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"EVERY 'ONE' AND EVERY 'THING' CAN BE LOVED": A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF NETWORKED SELF-REPRESENTATION BY THE OBJECTÙM SEXUALITY COMMUNITY

Kristen L. Cole

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**“EVERY ‘ONE’ AND EVERY ‘THING’ CAN BE LOVED”:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF NETWORKED SELF-
REPRESENTATION BY THE OBJECTUM SEXUALITY
COMMUNITY**

by

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B.A., Communication, San Diego State University, 2007

M.A., Communication Studies, Colorado State University, 2009

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Using rhetorical criticism informed by actor-network theory (ANT), in this dissertation I explore the emergence of queer identity and queer community building within the Objectum Sexuality Internationale Web site (OSI)—the largest source of information related to a community of over 300 hundred individuals who experience emotional and romantic desire towards objects. My goals in this study are (1) to identify and understand how rhetorical strategies are emergent and networked (rather than individually enacted) within the OSI Web site; and (2) how these emergent rhetorical strategies promote multiplicity of sexual desire and identity through the challenging of heteronormative and anthropocentric binaries and normativities via queer posthuman forms of love and connection.

Using an ANT informed rhetorical criticism, I identified four layers of communication that facilitate the emergence of actor networks within the OSI Web site: (1) translation—the process by which human actors depict experience in texts); (2) enactment—the process by which actors (human and object) interact in ways that create networks of action and agency); (3) representation—the process in which certain

macroactors (actors that appear as recurring and stable categories) present the interests of other actors within the network); and (4) teleaction—the movement of representations from place to place and over time through memory and text. Within these layers, I identified four categories of translation, thirteen macroactors, and four types of teleaction. The translations that emerge on the OSI Web site include how objectum sexuality became a term and community, what it means to be objectum sexual, how people who identify as objectum sexual have come to make sense of their experiences, and public pleas for acceptance regarding objectum sexuality. The macroactors that emerge include people, communication devices, purposes of OSI, orientation, animism, sensuality/intimacy, nonverbal communication, love, gender, attraction, marriage, medicalization, and the Red Fence. The processes of teleaction that emerge include verbal, nonverbal, hybrid, and symbolic actors.

These four layers then led to the emergence of four higher-level rhetorical dimensions. These include: (1) terminological dimension—the interrelationship between terms and the OS community; (2) ontological dimension—the emergence of a higher-level philosophy about the existence of beings and the meanings and modes of being, existing, living, and loving for OS; (3) axiological dimension—the emergence of criteria for ethical values and judgments in relation to OS; and (4) epistemological dimension—where the dimensions of ontology and terminology meet and the nature and scope of knowledge about OS is represented. Together, these four transcendent levels facilitate the rhetorical construction of the OS community and critiques of heteronormative/anthropocentric frames of love, desire, and sexuality.

Overall, these various strategies lead to two larger rhetorical moves: (1) OSI communicates and adapts to internal and external audiences; and (2) OSI rhetoric moves from specific meanings to larger paradigmatic shifts that reveal its function as a social movement within a single rhetorical text. This process of rhetorical strategy building positions OS within intelligible frameworks of understanding in order to: (1) provide information about OS that will mitigate fear and sensationalism and facilitate acceptance; (2) construct an OSI community identity and human-object desire more generally; and (3) direct people away from heteronormative and anthropocentric worldviews and toward a queer posthuman worldviews of love, desire, and connection.

Keywords: objectum sexuality, queer theory, posthuman, actor-network theory

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

In 2009, the BBC premiered the documentary *Married to the Eiffel Tower: Landmark Sex*. This program features U.S. American Erika Eiffel, a self-identified objectum-sexual (a person who has loving and sexual ties to objects) who decided to symbolically pronounce her love for bridges through commitment to the Eiffel Tower in a public marriage ceremony. Erika is one of the developers of the objectum-sexuality (OS) community Web site. The OS community includes over 300 hundred individuals who experience “a pronounced emotional and often romantic desire towards developing significant relationships with particular inanimate objects.”¹ The definition of what counts as an object for the OS community is left fairly open ended.

OS persons express romantic interests toward varied objects, such as bridges, buildings, cars, musical instruments, sporting equipment, and amusement rides, with some even expressing desire for less material objects such as words, syntax, languages, and accents (separate from those who speak with accents). For those who identify as OS, their experiences of love and intimacy are little understood and often delegitimized by anthropocentric heteronormativity. Although the term *objectum-sexual* denotes identification with affective-sexual ties and longings toward objects that are deemed by outsiders as inanimate, to objectum-sexuals objects are soul-bearing companions. This perspective is founded in animism, the belief that “natural phenomena” possess a “spiritual essence”² and are capable of reciprocating love.

¹ This definition comes from the Wikipedia entry on OS, which was authored by the OS community and is promoted on their Web site as a valid source of general information about the OS community.

² This definition comes from the Wikipedia entry on animism, which readers are directed to via the OS Web site.

Although *Married to the Eiffel Tower: Landmark Sex* has been denounced by the OS community because of its overtly sensationalistic portrayals of OS, since its air date there have been over a dozen more media portrayals of OS released, including many that have been embraced and promoted by the OS community for creating positive visibility. Mainstream media sources that have capitalized on the popularity of OS's unique public appeal include an episode of the *National Geographic* program *Taboo*, titled "Forbidden Love;" an episode of the *Tyra Banks Show*; news programming segments on programs such as *Good Morning America* and *ABC News*; and fictionalized characters who identify as objectum-sexuals in television series such as *Boston Legal* and *Nip/Tuck*. Other, less mainstream, public sources of information about OS include many online news articles and blog forums, a few academic articles, and the OS Internationale Web site.

By far the largest source of information about the OS community is the Objectum-Sexuality Internationale Web site (www.objectum-sexuality.org), which was founded by self-identified objectum-sexual Eija-Riitta Eklöf Berliner-Mauer, from North Sweden, and further developed with the help of OS members Erika Eiffel, from the U.S., and Oliver Arndt, from Germany. The site features information about how OS members define and describe OS, how the OS Internationale Web site was started, testimonials about living as OS, and links to external information about OS that have been deemed as acceptable by the community (some self-authored and some authored by mainstream or other media sources). Although authors of the site explain its primary function as a way to help those who identify as OS find, connect with, and support one another, much of the site functions to simultaneously challenge and correct negative misconceptions about OS and cultivate an ethos of respect from outsiders.

Many outside media outlets have categorized objectum-sexuality in unfavorable ways. Often it is described as a psychological disorder (Thadeusz, 2007), a capitalist fetish (Clemens & Pettman, 2004), a product of Asperger's syndrome (Lynn, 2009; Marsh, 2010), a fantasy refuge for victims of sexual and emotional abuse (LeMouse, n.d.), or a perverse form of masturbation (Dennison, 2011). Overall, OS has been framed in documentary television and film, editorial news articles, Internet blogging, and even academic research as pathological, unnatural, and a practice symptomatic of late capitalism's alienation.

I came to this research project after seeing the documentary *Married to the Eiffel Tower* on the BBC television channel one afternoon. The tensions I saw occurring from the interviewer's questions and the hesitant responses offered by OS persons being interviewed in the film sparked my curiosity about how OS persons conceive of and communicate object desire. Therefore, I decided to do an Internet search on the topic in order to find out more. Coming across the OS Internationale Web site, I was intrigued by the proactive rhetoric in which the community seemed to be engaging as a response to unfavorable public reactions. The mainstream media's increasing fascination with OS, the public's resistance to OS as non-(hetero)normative sexual desire, and the OSI Web site's response to these fascinations and resistances, then, led me to explore the OS community from a communication standpoint.

Having a general interest in the link between communication, culture, and social justice, the OSI Web site specifically interests me at the level of how certain forms of loving and living are proliferated and restricted through communication practices. Therefore, because the concept of object-desire intertwines and complicates issues of

gender, sexuality, and humanism, the theoretical projects of feminist studies, queer studies, and posthuman studies all provide useful foundations for questioning and understanding the communication of object-desire.

There are many different approaches to feminist and queer theory. For the purposes of this project, I pull from feminist and queer theory the perspective that gender and sexuality are socially constructed and thus fluid rather than stable. I explore the social construction of gender and sexuality by looking at the ways OSI disrupts (hetero)normativity and the presumed stability of gender identity, such as challenging restrictive binaries and heteronormative/anthropocentric categories, definitions, and perspectives. Therefore, although I recognize that some approaches to queer theory challenge the use of categories and labels all together, this study takes the approach that categories, definitions, and labels are necessary for communication and queer community building but exploring their socially constructed nature reveals how these categories are fluid, flexible, and can challenge normativity in favor of expanding possibilities of love and desire.

Specifically, I derive my own standpoint within feminism partly from hooks (2000), who suggests that “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. viii). Queer theory, is used to refer more specifically to the deconstructions of normative conceptions of sexuality in favor of the exploration of nonnormative modes of love, desire, and sex. Posthumanism is used to understand the deconstruction of the stability of the category *human* in favor of ontological understandings and perspectives outside of human exceptionalism, the belief that humans are hierarchically superior to all other entities. Therefore, my use of feminism in

conjunction with queer and posthuman perspectives refers to intersecting efforts to challenge, and ideally end, oppression perpetrated by the presumed stability of (hetero)normative standards of living and loving in order to invite and enact a plurality of lived experiences and modes of being.

Through the intersection of a feminist, queer, posthuman approach to OS, I examine the rhetorical processes that emerge within the OS Internationale Web site to simultaneously communicate human-object desire to other potential OS persons and to (hetero)normative publics. I explore the OS Internationale Web site in order to develop an understanding of how human-object desire emerges in communication while also exploring the ways that discursive practices both construct and regulate knowledge of sexuality (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003a).

Since the object is the focus of the OS community and typically is not centered in the communication discipline, in the following sections I provide an overview of current interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspectives in human-object relations. The various perspectives on human-object relations and the place of the object in the human worldview provide a rationale for studying object-human relations. I then discuss how these perspectives can be expanded using a constitutive-networked view of sexuality and community that accounts for the emergence of human-object relations in communication. The rhetorical strategies of the OS Internationale community Web site are analyzed in chapter 4 as a case study for understanding this process of emergence and its implications for the study of gender and sexuality more generally.

Rationale and Purpose

Human-Object Relations

The development of human-object relations through communicative interaction has been explored to varying degrees by scholars in fields such as sociology and philosophy (Baudrillard 1987, 1990, 1996; Knorr Cetina, 1997; Mead, 1938). These perspectives reveal a long standing curiosity with the impact of objects in forming social worlds, including the taken-for-granted assumptions of object worlds as non-interactive, and the importance of continuing a line of deep theoretical thought and reflexivity about human-object relations through contemporary research. These explorations provide discussion, either explicitly or through later interpretations, about communication with and about objects and point to what can be gained from analyzing the interactional dynamics between humans and objects. This section highlights a few dominant ways that human-object relations have been conceived of in relation to communication and how a feminist/queer/posthuman approach can contribute to these literatures. This research is used as a springboard for understanding the relevance of studying the rhetoric of OSI and of adding OSI rhetoric to conversations about human-object relations in order to expand their depth and scope.

The work of Mead (1938) in *Philosophy of the Act* is part of a series of works that outline the theory of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism discusses the construction of the self through interaction with others and things, and vice versa. For example, Mead (1938) suggests that “it is only as the organism first directly experiences the resistances of other things that it perceives itself as a physical thing” (p. xxvii). In other words, “the organism perceives itself as a thing no sooner than it perceives other

things” (p. xxviii). Using Mead’s work to theorize a sociology of physical objects, McCarthy (1984) further suggests that, “For Mead, the minded organism of self is fashioned out of a dynamic process of interaction with physical and human objects” (p. 106). This interaction is dependent upon feeling, touching, and experiencing things. Contact with things allows for the construction and maintenance of self and social identities and simultaneously constitutes the reality of object. By engaging in “cooperative activities with objects,” where both self and thing engage in a mutual process of resistance to one another and interaction with one another, selves and objects experience and understand action and effort in relation to one another.

Mead (1938), therefore, acknowledges the potential and importance of interaction between humans and objects. However, his emphasis on this interaction as central to the development of the self (re)positions human consciousness as the defining factor of this relationship. For example, McCarthy (1984) states that, for Mead, “although objects do exist independent of the consciousness of individuals, nevertheless they possess certain characteristics by virtue of their relations to consciousness or mind, which they would not possess apart from those relations.” Moreover, his emphasis on touch as central to human-object relations and the perception of self and objects in relation to one another, suggests that the “the reference relation is a perfectly objective affair. It is not a ‘mental state’ but a matter of response relations between parts of the environment” (p. xxx). In other words, although nonverbal communication (touch) between humans and objects is mutually constructive of perception and being, these perceptions are predominantly human-centric (consciousness of the mind) and not created or sustained through mental processes of connection.

In contrast, the work of Baudrillard (1987, 1990, 1996) engages more with the unpredictability of the communicative power of objects. The work of Jean Baudrillard in texts such as *Revenge of the Crystal* (1990), *The System of Objects* (1996), and *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987) has provided some of the more substantial contributions to understanding human-object relations from a communication perspective. Throughout the evolution of his work, Baudrillard has engaged with communication and the power of objects on different levels. In *The System of Objects* (1996), he suggests that objects are often classified based on their utility; in contrast, he proposes that questions need to be asked about: “how objects are experienced, what needs other than functional ones they answer, what mental structures are interwoven with—and contradict—their functional structures, or what cultural, infracultural or transcultural system underpins their directly experienced everydayness” (p. 4). Therefore, he suggests that we should not be:

Concerning ourselves with objects as defined by their functions or by the categories into which they might be subdivided for analytic purposes, but instead with the processes whereby people relate to them and with the systems of human behavior and relationships that result therefrom. (p. 4)

Baudrillard’s answers to these questions begins with the argument that the value of objects depends upon both their “utility” and “possession,” suggesting that “sign-value” creates a relationship between humans and objects where it is not that people personify objects, but that objects personify human relationships (1996). In other work, Baudrillard suggests that there is no difference between “someone” and “something” (1987), ultimately seeing the proliferation or overabundance of objects as a form of

seduction. He suggests that subjects now surrender to the seduction of objects, which then rule the subject.

Overall, Baudrillard explicitly engages with the communicative power of the object and addresses the central function of the anthropomorphized object within the contemporary (media) moment. The acknowledgment of the ways objects can surprise and seduce (communicate) through rhetorics of advertising and consumption is an important nod to object presence (1996) within communication. However, this acknowledgment still falls short in that he does not necessarily take seriously the object as active and desiring and in many ways does not answer his original question about the function of objects in everyday relations. For example, he often equates the object with characteristics of negativity and passivity, suggesting that the defining feature of the object's power is indifference (1987). Additionally, he suggests that the object is seductive and "seduction is not desire;" rather, "it is that which plays with desire, which scoffs at desire. It is that which eclipses desire, making it appear and disappear" (1987, p. 67). Lastly, his focus on practices and discourses of consumption obscures engagement with interpersonal connections such as love and sex outside of dependency upon systems of capitalism. An analysis of OS Internationale rhetoric provides a more complex understanding of the ways that people can relate to objects and the dynamic object-human relationships that arise within processes of communication. This dynamic process is more prominently addressed in the work of Knorr Cetina (1997).

