, inviting anyone who might be interested in participating to message me directly. It seemed that this had finally happened. But as I would come to find out, on servers in which roleplaying and digital LARPing feature heavily, characterizing yourself as a “researcher” open to “participants” who would want to be interviewed may be critically misinterpreted – this had also finally happened. We started with small talk, wherein I took my chance to reiterate that I was, in fact, *really* just a researcher. However, as their responses began to increasingly indicate that they were, to some degree, performing a role, I suspected that they imagined me to be doing the same. I laughed in spite of my frustration, because it was obvious that the more I tried to convey my purpose and keep our exchange “on

141 Agamben, Giorgio 1942-, and Michael Hardt. *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 64

track,” the more it appeared that I was “playing the part” of a researcher. I was trapped. I tried redirecting with a specific question, asking how they initially developed an interest in hypnosis. They replied by discussing a specific video, the first hypno clip they ever watched, and one they used “about 15 times:”

“I did feel REALLY relaxed but I could only remember about half of the video and I'm pretty sure I did not fell asleep. The description said it had a trigger, deep sleep, but I'm not really sure how those works... My experience is a bit hard to describe... It felt similar every time I watched it, after a while it felt like I was drawn into a tunnel. The last thing I remember is reaching a staircase with a large black door at the bottom, and it felt like I was floating around... this is so fascinating, just talking about this reminds me of watching that video, it feels like my body is going num”

I was confused by this response, knowing enough by then (after having immersed in OEH communities on Discord and other platforms for nearly a year), to understand that one does not casually share a “trigger:” the word or phrase that is used by hypnotists for inducing or deepening an entranced state, or inciting particular mental or bodily states – everything from amnesia or intelligence reduction to physical movements or hands-free orgasm. Thus sharing a trigger (“deep sleep”) is not only a sort of entrustment – a symbolic handover of control – but a statement of intention, on the part of the hypnotic subject. However, I remained resistant to this intention (to be hypnotized) as it conflicted with my own; not wanting to waste an opportunity to engage a responsive informant, I decided to make one last attempt at salvaging the conversation by asking for their permission to formally start the interview. Their one word response – “yes” – did not inspire confidence, but I proceeded anyway, returning to the topic of the hypno clip, to which they responded,

“now it feels like my entire body is melting into my chair”

Perfect. I felt helpless, all of my effort to make something out of this chat appeared ever more pathetic in the face of the sheer, unflinching will of this sub. I had only recently researched the phenomenon of “text” hypnosis, which is exactly what it sounds like – live, text-based online hypnosis. My findings from that ethnography made it clear that not only is it a wildly popular, accessible form of hypnosis across Discord platforms (with many channels designated for an online hypnosis that does not contain any images at all, but is rather mediated by live voice or text-based chatrooms), but its practitioners argue that it truly does “work;” while some users note their inability to fall into a trance due to typing or visual distraction, others are quick to point out that while it does not work for everyone all the time, it can be a powerful tool in the right hands.¹⁴² It seemed that my “interview” participant was, needless to say, familiar with this kind of hypnosis. They stopped responding to my questions, repeating things like “dont know, “hard to think.” I finally indicated that this was not was not what I had signed up for, politely expressing that I would like to help them, but that, “i'm not experienced in hypnotizing.” “Yes,” was their response.

Thus the conversation reached a tipping point: either wish them luck and extricate myself from the chat, or go with it. I took a minute to consider my options, but I felt oddly compelled; this person had obviously mistaken my intentions, but I felt that we were by now too far to turn back. Therefore I inquired, finally acknowledging what they had already been signaling to for several minutes, with their one word responses: “Are you in a trance now?” “Yes,” they said, which was not a surprise. It was time to commit,

142 Erickson. “Hypnosis and Tect - How to Hypnotize by Text Message.” HypnoSociety.com, December 16, 2019.

<https://hypnosociety.com/how-to-hypnotize-by-text-message/>.

responding: “yes you are.” “When did you drop?” “After telling you about hypnosis video.” “Yes,” I affirmed, “it made you drop... it made you drop when you typed two words... do you remember the words?” “Deep sleep.” “Good,” I said, parroting the hypno-speak I had grown accustomed to.