Knorr Cetina (1997) considers human-object relations from a more interpersonal perspective. Looking at the interaction between humans and objects in what she deems "expert cultures," which are contexts where researchers develop significant relationships

with objects of study, she argues that too often we consider the impact of objects based on either “intrinsic valuation [commodities]” or “external usefulness [instruments]” (p. 12). For example, she suggests that for Freud, object relations are not without human power and domination, and Habermas relies predominantly on notions of instrumentality when conceiving of human-object relations. On the other hand, although Heidegger includes a “concept of caring and concern,” this approach is “lost on today’s concept of instrumental action” (p. 11). Finally, for her particular study, she suggests that the “sort of conspicuous consumption and the exchange of goods as symbols which ensues from this abundance [Baudrillard], nor the Marxian notion of a commodity defined by labor seem to entail the form of object relations found in expert cultures” (p. 11). Instead, Knorr Cetina proposes a theory of object-oriented sociality.

In Knorr Cetina’s theory of object-oriented sociality, objects are seen as objects of knowledge, which means they have the “capacity to unfold indefinitely” (p. 12). Because of this, sociality with objects includes three parts: understanding these relationships through Lacan’s notion of lack and wanting, through “mutual ‘communicative’ partaking,” and through object solidarity (sharing of a lifeworld). The concept of lack allows us to see that because objects are continually being “materially defined” and “acquire new properties and change the ones they have,” they are always only representations of themselves and can never be fully attained, thus leading to a wanting of knowledge that can never be fulfilled or final (p. 13). Mutual communicative partaking refers to the “interweaving of wants and lacks” (p. 16)—when a scientist “becomes” their object of study, and there is a “cross-over between subject and object (part of the subject entering or ‘becoming’ the object and vice versa)” (p. 18). Object solidarity, then, occurs

through “human beings’ altruistic behavior toward an object world,” which often naturally develops through mutual communicative partaking because “relationship and knowing are interwoven—one cannot be considered without the other” (p. 23).

Knorr Cetina’s theory of object-oriented sociality makes it possible to begin conceiving of human-object relationships as a form of interpersonal connection and points to the ways specific communities (mathematical and scientific researchers) communicate these connections in everyday contexts. Additionally, her work points away from anthropocentric social understandings by distinguishing “various types of sociality with and through objects” that encourage the “interpersonal variety of social forms” (p. 25). Finally, Knorr Cetina’s discussions of mutual communicative partaking and object solidarity reveal the importance of acknowledging and exploring the mutual sharing of lifeworlds, which is a project imperative to the OS community.

However, Knorr Cetina resists conceiving of human-object relations “simply as positive emotional ties” (p. 11). She suggests that construing object relationships as “symmetric, non-appropriative, etc.” provides wrong connotations (p. 11). Even though she observed what could be considered love and desire for research objects in her study, she resists conceiving of these object relationships in romantic and sexual ways for the sake of propriety. Knorr Cetina focuses instead on how object relations have changed concepts of the self, concepts of individuality, and concepts of sociality within scientific, expert, and knowledge communities. Also, similarly to Mead (1938) and Baudrillard (1987, 1990, 1996), for Knorr Cetina (1997) sociality and communication with and about objects is often considered in terms of the impact of the object on and in relation to

human consciousness rather than considering the possibility of objects having certain conscious interactive capacities.

A study of OS rhetoric, instead, shows us what human-object relations and sociality looks like in considering the mutual desire of objects and desire with objects. Mutual concern is more thoroughly explored in discussions of human-object relations that emerge from beliefs in animism. Animism, as mentioned earlier, is described as the basis of OS desire in OSI rhetoric. Therefore, these perspectives are more thoroughly discussed in the following section in order to position a study of OS amongst these literatures.

Animism

Discussions of human-object relations that position animism as their framework of understanding are becoming increasingly relevant in academic literature due to trends in understanding “ecologies of concern” (Bell, 2012) or networks of relationality that lead to more conscientious living (often times environmentally motivated). However, similar to the previously mentioned approaches to human-object relations, these discussions often neglect specific attention to sociomaterial relations motivated by and productive of loving and sexual desire. Additionally, these perspectives are often present within fields of study outside of communication and describe rhetorical processes as products of rather than productive of sociomaterial interaction. Finally, they neglect attention to non-verbal process of interaction that might mediate and facilitate communication with and about objects. Instead, they focus primarily on verbal actions of anthropomorphism that are tied to animism. Therefore, the following literatures provide entry into discussions of object-human relational rhetorics and also suggest justifications

for studying these rhetorics through the lenses of gender and sexuality as a way to contribute to emerging projects of conscientious and interconnected living.

As a spiritual worldview, animism is and has been a foundation of many cultures and existed long before its development as a term. However, the study of animism has become increasingly popular in understanding contemporary issues, particularly in disciplines such as archeology, anthropology, and sociology. Within these studies animism is generally defined in these approaches as “an ontology in which objects and other non-human beings possess souls, life-force and qualities of personhood” (Brown & Walker, 2008, p. 297). The difference between animism and anthropomorphism lies in “attributing characteristics of living things (e.g. sentience and spontaneous motion) to inanimate things and events” versus “attributing characteristics of humanity (e.g. language and symbolism) to non-human things and events, including other animals” (Guthrie, 2001, p. 157). These academic literatures are predominantly concerned with understanding the ways knowledge about relationships is cultivated, especially in the contexts of relational development with non-human actors, including the environment (e.g., Bird-David, 1999), plants (Degner, 2009), machines (Guthrie, 2000), musical instruments (Mills & Ferguson, 2008), and planet Earth more generally (Tacey, 2009). Often times these perspectives focus on the philosophical knowing or action of objects, considering the implication of animating objects such as interacting emotionally with an animate object versus practically with an inanimate object (Guthrie, 2000), or they focus on the importance of objects in the formulation and existence of society.

Within feminist/queer/posthuman approaches, anthropomorphism is more readily addressed; however, discussions of animism are often absent, and anthropomorphism is

primarily conceived of in terms of verbal communication, such as speaking on behalf of animals, nature, and objects. Often, these perspectives are generated based on theories of human-animal interaction, not human-object interaction, which take for granted discussions of animism under the presumption that human-animal relationships are always already animate. They also do not consider the ethical implications of non-verbal anthropomorphism, which OS rhetoric reveals as central to their own views of animism.

Expanding Human-Object Relations in Communication Studies

In order to build a communicative approach to human-object relations that more appropriately accounts for the rhetorical construction of OS love and desire, I employ a constitutive view of sexuality and community that accounts for the interactivity and collective agency of humans and objects in conversation. A constitutive view of sexuality and community places communication as the central mode of explanation in understanding interaction (Gergen, 1999; Hartmut, 2003). It suggests that things do not exist outside of communication but are made through communication (Hartmut, 2003). Therefore, definitions, explanations, and representations of sexuality and community are co-constructed through communication with other people (Gergen, 1999). These definitions, explanations, and representations construct social and symbolic orders, which in turn influence what is perceived as reality (Hartmut, 2003). It is through communication that these realities are made and re-made (Gergen, 1999). In other words, our realities are dependent upon the constant making and re-making of meaning in order to exist. There is no reality outside of communication. This view is key in understanding sexuality and community as communicative phenomena; however, it still locates agency within human actors' ability to communicate experience to other human actors.

Actor-network theory (ANT), developed from sociological approaches to science and technology by Latour (1996; 2005) and Law (1992) and taken up more recently in organizational communication studies by Cooren and Taylor (1997) and Taylor and Van Every (2000), accounts for agency as a constitutive process in and of itself, thus acknowledging the role and importance of non-human actors. The defining features of actor-network theory include: (1) an argument for the social as performative, or emergent; (2) a definition of action as a networked rather than an autonomous process; (3) an account of (communicative) interaction as socio-material; and (4) an overall challenging of traditional distinctions between subject and object through a proposal for agency as networked, socio-material interaction.

Overall, combining a social constructionist perspective with ANT compensates for the pre-determined demarcation between human and non-human actors that is evident in a social constructionist perspective and subsequent exclusion of non-human actors from theories of communicative constructions of reality. This combination also extends ANT in a way that accounts more specifically for communicative interaction. In other words, these two perspectives must be mutually taken into consideration when building and working from a communication based constitutive-networked approach to sexuality and community.

Adding OS to the Conversation

The only academic research that has been published specifically about objectum-sexuality, to date, is by cultural and media theorists Clemens and Pettman (2004). Generally, this research uses the online testimony of Eija-Riitta Eklöf Berliner-Mauer, self-identified objectum-sexual, as “inspiration” for theorizing the complex relationship

between subject(ivity) and object(ivity) in the twenty-first century, where technological advances and heightened dependence on consumption of these technologies are creating and regulating loving relationships with objects. Their main argument is that

we should not be overly hasty in judging Mrs. Eklof-Berliner-Mauer's love of object, for this love may be merely an intense version of something we all feel from time to time, and thus reveals something significant about an age which—at least since Marx—"is regulated by an ultimate object outside itself; consumption." (p. 40)

Clemens and Pettman's study briefly addresses communication in relation to human-object desire by suggesting that all human-to-human interactions are, in some way, a product of animism or a belief in the soul of others as the basis for mutual human interaction. Although they do not explicitly include objects in this claim, the premise that all interaction is guided by animism could be extended to account for object-human relations and desire. However, the researchers approach the topic of OS from a Marxist perspective, which assumes that human-object relations are premised on processes of labor-production-consumption value. This approach centers human intervention because desiring of objects is linked to processes of (human) labor and (human) consumption. Specifically, this perspective highlights the reflection and construction of the (human) self through desiring the labor-production-consumption value of an object. Therefore, desiring objects is a consequence of processes of labor and consumption rather than a dynamic and communicative relationship.

While Clemens and Pettman (2004) encourage readers not to judge OS, they themselves end with a pathological and perverse diagnosis of OS—a characterization the

community resists. Clemens and Pettman claim that contemporary technological advances and heightened dependence on consumption of these technologies is what is encouraging relationships with objects, not legitimate loving and sexual desire. Clemens and Pettman's argument reduces human-object desire to a pathology produced by a proliferation of consumption in late capitalism. This analysis and argument represent the epitome of the problematic rhetoric about object-human desire that much of the negative, resistant, and sensationalistic media report in response to OS. Clemens and Pettman's research only demonstrates the need for an approach to OS that seeks to eradicate troubling and often default renderings of human-object relationality and sexuality. Instead, the goal of this particular study is to understand how human-object relationships can also be conceived of as positive communicative and dynamic processes.

The study of OS Internationale rhetoric provides a starting point for understanding how complex concepts such as sexuality, desire, human, object, animism, and community all intertwine and emerge and what this means for contemporary understandings of communicating relational connections. The ways various queer communities, such as the OS community, flourish and perish in public contexts needs to be explored in order to account for the possibilities for and obstacles to constructing and communicating sex and sexuality. In particular, studying the public presence of queer communities facilitates an understanding of the development and existence of these communities within dominant cultural contexts. For example, in his explication of publics and counter publics, Warner (2002) suggests that analyzing public discourses of queer communities is important:

To bring some clarity to the process by which people have made dissident sexuality articulate; how they have come together around nonnormative sexualities in a framework for collective world making and political action; how in the process people have challenged the heteronormative framework of modern culture while also availing themselves of its forms; how those forms of collective action and expression mediate the sexualities and identities they represent; and how many of the central aspirations of the resulting queer culture continue to be frustrated by the ideological and material organizations of publics, both of dominant culture and queer culture. (p. 18)

Rhetorical constructions of LGBTQ communities have been explored previously in communication studies. These studies include understanding the communicative practices of specific queer communities (e.g., Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003b); emphasizing the rhetorical potential of archives for constructing queer pasts, presents, and futures (Morris, 2006); exploring the role of public memory in rhetorically constructing queer identities and communities (Morris, 2007); and theorizing the function of queerness—defined as the unpredictability of interpretation and use of rhetorical texts—in facilitating rhetorical agency (Rand, 2008). These perspectives point to the importance of considering communication within queer communities, communication as constructive of queer communities, and the possibilities for agency within communication as queer. Adding to and expanding queer rhetorical approaches, I look at how rhetorical practices by the OS community facilitate the emergence of sexuality, community, and agency using a social constructionist view of sexuality based in tenets of actor-network theory. Therefore, this study is not a queer analysis, per se, but a rhetorical analysis of the

emergence of OS as queer and of the OSI Web site's processes of queer community building. In combining these perspectives together, I approach sexuality, community, and agency as constituted within socio-material patterns of communication.

Research Questions

Working from a framework of sexuality and community as constructed within socio-material networks of communication, I uncover how human-object desire is rhetorically presented through OS Internationale discourse. Broadly, I seek to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: What rhetorical strategies³ emerge from the OS Internationale Web site to communicate human-object desire to a larger public?

RQ 2: How is the OS Internationale Web site challenging unfavorable reactions and responses to human-object desire?

RQ 3: How does the rhetoric of the OS Internationale Web site contribute to or expand notions of queer sexuality?

RQ 4: How does the rhetoric of the OS Internationale Web site contribute to or expand perspectives on human-object relations?

Overall, in utilizing discourses of objectum-sexuality as a case study for exploring the possibilities of queer desire, I reveal potential nuances about how intimacy and sexuality beyond the realm of strictly human-to-human conceptions are communicatively developed and can be further understood.

³ I define strategies not in the traditional sense, as individually chosen and enacted, but from an actor-network theory standpoint, as emerging from the interaction of various actors within communication. Therefore, strategies have networked rationality not individual rationality.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Broadly, it seems that if a goal of feminist, queer, and posthuman theory is to promote multiplicity of sexual desire and identity through the proliferation of various forms of connection; including and theorizing the communication processes associated with human-object desire and relationships is an important contribution to this literature. In theorizing this expansion of possibilities, I take as my starting point various feminist, queer, and posthuman literatures with perspectives grounded in postmodernism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, environmentalism, science, and materialism. Throughout the exploration of this literature in the following chapter, I discuss current theoretical framings of the relationships between desire, queer sexuality, and human-object relations and suggest how these perspectives can be used to understand OS and expanded through the study of OSI rhetoric. Therefore, in the following sections, I provide more in-depth overviews of feminist, queer, and posthuman theories of love, desire, and sexuality, specifically as they are conceived of discursively.

Feminist, Queer, and Posthuman Approaches to Discourses of Desire and Sexuality

Feminist, queer, and posthuman approaches to desire and human-object relations provide a foundation for understanding the ways concepts such as gender, sexuality, and the human are intertwined and constructed, regulated, and restricted through discourse, thus revealing the possibilities and limits for queer communities. In particular, the following overview of literature explores how structurally sexist systems place limits on languages of desire and sexuality (Cixous, 1976; Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1995) and how discursive and performative linkages between gender and sex limit lines of connection within a binary framework that is (re)enforced through normative logics of sexuality.

These normative logics include heteronormativity, which describes dominant expectations of gender and sexuality produced by and productive of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2004; de Lauretis, 1994; Foucault, 1978; Halperin, 1997; Jagose, 1996; Martin, 1994; Sedgwick, 1990; Sloop, 2004; Yep, 2003); and heterofuturity, which describes how heteronormative practices prescribe, model, and reinforce what counts as a proper life trajectory (Ahmed, 2006; Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Runions, 2008). The following literature also covers how the category *human* is constructed as exceptional and reproduces rhetorics of legitimate and illegitimate love and desire (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2008; Bogost, 2012; Franklin, 2006; Giffney, 2008; Halberstam, 2008; Haraway, 1991, 2003, 2008; Turkle, 2011).

All of these perspectives are foundationally important for exploring OS discourses and are used as frameworks for analyzing the rhetoric of OS Internationale. Specifically, these literatures are used to reveal how human-object desire emerges in communication as queer by challenging (hetero/human)normative categories and paradigms. Additionally, using actor-network theory as a method for analyzing the OSI Web site with these literatures as foundation reveals how perceiving of objects as actors in communication is also queer at both rhetorical and interpersonal levels.

Most feminist and queer literature focuses on the construction and expression of desire through a relationship between discourse and the (organic) body. This raises the question: what about the existence of discourses of desire within, around, and about objects, which do not maintain an (organic) body? Some posthuman literature does attend to this question; however, much of this literature still focuses on organic and animate

bodies, such as humans, animals, and organisms, or electronically mediated and animate bodies such as digital technology and machines. Additionally, these literatures often theorize love, desire, and sexuality as initiated and controlled by human intervention rather than reciprocal processes amongst various entities.⁴

These various literatures are presented and discussed as starting points for inserting OSI rhetoric into current theoretical conversations. In particular OSI rhetoric can be viewed through theoretical approaches to desire and the expression of desire through communication as well as the discursive construction of sexuality and the human. OSI rhetoric also contributes to theoretical conversations by furthering possibilities for conceiving of nonnormative desires that emanate from connections with and communication about objects in order to account for a more comprehensive range of queer sexuality. Therefore, in the following sections, I offer more in-depth overviews of the feminist, queer, and posthuman literatures on discourse, sexuality, and desire that are foundational for a study of OS.

Feminist Theory

Many feminist perspectives of desire take on critiques and re-workings of psychoanalysis in order to open up possibilities for conceiving of multiple sexualities and the expression of these desires through discourse (Cixous, 1976; Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1995). What these critiques offer a study of OS is an argument for the importance of communication in the construction of sexuality and an exploration into the ways that

⁴ Throughout this dissertation I will not refer to object desire as non-human desire, as this labeling participates in the problematic rhetoric that renders objects as inanimate, which is not an appropriate description of what objectum-sexuals experience with their relationships to objects. I am not, however, arguing that objects are, to objectum-sexuals, human in a biological sense of the term (as they do not either).

language and discourse have been used to essentialize sexuality and, therefore, can be reappropriated and used to facilitate a multiplicity of sexuality.

In Lacanian (2002) theorizing of the Symbolic Order (the regulation of society through language-signs, roles, and rituals) there is the imaginary phase and the Oedipal phase, which depend on conscious and unconscious recognition of the body in order to be born (men) or forced (women) into language, either in their own right or in relation to others. For example, in the imaginary phase, the child conceives of the self in relation to the mother's perception, and in the Oedipal stage, boys' anatomical identification with the father leads to an internalization of societal roles. Women, who do not anatomically identify with the Oedipal stage, are forced into the Symbolic Order and must interpret their feelings in language based on masculine terms, or can only exist in the imaginary. Therefore, for Lacan, the body gets interpellated into the linguistic order.

In response to Lacan, Cixous (1976), Irigaray (1985), and Kristeva (1995) all take up the exclusion of the female body in the Symbolic Order by theorizing how the female body, and specifically female desire, can be used to escape the limitations of Western, masculine language and thought through feminine discourse. For example, Cixous (1976) theorizes the body and desire in relation to masculine and feminine writing, claiming that the body is tied to these forms of writing. She suggests that women have been "driven away as violently from their bodies" as they have from their writing (p. 875). History has been dominated by masculine forms of writing that are based in Western and patriarchal logics. According to Cixous, masculine writing is phallogocentric, based on the rigid singularity of the phallus and the boring structure of reason, and feminine ways of writing need to be written into existence and "break out of the snare of silence" (p. 881).

Cixous insists women can “rupture” and “transform” their history outside of phallogocentrism and return to the body, “which has been more than confiscated from her,” by writing herself and letting her body be heard (p. 880). Writing, for Cixous, is an act that will realize the “decensored relation of woman to her sexuality” and “will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (p. 880). Women can use their libido and their intersecting histories to write about their sexuality and its “infinite and mobile complexity” and their eroticization, in order to break-free from the repression of sexual modesty regulated by heteronormativity.

Generally, then, Cixous points to the ways that possibilities for rupturing dominant conceptions of sexuality are tied to communicative expression. For Cixous, “desire, not reason,” and the writing of this desire “is the means to escape the limiting concepts of traditional Western thought” (Tong, 1998, p. 201). However, throughout Cixous’s theorizing of writing as a practice of agency for women, her primary focus is the corporeal/organic body and the desires produced by and productive of this body, with little acknowledgment of the discursive possibilities for other queer sexualities, such as the construction of human-object desire. Therefore, what Cixous offers a study of OS is an understanding of the power of discourse to rupture normative prescriptions of gender and sexuality; and, what the study of OS contributes to Cixous’s theoretical conversation is an account of the ways anthropocentric standards of language and desire also limit a multiplicity of sexual expression.

Similar to Cixous, Irigaray (1985) embraces a female imaginary as a site of desire and agency. She states, “woman’s desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that

has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks” (p. 25). She claims that this logic, which is based on theories of repression, also represses the female imaginary and suggests that woman does not have a sex organ. However, she disagrees with this logic, and instead proposes that “woman has sexual organs more or less everywhere” and that within the female imaginary there are “untapped possibilities” for women’s desire (Tong, 1998, p. 202).

Irigaray goes on to discuss how the possibilities of women’s language produce their possibilities for desire, because they are both everything and nothing at the same time. Within traditional Western logics women’s desire is often misunderstood because it operates within a different “economy,” which “diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 30). However, the female imaginary remains repressed by dominant (masculine, Western, Symbolic Order) ideologies, and the potential for the multiplicity of language and sexuality to release itself from these ideologies lies in lesbian and auto erotic practice. In other words, Irigaray argues that women must challenge and change discourse in a way that does not perpetuate and preserve dominant subjects by using bodily desire. Women are trapped within their own bodies by language that does not allow them to express themselves; instead, they can use their bodies as a way to communicate. Irigaray’s work expands upon Cixous’s arguments for the use of communication to discover and construct a multiplicity of desire.

Kristeva’s (1995) research in *New Maladies of the Soul* theorizes the importance of the soul (psyche) in relation to the body (soma). Emphasizing the importance of the soul in love and desire, she suggests that the psyche is intertwined with the body. She

argues that the contemporary focus on maladies of the body have obscured the importance of the soul. This is problematic because, according to Kristeva, “you are alive if and only if you have a psychic life (p. 6).” Psychic life “combines different systems of representation that involve language” and allow you “access to your body and to other people” (p. 6). In other words, “because of the soul, you are capable of action. Your psychic life is a discourse that acts” (p. 6). Therefore, love and desire are dependent upon the interplay between body and soul, and this interplay is what gives rise to discourse that acts.

This theoretical approach disrupts rigid sexual identity such as a masculine/feminine binary that is dependent on biological anatomy and allows for multiplicity of sexual identity through emphasis on the role of the desiring soul. For Kristeva, all meaning “is constituted in relationships—relationships with others, relationships with signification, relationships with our own bodies and desires” (Oliver, 2002, p. xviii). The meaning of words comes from a constant relationship between “dynamic bodily drive force or affect and stable symbolic grammar” (Oliver, 2002, p. xviii). The stable symbolic grammar limits the ability of language to express certain desires; therefore, labels such as “man” and “woman” that attempt to categorize sexual identity exclude all sorts of nonnormative bodily drives and desires. As a result, these nonnormative drives and desires are pushed to the margins of the semiotic and symbolic, rendering them abject. Kristeva’s re-theorization allows for various manifestations of sexual identity beyond just female or male.

Kristeva’s (1995) centering of the psyche or the soul as equal in importance to the body provides a space to begin conceiving of and theorizing object-human relationships.

She even makes a gesture toward the necessity for understanding desire through the expression of various modes of being. She suggests that it is through language that we gain access to our body and our soul and thus gain access to love and desire. This perspective implicitly suggests that two bodies are not necessarily required to create and sustain desire. Rather, discourse allows access to bodily and psychic dimensions of desire, however they might manifest. The discursive construction of the body and soul is something that gets taken up more heavily in posthuman theories, but the gesture that Kristeva's work makes reveals the possibility for applying and expanding feminist theories to include multiple sites of desire outside of strict human-to-human relationships, which the study of OS invites and provides. This gesture toward the construction of multiple sites of desire beyond the (human) body is also seen in feminist approaches to queer studies.

Critiques of classic psychoanalytic tenets, such as those posited in the feminist works presented above, also have been utilized to theorize queer feminist perspectives on love and desire. In particular, de Lauretis's (1994) rereading of Freud in order to theorize a model for perverse desire, which is most specifically a model for theorizing lesbian desire, offers a more comprehensive understanding of the ways verbal and non-verbal communication constitute a socio-psychic-material desire. This more comprehensive approach begins to yield a space for conceiving of the complex socio-material discourses of OS.

Throughout her theorizing of lesbian desire, de Lauretis primarily is concerned with revealing how the Oedipal stage is not just about rejecting and identifying with the mother or the father, but about a threat with the "loss of body-ego, a lack of being" (p.

262). Body-ego refers to “the subject’s internal or psychic reality and the external world” (p. 260). In other words, it is a process of replacing, the lost (female) body through identification with, not the phallus, but with the female body, either through psychic or physical attributes. Therefore, a lesbian “does not ‘explore’ an already existent, innate lesbian sexuality, but rather imagines and constructs her sexuality in the practice—the pain and pleasure—of loving women” (de Lauretis, 1994, p. 287).

De Lauretis’s theorization of love is based on the “conscious presence of desire” (p. 284). She goes on to discuss how desire can be dependent on a bodily (somatic) or psychic (instinctual) foundation, where instinctual satisfaction is dependent on fantasy, which in turn strictly determines object-choice” (p. 284). De Lauretis continues by stating:

The object to which the drive attaches itself, the so-called object of desire, represents a fantasmic object, an intrapsychic image; in other words, desire is dependent on a fantasy scenario which the object evokes and from which the object acquires its fantasmic value, acquires the ability to represent the fantasmic object. (pp. 284-285)

This psychic activity takes the form of sexual practice in material embodiment, which is “what the body ‘knows’—or better has come to know—about its instinctual aims” (p. 286). Although de Lauretis is speaking most specifically in terms of lesbian desire and sexuality her discussion of psychic fantasy holds potential for an application and reworking of this theory to account for expressions of animated desire. In other words, there is potential here for understanding how discursive performances of desire can be

read as material embodiments of object desire, which are always already fantasmic objects, regardless of corporeality.

Queer Theory

Beyond de Lauretis's feminist approach to queer desire, more contemporary queer theory works, generally, to challenge the perspective that gender and sexuality, which are often subjected to a forced linkage, are natural and stable categories or identities. As will become evident throughout the following review of queer theory literature, understanding the challenge to and delinking of these categories is imperative to the study of OS, because interpreting the rhetoric of OS Internationale is dependent upon understanding the ways normative prescriptions of sexuality, although discursively constructed, have come to appear as stable. This foundational framework, then, allows for the development of an interpretation of how these discourses are engaged with and (re)appropriated by the OS community. What follows is an overview of queer theory literature that surveys the ways language and discourse regulate concepts such as love, desire, and sexuality and how language and discourse render particular forms of love and desire as normal, livable, pathological, and unlivable.

Queer theory, as with many of the theories discussed thus far, is derived from a post-structuralist perspective and suggests that identity is "a constellation of multiple and unstable positions" (Jagose, 1996, p. 1). Additionally, queer theory seeks to challenge the pigeon-holing of human sexuality into the heterosexual/homosexual binary, with heterosexuality representing the hegemonic norm and homosexuality its abject, abnormal opposite. Rather than relying on this binary, which essentially relies on other binaries such as male/female, queer theory maintains the perspective that sexuality cannot fit into

the confines of the hetero/homo cultural construct because it is essentializing and exclusionary.

More specifically, queer theory “seeks to complicate hegemonic assumptions about the continuities between anatomical sex, social gender, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual object choice, and sexual practice” (Martin, 1994, p. 105). By disrupting this continuity, “queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin, 1997, p. 62). It is for these foundational and fluid premises that queer theory lends itself to an analysis of objectum-sexuality; through a study of OS, the fluidity of queer theory can be expanded to account for non-anthropocentric relational constructs.

Additionally, along with its aim of challenging and disrupting the aforementioned norms, one of the primary concerns central to queer theory is livability—determining possibilities for or ways in which all lives are livable. The overarching task of queer theory is “about distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself” (Butler, 2004, p. 8). Many approaches to complicating hegemonic assumptions about gender and sexuality seek to explore the rhetorical function of discourse and language in constructing and disciplining gender and sexuality. What the following queer theory literatures leads to a study of OS rhetoric are arguments for the ways discourses produce the subject (Foucault, 1978), critiques of the restrictions of the heterosexual/homosexual divide (Sedgwick, 1990), and discussions of the limitations of nonnormative discourses (Butler, 1993) through the compulsory normalization of transgressive representations (Sloop, 2004).

Although not identified as a queer theorist because of the time of his writing, one of the most well-known approaches to the production and regulation of sexuality through discourse that is taken in up in much of contemporary queer theory comes from Foucault's (1978) genealogical work in *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. In this text, Foucault uses sexuality to talk about the relationship between discourse and power, suggesting that power is regulatory and productive, rather than repressive, and that where there is power there is resistance. Using sexuality as his point of departure for this argument, Foucault challenges the idea that sex is natural/biological by stating that discourses of sexuality are what produce our notions of sex, most often through normative representations of intercourse between a man and a woman. This discourse does not determine sexuality but rather constitutes and regulates it; in other words, discourse always precedes the subject.

As an example, Foucault attributes the construction of the term *heterosexual* to the invention of heterosexual identity. Heterosexuality, as an identity category, originally was recognized by medical and psychiatric institutions as a "perversion of sexual appetite," but became normalized when it moved out of medical discourse and into "American mass media" (Yep, 2003, p. 27). Yep (2003) suggests that heterosexuality's history "reveals that there are other ways of conceiving, ordering, and organizing sexuality, eroticism, and pleasure that are different from the homo/heterosexual binary framework" (p. 27). Negotiating and subverting the homo/heterosexual binary in order to open up spaces of conceiving nonnormative desire is one of the major projects of queer theory.

Disrupting the discursive construction of the heterosexual/homosexual binary is imperative for the project of queer theory and to the study of OS. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990) takes on the task of deconstructing cultural dependence on the heterosexual/homosexual binary in order to explicate its limitations on freedom and understanding of sexuality. This overarching and in some ways heuristic task is done in a way to demonstrate “that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions—heterosexual/homosexual, in this case—actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation” (p. 8). For example, relating specifically to the heterosexual/homosexual binary, Sedgwick explains how the term *homosexual* is subordinate to the term *heterosexual*; heterosexual depends on the “simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of homosexual,” and homosexuality works both within and outside of heterosexuality. The latter claim suggests that as much as homosexuality is constructed and perceived in relation to heterosexuality, it also includes identification with languages, thoughts, experiences, and practices that are unintelligible within the dyad of heterosexuality.

Sedgwick (1990) suggests that “a deconstructive understanding of these binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition or, more succinctly, the double bind” (p. 10). In other words, by revealing the unstable incommensurability of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, there is possibility to manipulate and make possible other identifications of sexuality, intimacy, and desire, even, perhaps, outside of human-to-human desire. The importance of such

manipulation is demonstrated in one of Sedgwick's central observations regarding the historical confounding of sexuality. She states:

It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensation, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, and so on) precisely one, the gender of the object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of "sexual orientation." (p. 8)

In other words, although sexuality often is constructed as gendered object choice, there are many other possibilities for constructing and conceiving of sexuality and sexual orientation. Overall, *The Epistemology of the Closet* forwards dynamic, complex contested connections between hetero and homo configurations, which could be extended to discuss the rhetoric of OS in relation to historical rhetorics of binary sexuality.