Stating that I felt uncomfortable and more than a little embarrassed would be an understatement. This was not something I ever imagined I would – or could – do. But over what was nearly an hour of text-based hypnosis (which I kept out of explicitly erotic territory – it would have been too far a stretch), I found myself calling on the very techniques, dramaturgy, and language I had immersed with throughout the past year. I surprised myself, needless to say; not only did I ultimately consent to hypnotizing someone, I had done a decent job of it, if their messages the following day are to be believed. But most importantly, I was forced into a position in which I, personally, had to negotiate the ethical quandaries of OEH: in light of everything I had researched up until that point, if the participant was truly in a hypnotic state, what I said and did could have a range of positive or negative effects. This led me to employing the techniques I had become familiarized with – primarily, the suggestion or (emically) the “implantation” of new triggers – to affect the sub in a way that I felt could be beneficial, or in the very least, harm-reducing: using the word *vapor* to achieve dissociated, euphoric, or relaxed states without the need for drug use: “you don’t need drugs to feel high... not anymore... the real vapor is here... in deep sleep...” Whether or not they (like Ryan) used drugs in conjunction with OEH, and regardless of the effectiveness of my ham-fisted hypnosis methods, I was content to know that I had not taken the exchange lightly.

After having been “woke up” from their entrancement by a phone call, they asked if I would hypnotize them more often, and communicated the fetishes they sought to enact, which involved a rather complex kink: to hypnotize them into believing that their girlfriend is falling in love with me, and additionally, as they put it, “make ME want my girlfriend to fall in love with you,” despite wanting “to keep her all to myself.” I declined, gently excusing myself from further participation in the hypnosis practice (and erotic fantasies); although I don’t plan to hypnotize again (in any form), I thanked them for what was a fascinating, if not challenging experience. It was an exchange in which I myself underwent a transformation of sorts, even if a more symbolic, performative one – into a researcher-hypnotist.

3.3.3 “I’m Gone:” How to Desubjectify by Fetishizing Psychosis

What I had failed to properly consider, prior to the would-be interview in the preceding vignette, was the fact that I too had assembled with OEH, albeit in a different manner than my informants; rather, by way of my own process of immersion and observation, I became a part of the assemblage. Both the assemblage of OEH and *academia* overlapped in my (temporary) position as a researcher-hypnotist, conditioning my approach to the performance of this role by my investment in the latter assemblage’s *formal expressions*, such as codes of conduct and the ethics statement of the American Anthropological Association (see Chapter 1). Further, my experience can itself be, according to this chapter’s framework, described as a process subjectification – points of subjectification (the interviewee, text-based hypnosis, a computer screen, a private Discord chat) affected a process by which the subject of enunciation (my own mental reality) issued a subject of statement, performed in acts (the mediation of hypnosis, the implanting of triggers) and illusory identity (the “ethically minded” researcher-hypnotist). However, this was an ephemeral “transformation,” if it can indeed be qualified as such; I did not exchange the identities of “researcher” or “student” for “hypnotist,” and while the relational event of hypnosis opened up a novel

capacity to affect and be affected, those affects did not engender a significantly altered sense of self. While Sleepinggirl's and Ryan's hypnotic experiences speak to the destructive and generative potentials of subjectification in OEH, there are also more banal experiences between these, and for the very same reason the intense ones exist: the intermingling of other assemblages, modulating OEH's affects and delimiting the possibilities of both subjection and desubjectification. It is therefore possible for HexLatex to, as they did in our interview, at once intimately involved themselves in producing *dronification* platforms and content, and at the same time maintain that they "don't focus on the sexual aspect of this at all – that is a personal preference. A lot of the dronification community revels in the sexual aspect of being a drone and that's perfectly fine, it's just not what I personally do."¹⁴³ They further suggest that many others who enjoy the influence of dronification media and ethos revel particularly in the idea that, "drones are productivity machines that focus on completing tasks as efficiently as possible," for which reason, Hex argues, it's "not unfair to assume that most people who engage with dronification come from a culture where 'productivity' is highly valued. They also typically live in an environment filled with distraction and a feeling that they are not getting as much done as they could." Here lies the evidence of another assemblage – that of *work* or *labor*, where *productivity* factors as a *substantive expression*. This owes, once more, to the fact that our emplacement within the world, within assemblages of assemblages, conditions the possibilities of subjectification according to the organization of those assemblages – there is no exit. What Buchanan warns rings true: "we cannot escape everything, all at once, because that too is a kind of death."¹⁴⁴ Consider what was for Ryan a harrowing experience of desubjectification, during a particularly intense "intox" session:

"I nearly had a *total loss*... but at the last moment, I called out, I called my name out. And I remembered who I was, as I was like hanging by a tether. I don't know what that would have done, but I think that could have been really bad. So yeah, I screamed my name, and still I could hardly walk... I gathered up everything around me, started trying to name the things around me... Orange juice. Water. Still traumatized by the experience, I started to be like, what the fuck? Like what was that? I tell myself to go to the shower, crawled into the shower and took my clothes off, had a shower... it was the weirdest the shower..."

The positive, fulfilling experience Sleepinggirl described (in subchapter 3.3) – a parallel, near "total loss" – manifest as something entirely different for Ryan, something horrifying and alien:

"If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected— is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever."¹⁴⁵

Desubjectification which is "too violent" and "without precautions" subverts any emancipatory potential by either casting the desubjectified person into oblivion or lodging them deeper into subjection; the interaction of drugs and online erotic hypnosis may provide a radical "freeing" of the subject of enunciation as psycho-hypnotic affects sweep it deftly away, but this desubjectification risks even more

143 *Fieldwork 4*

144 Buchanan, Ian, *Assemblage Theory and Method*, 53

145 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 161

devastating forms of subjection:¹⁴⁶ imprisonment resulting from the acquisition and use of illegal substances, addiction that culminates in cycles of relapse and rehabilitation, psychosis that ends in institutionalization. Ryan's isolated, alienating usage of OEH – which was assembled with the pandemic lockdown and capital, absent from the communities and safety mechanisms and self-education of BDSM or kink – afforded him not only subjection, but terror. The moments which could have opened lines of flight, affects and events with desubjectifying potential, plunged him back down, “heavier than ever.” In contrast to this, Sleepinggirl's process of assembling with OEH seems to be an exemplar of how Deleuze and Guattari describe that desubjectification *should be done*: “lodge yourself [in an assemblage]” (kink, polyamory...), “experiment with the opportunities it offers” (“dependency” in erotic hypnosis, new sexualities...), “find an advantageous place on it” (her role as an educator, popularizer, and published author), “find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight” (asexuality deterritorialized in bimbofication, family deterritorialized in kinky polyamory), “experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.”¹⁴⁷

Sleepinggirl indeed “found” a profound movement of deterritorialization: desubjectification *through* the fetishization of psychosis. In developing a practice, she made the “I'm gone” – the voiding of identity – the object of her erotic hypnosis; Sleepinggirl's admission that this loss of ego fits with the clinical definition of psychosis lead her to ask, “am I fetishizing psychosis?” Thus, the loss of identity itself became, paradoxically, a *point of subjectification*, and a means for collapsing the process of subjection in on itself – a process which always involves a recoiling of the subject of enunciation into the subject of statement; in other words, conformity with an identity. However, when fetishizing non-identity in the context of OEH, a line opened up out of subjectivity, a new vector by which reality itself seemed, momentarily, to dissolve. However, Sleepinggirl did not “blow apart the strata” – what awaited her was not a lonely flat with a floor to crawl across, a glass of juice for a point of subjectification, a name to scream out, and a cold shower. It was her partner, a body to touch, a trusted one, one to depend on.