In relation to the power of heteronormative rhetorics, Butler (1993) suggests that nonnormative discourses can be resistive but never revolutionary (Butler, 1993). Therefore, heteronormative regulations can be challenged but never fully changed. This concept of resistive discourse, especially in relation to gender and sexuality, is taken up in much of Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997, 2004) work. In particular, Butler's (1990) theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble* takes up Foucault's theory that juridical-medical discourse produces and regulates sexuality by suggesting that feminist (and arguably queer) critiques should explore how gender/sex categories such as "women" are

produced and constrained by “the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought,” thereby opening up more possibilities of resistance (p. 5). Performativity, in Butler’s sense is a bodily enactment of (hetero)normative discourses, which we cannot escape. She suggests that the thoughts we have and the actions we take are not our own; they are always constituted by discourse that is inside you and around you. Discourse manifests in you, and performativity is the outward bodily manifestation of these discourses. She states, “the power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts *as* discourse” (Butler, 1997, p. 11).

Butler takes on the concept of the heterosexual matrix by challenging traditional feminist distinctions between “sex” as a biological and gender as a category of identification. This process is theorized through Butler’s discussion of the heterosexual matrix, which is a process where people assume that a person’s sex will determine their gender; gender, in turn, will lead to opposite sex attraction (desire). Therefore, she explains that sex is as much a discursive construction as gender. Logic steeped in the heterosexual matrix is what:

regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire. (pp. 30-31)

The discursive construction and legitimation of the heterosexual matrix as normative is produced and reproduced through the performance of masculinity/femininity

that re-inscribes male/female desire. Overall, although Butler is most explicitly concerned with human-to-human desire, what performativity lends to (literal) object desire is that gender and sexuality are “capable of representations that exceed binary divisions and that redistribute symbolic authority and routes of desire” (Martin, 1994, p. 112). However, the possibility for destabilizing binaries and routes of desire lies in the recognition of the impossibility of getting outside of normative discourse; rather, expressions of desire will always be forced to work within this discourse.

Butler (1993) suggests that:

There is an ‘outside’ to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute ‘outside,’ an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive ‘outside,’ it is that which can only be thought—when it can—in relation to that discourse, and at its most tenuous borders. (p. 8)

Therefore, discourse relating to particular sexualities and genders that are rendered abject may, in thought, lie outside discourse in its legitimate and normative sense. This normative sense includes the perception and participation in discourse as well as the queer desires to be freed from, but these can only be formed “by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself” (p. 11).

Theories on language, sexuality, and media speak to these discursive limits. For example, Sloop (2004) argues that media representations of trans and intersexed persons often are deemed positive but are often simultaneously problematic. His overall thesis is:

Not to show that change is an impossibility but to highlight the mechanisms by which cases of gender trouble, once publicly articulated, become marginalized

and normalized by all of us, simply because, as humans, we have to rely on preexisting meanings and the power of the institutions we have put in place in order to create our own understanding of the present. (p. 141)

In other words, although they can be transgressive representations, they will always be normalized because of the limits of discourse to be anything more than comparative to the norm. Sloop is clear that even though these sites of representation might not be subversive in the sense of complete transgression, “it is in these public representations and the ways individuals interpret and struggle over them that ideological transition and change can take place” (Sloop, 2004, p. 1). Therefore, agency often lies in the ability to buy into other discourses and appropriate them in nonnormative ways.

Overall, queer theory provides a lens to challenge normativity. More specifically, it is a useful framework to bridge and challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality as they are articulated within normative notions of the category human. In other words, using queer alongside posthuman theories allows for interrogation of the ways that the human/non-human binary and the category human as exceptional are implicated within heteronormativity, and vice versa. Heterosexuality continuously is regulated by exclusive identification with the male/female binary and its subsequent expectation of opposite sex desire, as well as the heterosexual/homosexual binary and its subsequent expectations of human-to-human desire. The discursive maintenance of these binaries denies a host of sexual possibilities (Yep, 2003).

Additionally, what is necessary to a discussion of objectum-sexuality specifically is an overview of how heteronormativity is regulated through the human/nonhuman binary, which many perspectives in queer theory have begun to address. In particular,

these perspectives look at the ways concepts such as family and future are heteronormative and always already linked to humanism. These theoretical approaches point to the ways that binaries of sexuality and human exceptionalism are implicated in queer community building practices; a study of OS takes up and builds upon these implications. The following overviews of queer theory literature begin to address posthuman approaches to sexuality and desire. These brief overviews are followed by a more in-depth discussion of explicitly posthuman approaches to love, sexuality, and desire.

The category of human, and those who are deemed recognizable within this category, is connected to what Edelman (2004) terms “reproductive futurism,” the concept that U.S. nation building is primarily concerned with the child. The child, or the image of the child, is a product of heterosexual desire and normative kinship structures, based within monogamous, heterosexual coupling and reproduction, which has created heterofuturity, a forward looking progress narrative that must always serve to protect and reproduce the child. Anything that becomes a threat to the child then (i.e. queerness) is always perceived as negative and detrimental. Thus, the reproduction of the human is performed through heterosexual desire. Homophobic discourses, then, suggest that the success of humanity is dependent on the future of heterosexuality (Runions, 2008).

Also arguing for the ways normative conceptions of time and space socialize heterosexuality through a focus on the family, Ahmed (2006) presents an argument for the ways everyday objects are used to keep people on a straight (read: heterosexual) line. This straight line is one where people must meet certain points along the way in order to be considered ideal and productive members of society, which are always arranged

around heterosexuality, such as getting married and having children. Objects, then, become straightening devices, where people are directed in certain ways and pushed in different directions in order to keep them heterosexual. One example Ahmed uses of this are family photos in her parent's home. These become objects that document and communicate a proper (straight) life. Her analysis also reveals the ways that bodies are oriented within a system of whiteness, where certain things are within reach for certain bodies and racialized groups are made and (re)made through their access to and orientations around common objects. The human, then, is also constructed through particular orientations toward objects, where those that are in line with heteronormativity and whiteness are directed toward a particular future, and those that are not find themselves on queer paths not tied to heterofuturity, which limits the objects that are made reachable within these lines.

Similarly, Halberstam (2011) suggests that heteronormativity is based in liberal notions of progressive entitlement, which privileges success over failure. Narratives of success, then, are almost always linked to whiteness, heterofuturity, the image of the child, the family and “normative understandings of time and transmission,” all of which privilege hetero modes of being as human modes of being (p. 71). Instead, Halberstam argues that “new technologies of reproduction and new rationales for nonreproductive behavior call for new languages of desire, embodiment, and the social relations between reproductive and nonreproductive bodies” (p. 37). Specifically, Halberstam turns to pop culture, particularly Pixar animation, in order to reveal what is meant by embracing new languages of desire. For example, using the character Dori from *Finding Nemo* (a fish with short term memory loss), Halberstam shows how Dori's disconnection from the past

and the future, and thus traditional family lines, allows her to connect with others momentarily and temporarily and, in doing so, build connections that are queer, outside of normative kinship. However, Halberstam focuses on animated and fictitious spaces of queer connection, whereas OS narratives provide examples of queer connection within spaces of everyday community building.

Therefore, one particularly important reason for the study of OS is to understand how lives that do not follow straight lines, motivated by the image of the child and a vision of heterofuturity, are expressed and regulated. Lives that do not follow particular spatial and temporal standards—those that “are neither monogamous nor quasi-marital”—are deemed as “less than ‘true’ loves and ‘true’ losses” (Butler, 2004, p. 27). In other words, they are viewed as less human. Often, they are also deemed perverse, taboo, and pathological.

For example, Cvetkovich’s (2003) work (among others) on affect suggests that often times (queer) feelings are pathologized in traumatic and unproductive ways. She suggests that we embrace feelings as felt experiences rather than medical in order to open up multiple ways of desiring. This resistance to pathologizing affect and desire is a common thread among queer theory and one that is particularly important to studying OS, especially since the only existing academic research on OS subscribes to a rendering of object-human desire as perverse.

Much of the pathologization of OS, however, comes from the construction of the human in opposition to the non-human, and suggestions about appropriate and inappropriate orientations to objects. Posthuman approaches to queer theory, then, offer important perspectives on the ways that discourses of the family, future, success, loss,

and tragedy reinforce (white) heteronormativity, and how new lines of queer connection can resist and subvert heterofuturity. These perspectives inform a study of the ways queer communities, such as OSI, construct and emerge within these and, perhaps other resistant, discourses. The rhetoric of OS Internationale provides a fruitful space for understanding the ways heteronormativity, queerness, and the human are or are not created and reinforced within communication about object-human desire. Additionally, perspectives within branches of posthuman theory point to the ways discourses of human-object desire contribute to and challenge paradigms of human exceptionalism, which also influences possibilities for interacting and interconnecting.

Posthuman Theory

Traditional perspectives in communication have worked to define the human as exceptional, dominant over, and in relation to non-humans. For example, Burke (1963) suggests that the ability to be reflexive about symbol use is what makes humans distinct and capable in many ways that animals and objects are not. However, posthuman theories have begun to challenge this perspective. For example, Crist's (2004) research on bee communication demonstrates the many ways that species other than humans are capable of intentional symbol use. Additionally, the facets of queer theory discussed thus far offer important starting points to begin thinking about intimacy, desire, and sexuality as more than just fixed, human-to-human, and heterosexual or homosexual. Scholarship in posthuman studies, in many cases, uses queer theory as a springboard and offers pertinent case studies and perspectives for understanding the discursive construction of human-object desire. Such authors suggests that the category of human and the connotations of superiority that this category carries are discursively regulated constructs, similar to

gender and sexuality. These perspectives also argue that the exploration and challenging of the human construct through an analysis of OS rhetoric, for example, can create new (queer) points of relationality.

One way that the construct of human is challenged in posthuman studies is through a critique of the category of human as stable. For example, Giffney (2008) states, “The Human is both a discursive and ideological construct which materially impacts on all those who are interpellated through that sign” (p. 55). Human, therefore, is performative, a product and production of the repetition of particular discourses and practices that are defined as human by being “defined against those who are deemed unrecognizable and thus excluded from its remit” (Giffney, 2008, p. 56). In other words, the labeling of human is a discursive pattern of deeming certain entities hierarchically better over others, thus continuously reinforcing the category of human while excluding others from it.

Additionally, Haraway (2003, 2008) has in many ways bridged these posthuman perspectives with queer theory in order to continue challenging perspectives that proffer and reinforce human exceptionalism in order to argue for what she calls a “flourishing of significant otherness” (p. 3). In her work on interspecies relationships, Haraway uses a biological perspective to reveal the ways that all species are implicated in one another through their co-evolution. In other words, humans are only capable of what they do because of a long history of co-evolution with other species; species are indebted to one another. Although she often focuses on dog-human relationships, she suggests that her research is a call to take all interspecies relationships seriously as a way to facilitate a flourishing of love, companionship and significant otherness outside of the human/non-

human binary. In doing so, this binary is disrupted and lines of relationality and kinship can be created that are queer and otherwise not made available within current discursive patterns. This co-connection can also get outside of human exceptionalism because domination over other species is relinquished in favor of love and companionship.

Much of the work being done within queer posthuman studies is situated in a transbiological perspective, which is “conjured by hybrid entities or in-between states of being that represent subtle or even glaring shifts in our understandings of the body and of bodily transformation” (Halberstam, 2008, p. 266). Representative examples of this, which are covered throughout the following sections as ways of conceptualizing a different human-object relationship, include the female cyborg (Haraway, 1991), animation, and puppets (Halberstam, 2008); Tamagotchi toys (Turkle, 2011); and IVF methods (Franklin, 2006). All of these examples rupture the boundaries between “humans, animals, machines, states of life and death, animation and reanimation, living, evolving, becoming and transforming” (Halberstam, 2008, p. 266).

Halberstam (2008) suggests that all of these ways of becoming and being “evolve outside of reproductive dynamics and logics,” and that although “the spatial and temporal logics of hetero-reproduction quietly map themselves across entire corporeal circuits of intimacy and kinship,” ways of becoming and being that do not follow these reproductive logics “subtly assert other modes of being and attest to the interdependence of reproductive and non-reproductive communities” (p. 266). These theories of human performativity and transbiology are helpful in understanding the potential for discursive community building amongst OS within the heterosexual (human) matrix. A study of OS rhetoric expands these theories even further to address processes of animation and beliefs

in animism that are left out of transbiological conversations. In particular, the ways in which the concept of intimacy gets taken up in OS discourses as more spiritually than corporeally motivated is key to understanding the discursive construction of human-object desire.

One of the key tenets of posthuman theory is that, “nature is agentic—it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 1). This branch of theory proposes a theorizing of the inseparable relationality between materiality and discursive practices, but with a heavy emphasis on the material implications of interaction. This perspective suggests that “we need ways of understanding the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world-ways that account for myriad ‘intra-actions’ (in Karen Barad’s terms) between phenomena that are material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal, and technological” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 1). In particular, many of the posthuman perspectives that follow suggest a more materialist approach to human-object interaction—meaning interaction produces bodies and beings, not just constructs and ideologies. These are important for understanding the potential for object agency within discourses of desire, can be used to begin thinking about the construction of human-object desire, and can be expanded through an analysis of OS to account for the co-constitution of discourse and material within rhetorical practices of community and sexuality specifically.

One way that posthumanist perspectives seek to reconcile materiality and discourse is through an anthropomorphic appropriation of Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity, a perspective known as posthuman performativity (Barad, 2008). Barad

(2008) criticizes Butler's theory of performativity for restricting discursive practices to humans. She suggests that, "what is needed is a robust account of the materialization of all bodies—'human' and 'nonhuman'—and the material-discursive practices by which their differential constitutions are marked" (p. 128), which she attempts to develop through posthuman performativity. Barad, trained in theoretical particle physics, uses Neils Bohr's theory of quantum physics as a foundation for understanding the relationship between matter and meaning. According to Barad, for Bohr "things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings," and he believes that philosophy and physics essentially are inseparable (p. 132). From this, Barad proposes that "the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming," and things are not things, but phenomena, "dynamic topological reconfiguring/ entanglements/ relationalities/ (re)articulations," where "the primary semantic units are not 'words' but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted" (p. 135). In other words, Barad sees matter and discourse as always interacting in ways that create and recreate material-discursive boundaries.

For Barad (2008), nothing is fixed, everything is a phenomenon, which is (re)configured/(re)articulated through the instruments and ways that observation and intra-action takes place. The way that intra-action—the idea that objects do not exist outside of interaction but emerge through interaction—takes place, paradigmatically hinders us from viewing the multiplicity of matter, which Neils Bohr's theory of quantum physics suggests. In other words, matter is phenomena, which become significant through material-discursive intra-activity. Furthermore, "it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the 'components' of phenomena become

determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful” (p. 133).

Viewing matter as phenomena is imperative to Barad’s theory of posthuman performativity.

A strict application of Butler’s theory of performativity suggests that the term *human* only has meaning through material embodiment of discourse. However, Barad goes further to claim that this alone would suggest that *human* is a fixed material entity. Rather, understanding human as a phenomenon, with unstable and shifting materiality, allows for understanding how nonhuman matter also matters. Barad states:

If “humans” refers to phenomena, not independent entities with inherent properties but rather beings in their differential becoming, particular material (re)configuring of the world with shifting boundaries are properties that stabilize and destabilize along with specific material changes in what it means to be human, then the notion of discursivity cannot be founded on an inherent distinction between humans and nonhumans. (p. 136)

In other words, humans and nonhumans are phenomena that exist with equal potential for agential material-discursive intra-action and equal possibilities for being (re)configured/(re)articulated materially. There is no fundamental pre-determined/fixed difference between humans and nonhumans. Therefore, humans cannot claim discourse and all matter has the potential to be materially figured through discursive boundaries, including objects.

The overall purpose of Barad’s theory of posthuman performativity is to reveal how “particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world’s becoming, to contest and

rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (p. 144). What this means for theorizing human-object desire is that objects themselves can be perceived as agentic, capable of acting within discursive configurations of desire. It is within the paradigm of subject-object distinction, the view that objects are always already inanimate and cannot be interpellated as subjects outside of human intervention, that objects are not perceived as matter that matters. It is within this paradigm that concepts such as love, desire, and pleasure, are discursively captivated and bound to the human. I am not suggesting that human-object desire is free from human influence, because by definition it is not. Rather, I am suggesting that perceiving objects as having agential materiality opens up possibilities for understanding the legitimacy of human-object relations, including human-object desire, and encourages the exploration of communicative practices that construct and facilitate these relations.

Beyond the appropriation of the scientific theory of quantum physics as a foundation for understanding and theorizing the instability of subjectivity, classical theories of evolution purported by Darwin also have been used toward similar means (Grosz, 2011). Grosz (2011) reads Darwin’s theory of individual variation to suggest a “proliferation of diversity,” because it “requires an abundance of variation” and therefore holds infinite potential for multiple positionalities (p. 25). Darwin’s theory of natural selection, which is premised on individual variation, offers “a profound and complex account of the organic becoming of matter, of the strategies of survival and the generation of multiple modes of becomings” (p. 46). Grosz claims that Darwin’s biological theories of evolution can be read as anthropomorphic because they suggest an open-ending realm of possibility for an evolutionary substantiation of all organic matter,

human or nonhuman. She states that “‘biology’ not only designates the *study* of life but also refers to the body, to organic processes or activities that are objects of that study” (p. 23). In other words, the existence of a human body is not what designates biological possibility. Although Grosz does not specifically discuss desire, it would be fair to claim that open-ended possibilities for positionality can also refer to a multiplicity of sexuality and desire. However, her primary focus on organic processes does limit heuristic theorizing of inorganic objects, a problem to which Haraway’s (1991) theory of the cyborg more attentively, although not overtly, attends.

One particularly well known piece of literature, which also seeks to destabilize the notion of a fixed material human body, is Haraway’s (1991) *Cyborg Manifesto*. Haraway’s cyborg, which is deployed metaphorically as a way to explain the organic and technological/mechanic complexities of women and their bodies, is described as a way to disrupt essentialist and universalizing categories of woman and the human body. She states “the cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality” (p. 150). Most specifically, in relation to the concept of desire, Haraway claims that the cyborg is “an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” (p. 150). She suggests that shifting our perspective to view the body as a shifting hybrid, rather than as fixed and stable, allows us to “contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies” (p. 154). The concept of the cyborg suggests a constant relationship between human and nature, an interspecies relationship, and thus, discourages the separability of the two, thereby, discouraging the mastery of one over the other (usually the former over the latter).

Haraway claims the purpose of the cyborg metaphor is to “multiply heterogeneous, inhomogeneous, accountable, and connected human agents” (p. 163). She explains this in terms of a trickster, similar to Butler’s description of the performance of drag as an allegory, claiming that it can show us how “historically specific human relations with ‘nature’ must somehow—linguistically, ethically, scientifically, politically, technologically, and epistemologically—be imagined as genuinely social and actively relational; and yet the partners remain utterly inhomogeneous” (p. 163). In other words, the concept of the cyborg reveals the inter-relationality of humans and nature, in which neither of these are sacred, homogeneous, or stable, but both diverse, and constantly in flux with one another. Furthermore, through language, there can be a common boundary constructed between these two bodies/spaces. From this perspective, Haraway believes that the cyborg world might be about “lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (p. 154). Not only does this concept of the cyborg—the realization of the body as a constant evolution and (re)articulation of nature, technology, and machine—suggest a more equal relationship between humans and nature, but it also suggests multiplicity of desire and sexuality, even beyond human-to-human relationships.

The cyborg challenges traditional notions of “woman” as an essentializing and universalizing category through its explication of a fluctuating subject. Additionally, it challenges traditional phallogentric and heteronormative concepts of desire by revealing possibilities of pleasure beyond that which is a side-effect of reproduction and traditional kinship structures. In the cyborg world, “ideologies of sexual reproduction can no longer

reasonably call on notions of sex and sex role as organic aspects in natural objects like organisms and families” (p. 162). Therefore, the cyborg challenges traditional gender and sex roles. In her later work, Haraway (2008) discusses various sites of erotic pleasure that are made possible in the cyborg world, even discussing how the production of knowledge through historical-social intercourse, or conversations, can be an erotic source of pleasure. She states that, “our desires are very heterogeneous indeed, as are our embodiments” (2008, p. 164). The concept of the cyborg reveals the heterogeneity of desire and the many corporeal and post-corporeal ways these desires can be embodied.

Haraway’s (1991) cyborg metaphor is still primarily utilized in reference to a relationship between an organic, material body and the imagination of a posthuman (technological/mechanic) version of this body; arguably, natural and/or animate matter-which does not provide coherent inclusion of social connections with objects. Although, her work does lend a powerful perspective for understanding how desiring objects, rather than possessing or mastering them, is less of a taboo concept when we understand how our eternal relationships with nonhuman matter are constitutive of who we are, and who we can possibly become. Additionally, understanding the role of language and communication in the construction of our bodies and our relationship to other (non-corporeal) bodies also reveals the possibilities for understanding multiple sources of erotic pleasure and the sociocultural boundaries that restrict non-normative desires.

In taking OS seriously from a feminist/queer/posthuman perspective, objects can be conceptualized as significant actors within the co-construction of affect and desire. Ahmed (2006) suggests that the use of objects as straightening devices is largely based on our taking advantage of the potential that objects carry within our lives. For example, we

rarely question the socially constructed utility of an object. Using the example of the hammer set forth by Husserl, Ahmed shows how it becomes an extension of one's arm, almost unconsciously, when it is being used "properly." However, the moment the hammer breaks we begin to realize its weight because it no longer does what we needed it to do and has, instead, become uncomfortable. If we were to reframe our understanding of the use of the object it becomes something queer. We begin to see it for everything it is; its history, its materiality, its relationality. In other words, when we begin to recognize the potential agency of objects rather than seeing them only for utility and domination they become something more than just straightening devices, they gain a queer life.

Bogost's (2012) work in *Alien Phenomenology* argues for understanding the life of objects from an object-oriented ontology (OOO), a similar but different theoretical approach than posthumanist theory. OOO is the view that everything exists on an equal playing field. He resists any form of exceptionalism, human, animal, object, etc. Instead, OOO sees everything as interconnected. Although he does not ground this perspective in queer theory, queer theory can be used to extend OOO because it similarly resists binary views and, used together, they suggest that objects are capable of (queer) relationality in unpredictable ways.

Another theory that does not outwardly claim to be a posthumanist theory but that can be used to understand the interconnectedness of humans and objects in communication more specifically is actor-network theory. Actor-network theory highlights the equal and interconnected nature of humans and objects, specifically within the communicative construction of entities and enactments of agency by these collective entities. Therefore, as an arguably posthuman approach to the sociology and

communication of humans and objects, actor-network theory provides an important theoretical and methodological lens to the study of OSI rhetoric. In providing these lenses, ANT can also be expanded to account for the construction of desire and queerness more broadly. ANT as a methodology is discussed in the following chapter; however, it is important to note here that many of the characteristics of posthuman theorizing are present within the tenets of ANT, which make it an ideal theoretical and methodological framework.

Overall, challenges to traditional views on human-object interaction lead me to question: does OS Internationale communicate a different way of thinking about queerness? And does OS rhetoric construct new lines of relationality? Or, does their project of intelligibility, similar to Butler's argument that we cannot get outside of heteronormative discourses, reinforce previous ways of thinking about sexuality and human-object interaction? In other words, in what ways does the OS Internationale community communicate object-human desire to a public that is presumably entrenched within paradigms of hetero-human-normativity?

Conclusion

The various patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions of language as connected to the (organic) body, progress narratives of family and reproduction, the pathologizing of non-normative affects and desire, and the construction of arbitrary binaries of relationality, are all challenged when considering the possibilities of object-human desire. Engaging with feminist, queer, and posthuman theories allows for seeing the ways that OS engages in constructing desire with non-reproductive entities, creating networks of agency with those deemed non-human, and, in doing so, disrupt hetero-

human-normative logics. In particular, although current theory neglects specific attention to object-human desire and the communicative construction of sexuality within this paradigm, the ability to create and imagine different modes of living and being via these theoretical perspectives creates a space for taking OS seriously. Within this space, OS no longer is dismissed or deemed taboo and perverse, which is always motivated by preconceived notions of appropriate relationality between humans and non-human (e.g., dominance and utility).

My intentions in this dissertation are to: (1) more explicitly join perspectives of gender and sexuality as discursively constructed, sex and gender as delinked and fluid, challenges of heternormativity, and disruptions of the human/non-human binary (in other words, to join aspects of feminist, queer, and posthuman theory) in order to analyze specific rhetorical practices within OSI; (2) to extend communication beyond its conceptualization as always human; and (3) to interrogate normative discursive constructions of human-to-human companionship by considering the rhetoric of Objectum-Sexuality Internationale. In order to do so, the following chapter presents a method for studying OS Internationale based in rhetorical criticism and actor-network theory to facilitate a posthuman approach to rhetorics of sexuality.

Chapter 3: Method

In order to explore rhetorical strategies of self-representation by the Objectùm-Sexuality Internationale (OSI) community, I analyzed the OSI Web site using rhetorical criticism informed by actor-network theory (ANT), motivated by a feminist/queer/posthuman framework of understanding. Using ANT and a feminist/queer/posthuman framework uncovers the potential ways that rhetorical practices interconnect and emerge is an effort to end oppression. Bell (2012) points out that criticism “is not so much to represent accurately as it is to ‘cut well,’ which is to say provocatively or perhaps ‘generatively,’ inviting the concern of others” (p. 117). In other words, one of the major purposes of conducting this analysis of OS Internationale is to uncover and draw attention to rhetorical practices that contribute new and important knowledge to communication studies.

Artifact: Objectùm-Sexuality Internationale Web site

The OS Internationale Web site consists of two parts: (1) a site open to the public; and (2) a blog forum that is semi-closed, requiring entry approval. For the purposes of answering research questions concerned with the emergence of rhetorical strategies in OSI public self-representation, my analysis focuses specifically on the portions of the Web site that are open to the public. The portions of the Web site that are open to the public are designed for OS folk to find and connect with one another, for friends and family of OS folk to learn more, and for the public at large to find out more about OS. Viewed as a community narrative, the Objectùm-Sexuality Internationale Web site is comprised of definitions and descriptions of objectùm-sexuality, common questions and answers about objectùm-sexuality, individual narratives about life as an objectùm-sexual,

and several links to external information about OS. Overall, OS Internationale invites people to peruse the Web site for purposes of finding support and gaining understanding free from outside judgments.

For the purposes of this study, I conducted a textual analysis of the four major internal content portions of the OS Internationale Web site and four of the external links provided within the site that are either explicitly authored by OS members or dedicated to providing foundational definitions and descriptions about OS, which are imperative to comprehending the OS Internationale community rhetoric. The four major content pages of the OS Internationale Web site include: (1) “Home;” (2) “The Red Fence;” (3) “What is OS?,” and (4) “Expressions.” The “Home” page includes a brief description of the history and purposes of the Web site. “The Red Fence” page includes a more detailed description of the lives and histories of OS founders (Eija-Riitta Eklöf Berliner-Mauer, Oliver Arndt, and Erika Eiffel) and the significance of the Red Fence as a symbol of OS. The “What is OS?” page includes a definition of OS, a brief discussion about OS as a sexual orientation, and answers to common questions about OS. The “Expressions” page includes internal hyperlinks to nine personal testimonies from OS members about living and loving as OS.

The four external links, which come from within the pages listed above and/or on the site’s “Links” page, include a diagram authored by sexologist and OS expert Dr. Amy Marsh, titled the “Marsh Spectrum of Human/Object Intimacy;” an article about OS authored by Dr. Amy Marsh titled “Love’s outer limits: People who love objects part I;” a FAQ page authored by Erika Eiffel; and Eija-Riitta’s personal home page titled “OS

and Animism defined by Eija-Riitta.” Figure 3.1 summarizes the content I analyzed from the OSI Web site.

Web site Page	Headings/External Links
Home	Welcome to Objectum-Sexuality Internationale!
The Red Fence	The Pioneer The Breakthrough The Symbolism... The Meaning...
What is OS?	<p>What is the natural feeling of OS? What makes OS Different from obsession? How can one love an inanimate object? How can one love a public object? How does one communicate with an object? Intimacy, Sex, and OS. What is the difference between OS intimacy and masturbation? Is OS a fetish? Marsh spectrum of human/object intimacy (<i>external link</i>) Are there factors that cause one to be OS? Asperger’s Syndrome and OS. Sexual trauma and OS. Gender dysphoria and OS. Synesthesia and OS. Animism and OS. Love’s outer limits: People who love objects part I (<i>external link</i>) Are there fears regarding OS people? Why do OS people love landmark objects? Do OS people love more than one object? Are all OS people female? FAQ about OS from Erika Eiffel (<i>external link</i>)</p>
Links	Eija-Riitta’s Homepage: OS and animism defined (<i>external link</i>)
Expressions	<p>The Thing with a Soul – by Rudi from Germany ‘Married’ to the Eiffel Tower? – by Erika Eiffel I am Human but my Partner is Not – by A. L. Thoughts from Me...an OS Person – by D. from Berlin A few more thoughts... – by D. from Berlin The Only Love for Me... – by B. C. Hall Love Letters to Letters... – by Eva K. from The Netherlands My Ode to the Magic of a Word... – by Eva K. from The Netherlands An Introspective View of Objectum-Sexuality – by Adam M. from</p>

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Figure 3.1. Objectum-Sexuality.org Dataset

Methodological Approach

The method that I employed in this textual analysis of the OS Internationale Web site is a hybrid rhetorical criticism/actor-network approach guided by feminist, queer, and posthuman perspectives. I define rhetorical practices here as the emergence of socio-material symbolic resources in communicative contexts. This definition includes attention to what has been categorized as non-human actors, those that are often left out of traditional approaches to rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism is “designed for the systematic investigation of and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purposes of understanding rhetorical processes” (Foss, 2009, p. 6); actor-network theory, although not originally proposed as a methodology for textual analysis, provides a lens for interpreting the emergence of and engagement with socio-material actors.

Combining rhetorical criticism with ANT expands the process of rhetorical criticism to account for the ways that non-human actors interact with and thus equally contribute to the creation and maintenance of symbolic processes. Conversely, combining ANT with rhetorical criticism expands ANT to be used more specifically as a methodological tool in analyzing rhetorical practices. Therefore, together these approaches offer a method for understanding how marginalized groups enact agency within their world rather than against it (Hallenbeck, 2012). I first turn to a discussion of the process of rhetorical criticism informed by ANT and then discuss the function of this method within a feminist, queer, posthuman framework.

Rhetorical Criticism and Actor-Network Theory

For the purposes of this study, I combined Foss's (2009) process for generative criticism with Taylor's (2006) communication derived approach to ANT that accounts for the ways networks of relation are articulated in conversation. Using generative rhetorical criticism (Foss, 2009) allowed for an open and emergent approach to coding the artifact. This particular branch of rhetorical criticism began with "initial broad-brush coding" in order "to discover its central features" (p. 389). These central features were identified using "*intensity and frequency*" as initial criteria for coding (p. 389). In other words, aspects of the text that seemed "important or significant" or are "repeated and show up with some regularity" became central in analyzing the text. Once broad coding was completed, an explanatory schema was applied in order to interpret the text and draw critical implications from this interpretation. Using ANT, coding of the data included identification of frequent and intense human, object, concept, and idea actors.