146 This is not to say that it necessarily leads to suffering or subjection, rather, the use of drugs may also be done in moderation and in the context of the kink assemblage: “while ‘extreme drinking’ and drug use to ‘annihilation’ might seem at odds with the stringent focus on safety in kink... Certain forms of both intoxication and kink can be seen as edgeplay, with participants seeking pleasure through a “controlled loss of control” for themselves and/or for others... For people experienced using drugs, the desired altered state of intoxication is not ‘annihilation’ but achieving a ‘sweet spot’ without tipping over into the excess that risks compromising the psychoactive experience and the health and wellbeing of the participant.” McCormack, et al. “Kink in an English Field,” 4

147 Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 161

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 Summarizing How Online Erotic Hypnosis Affects & Transforms Subjectivity

This thesis was guided by one primary research question, inquiring *how the OEH affects and transforms subjectivity*; while I do not offer a definitive answer incorporating all of the factors of subjectivity transformation (and production) that are necessarily at hand in such processes, I nonetheless propose that the research presented here might engender several responses. First, by starting from an inductive approach to online erotic hypnosis – which privileged an *emic* understanding of what OEH consists of – I was able to adapt my theoretical and methodological framework around the notion that, rather than merely representing a genre of pornographic “new media,” OEH is constituted by a wide array of agents and forces. In lieu of this, I suggest the gathering spectacles of online or digital “content” should not merely be reduced to categories which correspond to their most overt or exemplary facets, but should be interrogated as *assemblages*: this thesis demonstrates how OEH is one such assemblage, and that understanding the affectivity of its media requires investigating the organization of the components with which it emerges. This is to entertain the notion that such an approach may indicate a potential, under-explored bridge between disciplines – one that could take the sociopolitical inquiries and aesthetic theories of fields such as (new) media and internet studies, cybernetics, or (post)humanities in general, and fashion new concepts by concretizing them with particularized, empirical ethnographies of media assemblages.

Second, assemblage ethnography also bolstered an approach to understanding the complexities and contradictions within OEH; accounting for the range of experience – from (socially, economically, sexually, subjectively) affirmative, to (socially, economically, sexually, subjectively) destructive – necessitated a comprehensive overview of not only the assemblage of OEH, but the (so-called) “OEH niche” wherein it emerges. In this sense, part of what conditions the ethical viability of subjectification within OEH is the imbrication of other assemblages. The examples of my informants, as well as those observed in online ethnography, attest to the fact that no-one/thing assembles with anything else *tabula rasa*; my thesis therefore emphasizes that, while subjectivities should indeed be understood as creative productions, they nevertheless travel with us. Our histories, conditions, relations, privileges, limitations, contexts – these all modulate our processes of becoming. Utilizing the operations of subjectification, or indeed desubjectification, to open up novel potentials and accelerate past (or oppose) the forces of domination and subjection requires a careful, strategic negotiation: choosing what – or who – we assemble with. Whether or not OEH represents such possibility is not determined by what we, who look on from academic or reflective positions, may attribute as either virtuous or immoral – there is no essence here, in assemblages of assemblages. Such potentials are only determined by the organization of affects within which those on the inside assemble.

Third, and finally, I argue that OEH itself provides a unique and novel opportunity for research creation that exceeds the narrow scope of this thesis. What I am left with, having completed this project, is the sense that there is much more to be done, not only in offering additional or more fine-tuned responses to my research question, but exchanging this inquiry for others. For instance, one further line of questioning (which was under-represented here, due to the strictures of time and page count) may ask, *is the media of OEH pornographic, or (as its name implies) “erotic?”* What are the differences between these, and how might a philosophical approach to the concepts of *eros* and *desire* inform a new

understanding of OEH content and the people who produce and use it? This last remark is also given to admit my own limitations and quandaries in plotting a course through the “field” of OEH – I was repeatedly overwhelmed by not only the rigors of theorization, but sheer number of unknowns: manifold practices, concepts, histories, discourses, and objects presented themselves to me as either unfamiliar or drastically reframed, in unfamiliar contexts. Thus, despite my best efforts to not misrepresent individuals, communities, cultures, or to skew the image of OEH, I am aware that my knowledge and experience is severely limited. I hope that, despite this fact – and despite the intensified possibility of miscommunications and misunderstandings in light of the significantly *online* nature of my observations – my thesis offers its readers a balanced, informative study that (in the very least), leaves them with a galvanized curiosity over not only the ways in which OEH transforms subjectivity, but also an awareness of those things which they also assemble with and affect, and by which they are themselves affected.

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