ANT presents an understanding of the social as, what Taylor and Van Every (2000) call, "emergent" rather than "ostensive." The latter assumes that society, or in this case sexuality and community, is a pre-existing structure that actors enter into, whereas the former suggests that "actors define, for themselves and for others, what society is, that is, it exists nowhere else other than in their performance of it" (Taylor & Van Every, p. 157). In other words, an emergent view suggests that societies, organizations, communities, ideologies, and even sexualities, emerge in conversation through a process of "becoming" rather than "being" (Taylor & Van Every, p. x). Therefore, for ANT, interaction is all there is. Interactions that "succeed in stabilizing and reproducing themselves" are the ones that appear macro; the ones that produce what appear as stable

social organizations (Law, 1992, p. 380). From this perspective, communities and sexualities are made by the many ways they are said to exist. Therefore, if you stop making and remaking sexuality and community you stop having conceptions of sexuality and community (Latour, 2005, p. 23).

ANT does not locate action, the ability to act, within autonomous (human) actors. Instead, ANT argues for a view of action as emergent within various actor networks. For ANT, anything can be an actor because everything has the potential to act, even outside of direct human intervention. For example, humans may give function and characteristics to objects in interaction but in doing so, these objects become actors, they are productive and essential to interactional contexts. This is made especially clear by that fact that objects always carry the potential to act in ways that are unforeseen or unexpected. As Taylor and Van Every (2000) point out, “because the material world has its own internal properties of agency independent of ours, the outcomes of action are never predictable” (p. 163). Therefore, it is not just that humans rely on objects for interaction, or vice versa, but objects and people actively contribute to and construct various moments and contexts of interaction.

Action, then, is always interdependent. It is not enacted by actors but created within the articulation of relationships between actors. In other words, action can be seen as existing outside of the human or object and unpredictably waiting to be channeled through the articulation of relationships among these diverse actors. An individual is never autonomous and never just made and re-made through interaction with other human actors but is itself always part of larger networks of various “heterogeneous

materials” (Law, 1992). Therefore, sexuality and community are always being articulated and rearticulated in communication via socio-material interactions.

ANT accounts for interaction as socio-material. An ANT approach to discourses of sexuality and community accounts for the emergence of various human and non-human actors in communication rather than presuming that social construction is always a product of human-to-human interaction. For example, Latour (2005) suggests that ostensive perspectives on the social prematurely demarcate distinctions between what is social (human) and what is not social (non-human). Instead, ANT claims that there is no such thing as the social, only social formations. In other words, when theorizing sexuality and community relations, we cannot take individuals or ideologies as our starting point, we must take interaction, and in this case communicative interaction, as the starting point in order to fully understand these collaborative constructions.

What appear as stable social constructions, such as dominant conceptions of sexuality and community, are actually the effects of constantly (re)patterning various types of material, human and non-human, through communication. Human material is what has traditionally been considered social (actions, behaviors, communication) and non-human material is anything from material objects to concepts, ideas, machines, states of being, etc. In ANT, there is no separation between the social and the material; they are always continuous with one another. In other words, communication is always socio-material, therefore a constitutive view of communication informed by ANT must account for various actors, human and non-human, involved in interaction, including the representation of material objects as well as non-human social objects such as ideas and concepts as actors.

Finally, ANT suggests that agency, a complex process of unpredictable change, can only be created within socio-material networks, which challenges traditional conceptions of the subject (traditionally considered as the human actor in conversation) and the object (traditionally considered the topic of conversation). ANT proposes a view of agency as productive and collective (networked) rather than possessed and specifically human-centric. However, this is not to say that an individual cannot act, but that the individual is always an actor-network, so this action is never what we would conceive of as being individually (or autonomously) enacted. There is indefinite potential for actors involved in a network and it is through communication that we see these relationships articulated.

What actor-network theory provides for a study of OS is an understanding of sexuality and community as emergent within interaction among various entities, those considered human or non-human. Therefore, ANT privileges self and community generated definitions, identifications, and actors as foundational to constructions of social organizations, such as sexuality and community. From this perspective, the rhetorical strategies employed by the OS community are important on two levels: (1) They reveal the ways OS as sexuality and community emerges in communication both organically and in contrast to what appear as macro, or stable, structures of sexuality and community; and (2) they take seriously the role of objects in constructing and contributing to notions of OS and conceptions of sexuality and community more generally.

Taylor and Van Every (2000) claim that “subjects can only act by the mobilization of their objects but objects, per se, have no meaning in the absence of a subjective investment” (p. 161). In other words, subjects and objects are interdependent

in conversation. The mobilization of various entities in communication depends upon processes of enacting/translating, representing/teleacting, and collapsing distinctions between mediators and intermediaries, which are described in the following sections. Therefore, an analysis of rhetorical practices of OS Internationale also included coding and explanation of instances of enactment/translation and representing/teleacting via the collapsing of mediators and intermediaries. These practices are described in further detail in the following sections.

Translation/Enactment. The processes of translation and enactment are based in the idea that what we come to know about our environments is a “projection” of “sensemaking activities” (Taylor, 2006, p. 146). Sensemaking occurs through translation of experiences via communication with and about objects. According to Taylor (2006), translation is the process whereby we “punctuate experience so that it becomes events for us” (p. 149). He goes on to describe translation as a process in which “our experiences in living in a hybrid material-social world is transformed, through conversation into a text based comprehension of it” (p.146). In other words, when we experience our life-worlds and environments, we make sense of them by translating them into systems of language and then describe them for others through communication.

Through the processes of explaining or translating experiences, these text-based comprehensions are “transformed” into “object-oriented performances,” meaning they reflect and enact a continuous system of human-object interaction (p. 146). As Latour (1996) describes it, “the texts that people produce reflect their involvement in a mixed, or ‘hybrid,’ material and social environment” (p. 397), in which experience is categorized through language (translation), employing various actors within a network of activity

(enactment). As Taylor (2006) suggests, because we confront “our existence in a mixture of material-social and linguistic environments,” we are constantly challenged with translating among them. Therefore, in processes of translation and enactment, we are also always representing and teleacting on behalf of various actors.

Representation/Teleaction. It is through the representation of various actors that⁵ relationships begin to be articulated and through teleacting that networks of relation are continuously enacted. Through representation, interactants can present someone or something in interaction regardless of physical presence. For example, actors can represent the interests of other entities in interaction through conversation, similar to a union representative presenting the interests of union members at a meeting. Those that represent are often seen, then, as macroactors, the actors that act on behalf of all other actors.

Teleaction allows for the transporting of entities from one locale to another through, for example, technological devices or human memory. Teleaction is similar to but different from representation (and the two are not mutually exclusive) in that when someone represents, they are acting on someone/something’s behalf, whereas when someone teleacts, they are bringing someone/something not present into an interaction. These actors are brought in on specific terms. Often these are predetermined or presumed terms, but there can be deviation from these terms as well. For example, Latour (2005) shows how certain agents “come with their own built-in purposes, like guns, for example, which are made for killing” (p. 153). Because the meanings of tools and objects are built

⁵ I acknowledge that generally the pronoun *who* would precede or follow the nouns *actor* and *actors*, however, in order to adhere to ANT assumptions about collapsing distinctions between human and non-human actors, the relative pronoun *that* will be used in reference to all actors from this point forward.

upon previous experiences or memories associated with them, when these objects are mobilized in interaction, they “reflect the purposes of actors that are not physically present in the situation” (p. 153). Therefore, processes of teleaction, whether on presumed terms or terms that deviate from these perceptions, reflect the purposes of the actors involved. In communication, we are always presenting actors that are not physically present, whether through representation or teleaction.

Considering these two concepts in conjunction with one another was crucial for this analysis because, as Taylor and Van Every (2000) point out, it is through both locution (representation) and illocution (action, with practical consequences)” (p. 4) that organizations, or in this case the OS Internationale community, are performed into becoming. Finally, what the discussion of these various concepts reveals is that because there is no distinction between individual and collective actors, there is also no limit on what counts as an actor, subject, or object.

Mediators and Intermediaries. One very specific distinction between traditional perspectives on rhetoric and a perspective of rhetoric through the lenses of ANT is the function of mediators and intermediaries. Mediators are actors that are often foregrounded in communication, the ones traditionally (from a non-ANT perspective) viewed as holding the potential to enact agency (usually human actors). Intermediaries, by contrast, are often considered as background objects, not capable of facilitating agency in anyway (usually non-human actors). In traditional theories of communication, there are few mediators and many intermediaries. From an ANT perspective, the subjects and objects that emerge in conversation are considered equally important because they are interdependent.

As Bell (2012) points out, when analyzing the emergence of various entities within a text, “this is not the same as saying that the emergent entity is intrinsically valuable but simply to recognize that anything that emerges does so because it appeals, that is to say, it has, or is, value for someone or something” (p. 115). The importance of looking at the way various actors, not just human, emerge within conversation through practices of enactment/translation and representing/teleacting is to understand the ways various entities hold value for the rhetorical construction of communities, such as OS Internationale. Therefore, a method of textual analysis informed by rhetorical criticism and actor-network theory facilitated a generative or grounded approach to criticism by focusing on the ways various socio-material actors and symbolic resources constructed particular life worlds.

ANT as a Method

As a method for approaching the research data, the ANT tenets of translation, enactment, representation, and teleaction informed a process of identifying and interpreting OSI rhetorical strategies. First, in order to identify basic translations that the OS Web site presents, I did a general thematic coding of the major topics that generally comprise the content of the Web site. Using these translations as basic organizing schema, processes of enactment, representation, and teleaction were analyzed in more detail in order to determine how networked-actors emerge and reflect these translations, and perhaps others, in more depth.

In order to map the enaction of actor-networks within the OSI Web site, I first identified intense and frequent terms (actors) within the five major content links and four external links, including the OSI “Home” page, “The Red Fence” page, the “What is

OS?” page, the “Expressions” page, the “FAQ about OS from Erika Eiffel” link, the link to Eija-Riitta’s home page, and the links to Dr. Amy Marsh’s “Spectrum of Human/Object Intimacy” and article on “Loves Outer Limits.” Using cluster analysis (Foss, 2009), I grouped terms that emerged around and in reference to one another. For example, if the term *sexuality* emerged frequently/intensely I went back through the data to see what other terms, objects, people, ideas, and concepts emerge around and in reference to this term.

Once this first process of clustering was conducted, in order to understand the emergence of these actors and their articulation within networks, these preliminary findings were charted, noting the relationship of the various identified actors. After these preliminary actor networks were identified, clusters were compared and contrasted to one another in order to identify areas of similarity, overlap, and difference. Actor networks then were merged to consolidate overlapping content and added to one another to reflect related and divergent trends. This charting was used to identify the enactment of interconnected but distinct actor-networks.

After identification of general translations, clustered key terms, and the charting and merging of actor networks, these findings were used to identify the emergence of important and distinct representations, or macroactors. Macroactors refer to actors that represent or act on behalf of other actors and, in this case, actors that facilitate the emergence of multiple interconnecting and surrounding actors. Emerging actors depend upon macroactors to represent their function and meaning when enacted. Without macroactors, other actors will have no representative and organizing principles to which to refer. In other words, macroactors were identified based on their organizing properties;

they are actors that represent a “collectivity whose existence and authority transcends and eclipses the *human* being(s) who comprise it [emphasis original]” (Nicotera, 2013, p. 71). Without macroactors, surrounding and supporting actors would appear as a disjointed string of key terms, concepts, names, and objects rather than as actors that inform and support particular themes or categories of OS. Therefore, macroactors are those that significantly connect surrounding actors in some way.

Finally, processes of teleaction were analyzed based on how macroactors and supporting actors are brought into the Web site, such as on predetermined/presumed or different terms. For example, when a person is teleacted, it is often to recall or foresee the content of a communicative interaction with that person because we perceive people as social beings. When a table is teleacted, it is often to recall or foresee its function (There are too many things on the table, why don't we eat at the table, or I think I'll work at this table today) or its value (I found a new table I want to buy or this table is a family heirloom) because we often perceive objects based on their utility or value. Consideration of these, and similar, terms were used to analyze processes of teleaction. In other words, identifying teleaction meant exploring whether dominant perceptions and expectations about roles, functions, and meanings were met when actors were teleacted or, if not, how they were changed and what this means for OSI self-representation.

In terms of methodology, concepts from feminist/queer/posthuman theory were used as a general framework for engaging with the OSI Web site and designing an explanatory schema. Specifically, these concepts were used to identify heteronormative/anthropocentric binaries and normativities that OSI works to disrupt and challenge. Along the lines of Butler's (2004) project of livability, feminist (rhetorical)

criticism works to interrogate the terms by which world making is constrained, appropriated, and/or multiplied (Butler, 2004) in order to facilitate the construction of multiple modes of living and being. Additionally, one of the functions of feminist work is bridging multiple perspectives. I see my own approach to feminist rhetorical criticism emerging through a conjoining of queer and posthuman perspectives, which challenge the dominance of one entity over another; resist normative prescriptions for living, loving, and desiring; and recognize the potential for agency to be generated outside of human actors. The concepts from these literatures and perspectives that were identified in the previous chapter were used as frameworks for an ANT-informed rhetorical criticism of the OS Internationale Web site. This analysis and a discussion of its implications are the focuses of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 4: Networked Self-Representation by OS Internationale

In this dissertation, I use rhetorical criticism informed by actor-network theory (ANT) to analyze the rhetorical strategies of the OSI Web site and answer questions about how the OSI Web site communicates human-object desire, challenges unfavorable reactions to human-object desire, and contributes to and expands theoretical approaches to queer identities and human-object relations. As discussed in the previous chapter, an ANT informed rhetorical approach to the data is concerned with interpreting processes of translation, enactment, representation, and teleaction. To review:

- *translation* is the process by which human actors depict experience in texts;
- *enactment* is the process of actors interacting in ways that create the network;
- *representation* is the process in which certain macroactors present the interests of other actors within the network; and
- *teleaction* is the movement of representations from place to place and over time through memory and text.

Explanation of these processes allows for the construction of an interpretation about higher order rhetorical strategies employed by the OSI Web site. In this dissertation, I (1) identify the process of translation by analyzing the dynamic set of texts within the Web site; (2) analyze the ways these translations are enacted, meaning the ways actors are brought together in actor networks within various themes of translation; (3) identify instances of representation within these enacted networks, which means determining what actors represent the interests of other actors and become macroactors;

and (4) identify processes of teleaction by looking at the ways various actors are depicted through memory and language within the network. This final step is critical to my analysis because it enables an interpretation of the ways human, object, and concept actors emerge either in alignment with or in resistance to dominant presumptions about their roles, functions, and meanings. Overall, unpacking these processes provides insight into the many human, object, and concept actors that work together to translate OS experiences and rhetorically construct the OSI community and human-object desire more generally. As detailed in the previous chapter, the analysis proceeded along these four stages:

Stage 1--In order to first understand the translations presented on the OSI Web site, I conducted a general thematic coding looking for what information and experiences emerged as the focal topics of the Web site.

Stage 2--In order to identify processes of enactment based in these translations, I conducted a general cluster analysis, including (1) identifying important key terms (actors) that emerged intensely and/or frequently on the Web site in relation to each category of translation identified in Stage 1 and (2) charting the various terms that clustered around one another (Foss, 2009).

Stage 3--Once these clusters were identified and charted, actors that emerged as central to the meaning and understanding of other actors were identified as representations or macroactors.

Stage 4--Next, I further divided this list of macroactors into types based on their role and function in the process of teleaction. The results of this four-stage process are addressed in the following section.

Results

Translation

In Stage 1, I identified several themes in the text. This coding revealed four basic translations:

- (1) descriptions of how OS became a term and community;
- (2) open-ended discussions of what it means to be OS;
- (3) theories and narratives by people who identify as OS about how they have come to make sense of their experiences; and
- (4) public pleas for acceptance regarding OS.

I further identified the actors associated with each of these themes. Figure 4.1 identifies the several actors associated with each of these translation themes.

Key Actors within Translations

How OS became a Term & Community	What it Means to be OS	OS Experiences	Pleas for acceptance
Objectum-sexual(ity)	Communication	Marriage	Respect/Openess
Web site(s)	Orientation	Heart	Red Fence/emblem
Internet	Objectum	Innate	Education
Network	Homo(sexuality)	Feelings	Bravery/Courage
Connections	Hetero(sexuality)	Mainstream	Harassment
Family	Inclination	Public/landmark	Beyond the horizon
Friends	Mainstream	objects	Happiness
Eija-Riitta	Gender	Contact	Normals
Erika Eiffel	Objects	Sensations	Abused/twisted
Pen pals	Complex mental state	Aspergers	Shame/Hurt/Pain
Oliver Arndt	Intimacy	Sexual trauma	
Support	Love	Gender dysphoria	
Reckoning	Obsession	Synesthesia	
Criticism	Multifaceted	Information	
Hope	Spectrum	Polyamory	
Typed flyers	Bell curve	Attraction	
Languages: English,	Reciprocation	Physical/intellectual	
German, Latin, HTML	Sensations	Geometry/function	
Community	Sensuality/Intimacy		
Media	Sex		

Sensationalism/Exploitation	Masturbation Animism Soul Thought transference Forgiveness Humans Superiority/Master Race Equality Evil/Stupid Religion Consciousness Personality Energy Hierarchy Spirit Fetishism Sexual gratification Psychic connection		
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Figure 4.1: Key Actors within Translations

My analysis showed that these actors clustered in certain ways within each translation theme. Figures 4.2 through 4.5 illustrate these clusters.

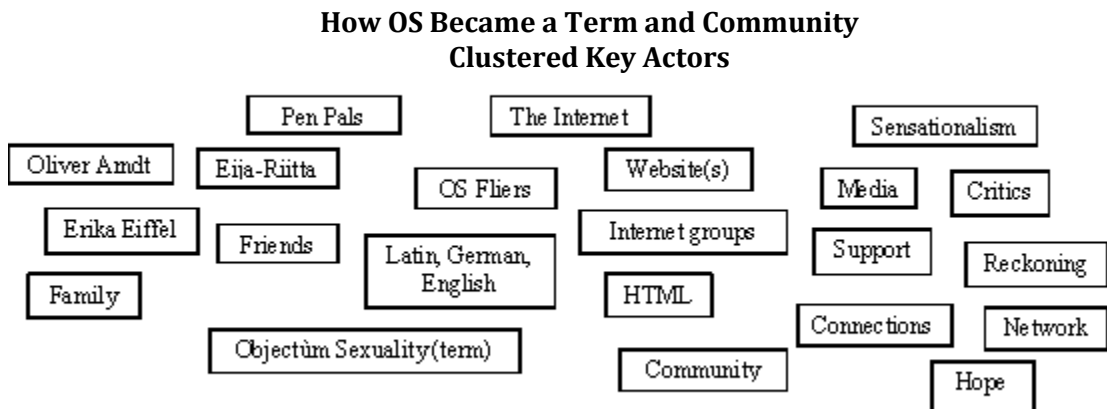


Figure 4.2: How OS became a Term and Community, Clustered Key Actors

What it Means to be OS Clustered Key Actors

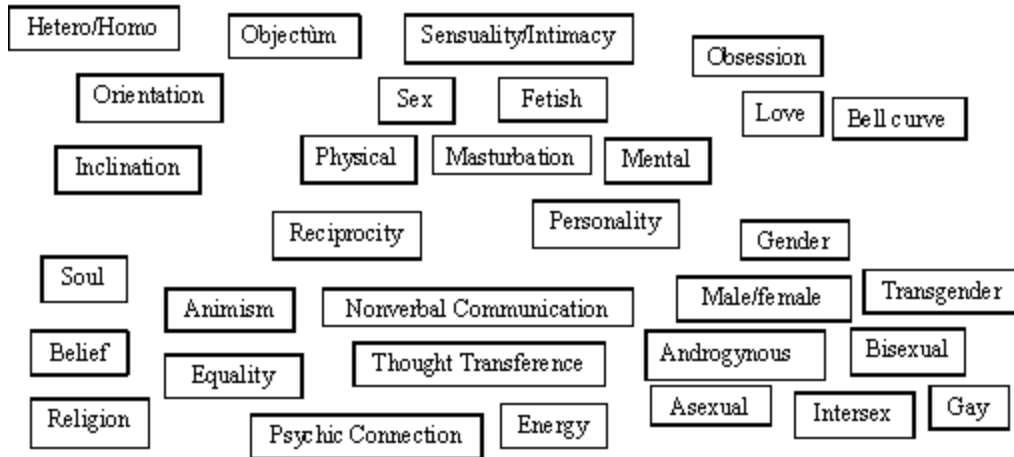


Figure 4.3: What it Means to be OS, Clustered Key Actors

OS Experiences Clustered Key Actors

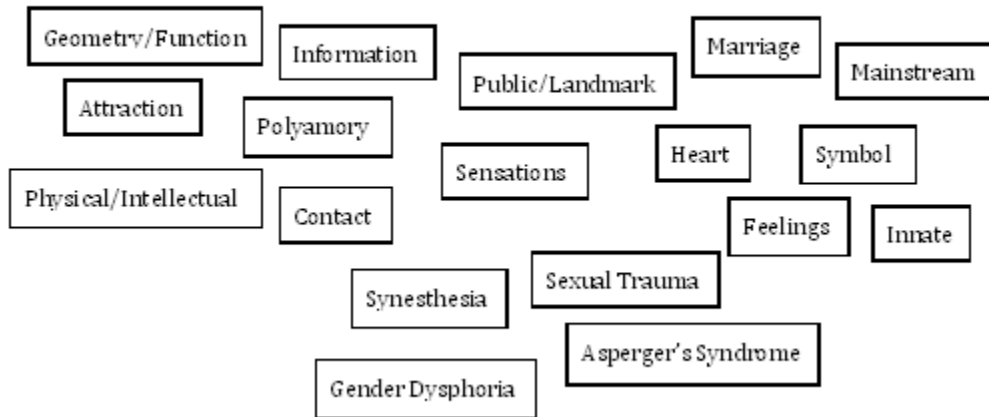


Figure 4.4: OS Experiences, Clustered Key Actors

Pleas for Acceptance Clustered Key Actors

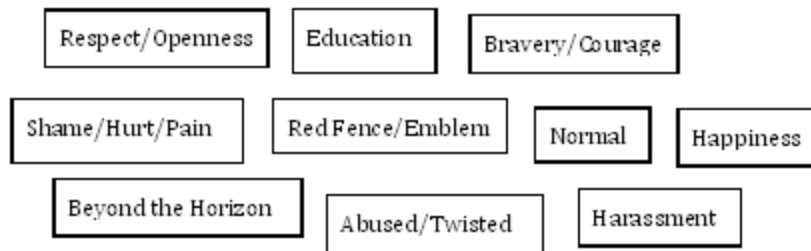


Figure 4.5: Pleas for Acceptance, Clustered Key Actors

Enactment and Representation

In the second stage of analysis, I looked for macroactors within each theme. Macroactors are the broad categories that assume significance in the emergence of thematic translations.

- How OS became a term and community:
 1. People
 2. Communication devices
 3. Purposes
- What it means to be OS
 1. Orientation
 2. Animism
 3. Sensuality/intimacy
 4. Nonverbal communication
 5. Love
 6. Gender
- How people come to know they are OS
 1. Attraction

- 2. Marriage
- 3. Medicalization
- Pleas for acceptance
 - 1. Red Fence/emblems

In the third stage of the analysis, I looked at the actors represented by these macroactors. Figures 4.6 through 4.9 illustrate these clusters. These clusters are explained in greater detail later in this chapter.

Macroactors within Translations

How OS Became a Term and Community Macroactors

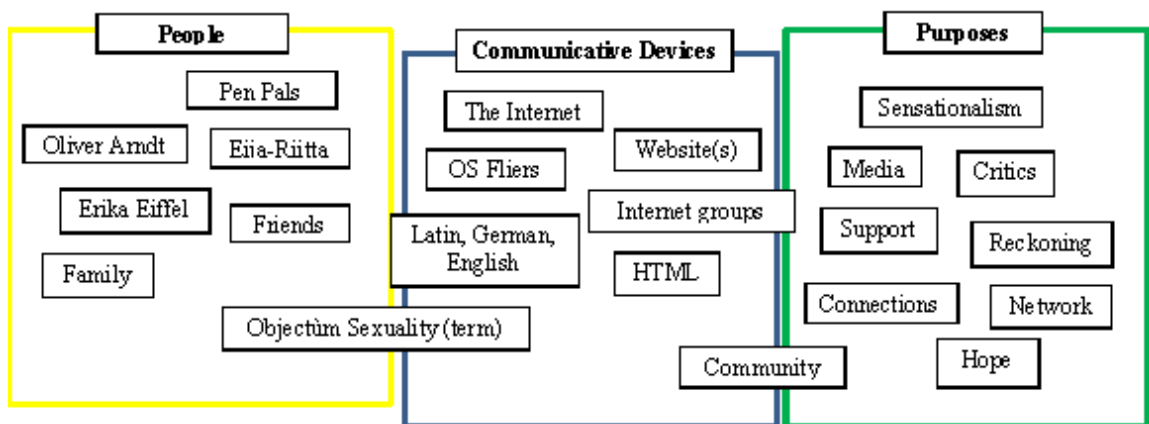


Figure 4.6: How OS became a Term and Community, Macroactors

What it Means to be OS Macroactors

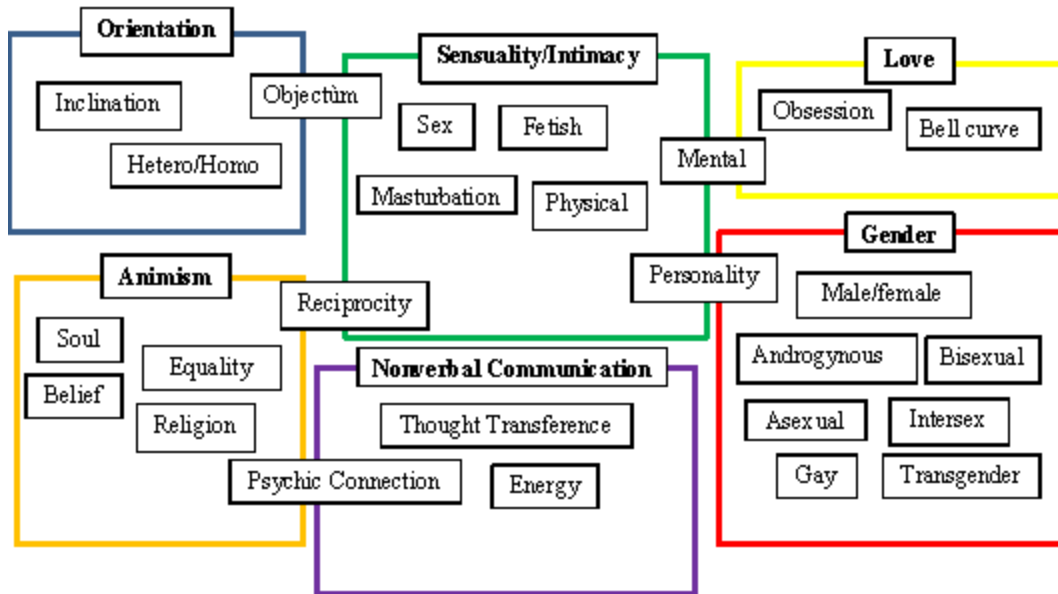


Figure 4.7: What it Means to be OS, Macroactors

OS Experiences Macroactors

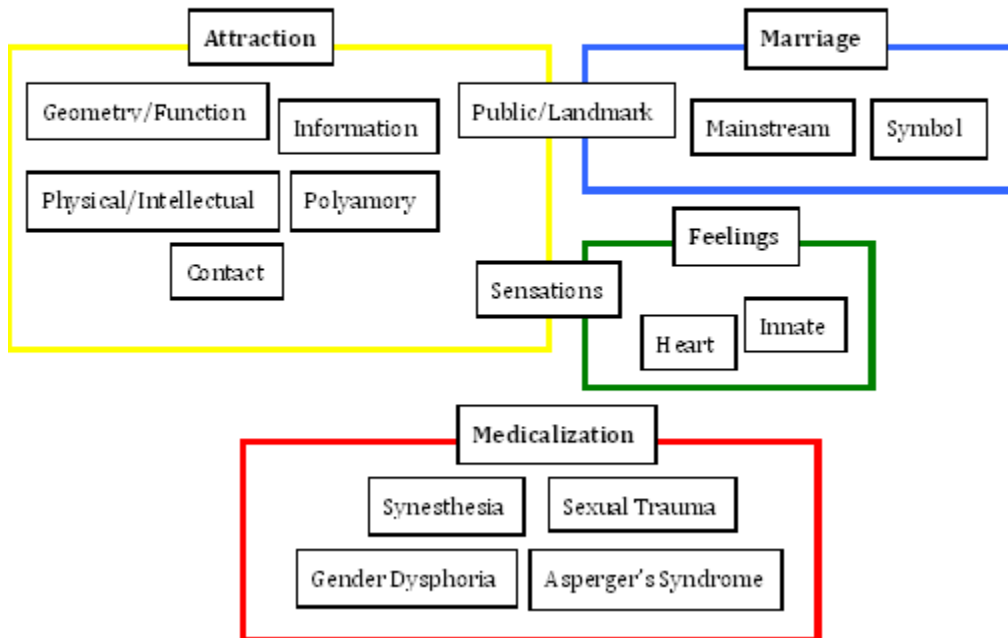


Figure 4.8: OS Experiences, Macroactors

Pleas for Acceptance Macroactors

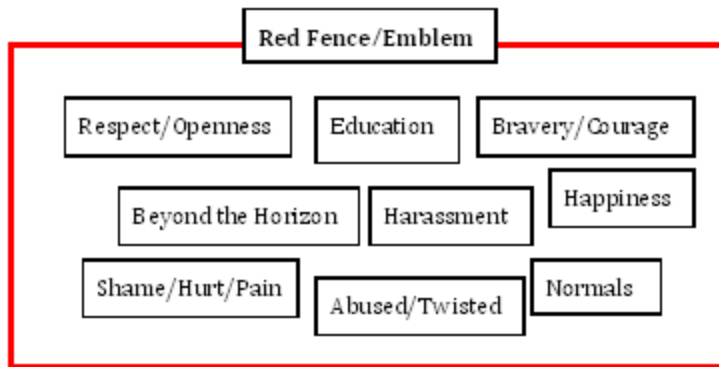


Figure 4.9: Pleas for Acceptance, Macroactors

Teleaction

Recall that teleaction is a process by which certain actors are moved in time and space through memory and, more specifically, in texts. Here, I identify four kinds of network actors involved in teleaction—(1) verbal actors; (2) nonverbal actors; (3) hybrid actors; and (3) symbolic actors.

Specifically, the OSI network teleacts verbal actors—human or object actors with presumed verbal capabilities—in line with their perceived dominant roles. Verbal actors that are teleacted within their perceived verbal and social functions emerge when translating more concrete, definitive, and stable experiences. Verbal macroactors include people, communication devices, and purposes.

In contrast, OSI teleacts nonverbal actors, which are usually object or concept actors without any perceived outward verbal function, often in contrast to their presumed dominant roles, functions, and meanings. Specifically, the dominant roles of these actors are usually highlighted by OSI and then explicitly contrasted. Nonverbal actors in contrasting roles are employed when translating more flexible, ambiguous, and open-

ended perspectives. Nonverbal actors include orientation, sensuality/intimacy, gender, love, animism, and nonverbal communication (e.g., telecommunication).

Hybrid actors, actors that can be perceived as working both within and outside of dominant perceptions, are teleacted when comparing and contrasting dominant presumptions with alternative perspectives in order to present flexible ideas within more stable frameworks of understanding. Hybrid actors include attraction, feelings, marriage, and medical diagnoses.

Finally, symbolic actors are actors that are teleacted in creative ways in order to construct new and unique meanings specific to the OSI Web site and community. Specifically, OSI teleacts the Red Fence as a symbolic actor.

Figure 4.10 summarizes the macroactors by theme and the type of teleaction in which each is involved.

Processes of Teleaction

Translation	Macroactors	Teleaction
How OS Became a Term and Community	People	Verbal
	Communication devices	Verbal
	Purposes	Verbal
What it Means to be OS	Orientation	Nonverbal
	Sensuality/Intimacy	Nonverbal
	Gender	Nonverbal
	Love	Nonverbal
	Animism	Nonverbal
	Nonverbal Comm.	Nonverbal

OS Experiences	Attraction	Hybrid
	Feelings	Hybrid
	Marriage	Hybrid
	Medical Diagnoses	Hybrid
Pleas for Acceptance	The Red Fence	Symbolic

Figure 4.10: Processes of Teleaction

Understanding the four networked layers of teleaction reveals how agency and self-representation emerge within the OSI Web site; how OSI reaffirms and critiques traditional perceptions of sexuality, love, and desire; and what this means in terms of larger rhetorical strategies. The following sections provide an overview of the primary translations presented on the Web site. Within these translations, the emergence of macroactors and processes of teleaction are discussed in relation to OSI networked agency and self-representation. Because teleaction is vital to my rhetorical analysis, I address each theme in greater detail below. These various layers of analysis are followed by explication of the transcendent rhetorical strategies that emerge from OSI rhetoric, which include creating new terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological dimensions. Throughout the following analysis and discussion sections the term *strategies* is not used in the traditional sense of individual rational choice. Rather, the term is used to identify the emergence of rhetorical forces from networked rationality.⁶

⁶ As discussed in prior sections on actor-network theory, action, agency, and choice are not conceived of here as individual (human) processes. Rather, strategies emerge from a constant re-patterning of various entities within communication, which create rhetorical forces based in a process of collective and collaborative action and agency. Thus, strategies are not based in individual choices but networked and emergent within communicative processes.

How OS Became a Term and Community

Before a definition or description of OS is ever provided on the OSI Web site, viewers encounter two full pages of information regarding how the Web site was created, where the term *objectum sexual* comes from, and how and why fellow OS members have connected with one another both online and off. The macroactors that emerge within the translation of the history of OS include people central to the development of OS as a term and community, communicative devices that facilitate interaction, and purposes for developing and maintaining OSI. The macroactors of people, communicative devices, and purposes are clearly outlined in the very first paragraph of the OSI Web site, which states:

This international Web site about objectum-sexuality, (widely known as Objektophil in Germany), is designed to offer a support network for objectum-sexuals (Objektophile) and education for friends and family about objectum-sexuality (Objektophil), and insight into our way of accepting, living, and adapting as individuals who are in love with objects.

These macroactors are primarily verbal, meaning their perceived dominant functions are to facilitate social interaction, develop communication strategies, and allow for the initiation, maintenance, and/or termination of relationships. As the next sections reveal, the teleaction of these macroactors in alignment with dominant expectations leads to the development of very specific, concrete, and definitive networks of connection and goals that facilitate the emergence of the OSI community's self-representation and human-object desire more generally.

People, Communicative Devices, and Purposes

The OS Web site provides a detailed description of how Eija-Ritta Eklöf Berliner-Mauer, labeled as “the pioneer”⁷ of the OS community, “took a chance and braved hoards of criticism from faceless critics on the Internet in an effort to find others like her.” The site goes on to describe how she developed hundreds of pen-pal relationships all over the world, which allowed her to “open up about her sexuality with little to no reprisal.” She decided she wanted to educate her pen-pals about her sexuality by creating a typed flyer to include in her letters. The OSI site explains that “in the early 1970s, Eija-Riitta with two close friends, Lars and Frank, decided on a term for the orientation to love objects...They chose ‘Objectum-Sexuality’ and it is this Latin terminology that we still use today and often the acronym OS.”

In 1996, Eija started the first OS Web site, written in four different languages. She states that “it was from these early hand-coded pages that objectum-sexuality became known in the trenches of the Internet.” Then, in 1999, Eija started the first Internet group “with an extended invitation to anyone interested in discussing objectum-sexual issues.” The Internet group was extremely popular, but it was unclear if interested persons were “actually OS or simply curious and discussions never developed.” Eija-Riitta shut down the group and then reopened it in 2002 “with focus directed at providing a more private environment for discussion.” The new discussion forum required membership approval, which eventually led to the “first active and sincere members of the Objectum-Sexuality Community.”

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations without parenthetical citations following them are taken from the Objectum-Sexuality Internationale Web site at objectum-sexuality.org.

One founding member of this community, Oliver Arndt, developed the largest network for Objektophilie (the German word and online network for objectum-sexuality) in 2002. Through this network, members “have been actively educating the public and courageously addressing the media for many years.” Finally, another founding OS community member, Erika Eiffel, travelled to meet Eija-Riitta and many other OS members in order to gather data and learn more about OS. From these meetings, in 2004 Erika and Oliver were able to work together to adapt the German OS group for English speaking objectum sexuals. The OSI site goes on to state that “Erika later founded Objectum-Sexuality Internationale and started a new international forum in February 2008 inviting the assistance of Oliver and Eija-Riitta to help to share the hope started so long ago...to know we are not alone.” In alignment with their perceived social roles, these descriptions reveal how OS people came together via communicative devices to verbally share and understand experiences and develop goals and purposes for the OSI Web. These goals include connecting to one another and also disseminating information about OS that will limit fear of OS and counter mainstream media sensationalism.

For example, the OS “Home” page praises “The Internet” for its “amazing resources to make connections with others; old classmates, lost family members, and like-minded individuals.” One of the goals of OSI, then, emerges as social connection and networking with other people who identify as OS and family and friends who might be curious about OS. The Internet as a social medium is teleacted in ways that align with dominant perceptions of its purposes as a communicative device and also outlines the purposes of a public OSI Web site as a collection of information for public consumption.

This information also emerges as a way to mitigate sensationalism and fear surrounding OS.

The “Home” page of the OSI Web site addresses the BBC documentary *Married to the Eiffel Tower* and states that “despite featuring OSI members Eija-Riita Berliner Mauer and Erika Naisho Eiffel, this film is firmly denounced by the objectum-sexual community for its exploitative and sensationalized take on OS.” In the “Expressions” section of the Web site, Erika Eiffel elaborates on this, claiming that “the media exploited my willingness and falsely portrayed my relationship with the Eiffel Tower.” Therefore, within the role of disseminating information publically, another purpose of the Web site is also to counter sensationalistic media portrayals by instead offering self-authored information about OS through the OSI Web site. This goal is reaffirmed by personal testimony in the “Expressions” section of the Web site.

One OS member, identified as B. C. Hall, describes in his personal expression that:

People fear what they do not understand, and because fear is such a negative emotion, they hate what they fear. It is then that anger forms, and they try to destroy what they hate. It's like a spider. My sister cannot stand spiders, but she can't stand them because she doesn't understand them, and because of that, she's afraid of them. The end result: she kills every spider she sees.

Therefore, B. C. goes on to say, the goal of this personal testimony “is to help the reader to understand so that they will not fear OS people anymore, and in return, will not hurt anymore of us than they already have.” Here, B.C. describes how a collection of information about OS via public expressions on the OSI Web site cannot only limit

sensationalism but also fear and hatred toward OS. In other words, the purposes of the Web site are, again, teleacted within dominant frameworks of understanding about the role of communicative devices and public information. The teleaction of these macroactors within these dominant understandings facilitates the emergence OS as a specific term and community.

Summary

People such as OS founders Eija-Riitta, Erika, Oliver, and friends and family of OS founders and members are teleacted in ways that show the importance of human interaction and memory in the development of OS. Communicative devices such as the Internet, various instantiations of OS Web sites and Internet groups in a variety of languages, and written communication through pen pals and fliers reveal the importance of technology and media in communicating OS. Purposes such as providing support, offering reconciliation, working against mainstream media sensationalism, and mitigating fear of OS suggest how and why OS members connect with one another and develop a community.

The macroactors of people, communicative devices, and purposes of OSI are predominately verbal, meaning that their perceived dominant roles are outward exchange of messages. In this case, these actors are teleacted in alignment with these dominant perceptions, which leads to a translation of clear and definitive communicative experiences. Throughout the descriptions of the development of OS and the various stages of OS communities, emphasis is continually placed on the ways that OS as a term and community is dependent upon the teleaction of these many verbal actors.

For example, human actors such as Eija-Riitta, Eija-Riitta's pen-pals, Eija-Riitta's close friends Lars and Frank, Oliver Arndt, Erika Eiffel, and potential critics of OS all worked together to create a way to communicate about shared experiences. They agreed to call these feelings and experiences OS and then needed a way to reach out to and connect with others (early and late members of various OS communities) who might also share these experiences and who might need a language to talk about these feelings for purposes of support and/or reconciliation. Object actors such as the Internet, typed flyers, multiple language structures (including Latin, English, and German), various Web sites, html coding (which could also be considered a specific language structure as well), and online discussion forums reveal that the emergence of OS as a term and community is dependent upon the existence and cooperation of and access to various human and object resources capable of verbally facilitating a project of outreach, mutual communication, and resistance to sensationalism.

Overall, these processes of teleacting verbal actors leads to the emergence of OS as a term and community via more specific and concrete exchanged messages and experiences, agreed upon meanings of verbal messages and experiences, and the recording and remembrance of these verbal messages and experiences. In other words, the translation of OS as a term and community emerges through a complex network of language use, relationships, mutual connection, history, and goals. OS as a term and community, then, is dependent upon these various human and object socio-material resources and their presumed roles in order to mutually create a way to label and disseminate collective information about OS and offer support and reconciliation to those who seek it.

What it Means to be OS

Another primary translation within the OSI Web site is various open-ended interpretations about what it means to be OS. The macroactors that emerge and reflect this translation include a broad definition of OS as an orientation, a discussion of how some OS may or may not engage in sexual activity with objects, what it might mean for some people to love an object, a discussion of the ways OS is founded in beliefs in animism, and the various ways OS communicate with objects. These concepts emerge as predominately nonverbal actors, meaning they are actors not necessarily capable of verbal exchange or concrete meaning and thus rely upon their enactment within specific contexts. OS uses them in more flexible and contradictory ways than what might be traditionally expected. Therefore, the teleaction of these actors in contrast to many of their presumed dominant roles complicates their traditional meanings and leads to a more abstract and fluid translation of what it means to be OS.

Orientation

OS orientation is defined on the OS Web site as separate from and different than sexual orientation, which teleacts it in ways that are inconsistent with traditional understandings of orientation in order to disrupt and expand these perceptions. OS is defined and described on the Web site as “an *orientation* to love objects [emphasis added],” which is different from a *sexual* orientation. In the section of the OSI Web site titled “What is OS?” a definition of sexual orientation is opposed to a definition of orientation (sans sexual) to demonstrate to visitors of the site the ways that the term *sexual orientation* does not account for object desire and separating *sexual* from *orientation* provides a more accurate account of OS desire. Sexual orientation is

described as: “*the direction of someone's sexual desire toward people of the opposite gender, people of the same gender, or people of both* [emphasis original]. This does not include objects.” Immediately following is a definition of orientation, described as “*a complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways* [emphasis original]. This does include objects as we see it.” Later on, in this same Web link, OSI suggests that if you replace *objectum* with *hetero* or *homo* before *sexuality*, it merely implies an inclination toward such, suggesting that all sexuality is more fluid than determination based on types of sex acts. Rather, it is an inclination toward particular ways of living and loving. In fact, they go on to suggest that the OS community prefers the terms *sensuality* and *intimacy* over *sex* because physical acts of desire are not generalizable across many relationships, including human-object relationships.

Sensuality/Intimacy

Many curiosities related to OS arise from interests about how someone has sex with an object and how sex with an object differs from masturbation or fetishism. Sensuality and intimacy represent, and become macroactors, of what it means to be OSI. They are teleacted in opposition to dominant presumptions about sex as penetration in favor of sensuality or intimacy as psychic or spiritual presence. One OS member, identified as A. L., recalls a counseling session with a psychiatrist who claims that “it is not possible to have sex with a building” and that the only explanation is that A. L. “must love a building because it’s a large phallus!” The psychiatrist assumes that object sex is not possible because sex requires a penis, or at the very least some form of penetration. In response, A. L. says “OK, that may be the case if you are going off the prolific definition

between humans.” Instead, A. L. suggests that OS cannot be understood within human-centric frames of reference that presume the role of sexual activity is penetration.

Therefore, the OSI Web site states, “we use sensuality or intimacy to describe physically related expressions of love as this offers a broader definition considering our partners are not human and cannot be generalized.” The site goes on to explain that “intimacy is very broad and what may be sensual for some may not be so for others.” The representation of sensuality and intimacy, over traditional definitions of sex as penetration, teleact these macroactors on more broad, flexible, and non-monolithic terms. Sensuality and intimacy emerge to represent more expanded and open-ended notions of sexual activity that may include physicality but could also include a range of expressions beyond physical touch, penetration, and gratification.

The teleaction of sensuality and intimacy on broader and more flexible terms is furthered through the inclusion of the Marsh Spectrum of Human/Object Intimacy diagram in the Web site’s discussion of what it means to be OS. In response to these curiosities about “making union” OSI provides this diagram, developed with the assistance of sexologist Dr. Amy Marsh. In the Marsh Spectrum of Human/Object Intimacy, masturbation is positioned at one end as “instrumental manipulation to self-pleasure.” In other words, the object is a means to an end. In contrast, OS is positioned at the opposite end of the spectrum and is described as an intimate focus on an object that is loved. Fetish/paraphilia is located in the middle of the spectrum and involves the presence (physical or mental) of an object in order to achieve sexual gratification, which is a “habitual psychosocial response.”

The spectrum, from one end to the other, ranges from specific behaviors with objects, to heightened interest in objects, to orientation toward objects. An orientation to objects, then, may include “utilitarian physical involvement,” “physical desire,” and “object fantasies,” but only if these are combined with a “full sense of object personality and/or gender,” “emotional and romantic attachment—sense of reciprocity,” “actual sense of object consciousness,” “spiritual connection,” and “little or no interest in human sex partners.” This diagram layers various levels of sexual gratification and psychic or spiritual connection with objects in order to juxtapose masturbation and fetishism with OS. In doing so, OSI compares and contrasts object-oriented sensuality and intimacy with human-oriented sexual gratification.

Each behavior with and orientation toward objects builds upon the next, leading to a complex layering of physical and emotional intimacy and sensuality that complicates dominant understandings. Instead, sensuality and intimacy are teleacted as varying levels of physical and psychic interconnection between humans and objects. This interconnected perspective takes the spiritual dimension of desire into consideration, forefronts object consciousness and personality, and offers a model of sensuality and intimacy that by definition works outside of traditional reproductive frameworks of sex and desire. For example, as Adam M. points out in the “Expressions” section,

Hearing that someone is intimately in love with a car, for example, is shocking because the first thing that is processed in the brain is something like this:
‘Reproduction: human + machine = error’ (A machine has no reproductive organs, and is not a similar biological entity so reproduction is impossible).

However, this usually occurs because people do not think of sex in terms of “a deep emotional, and spiritual bond.” Therefore, intimacy/sensuality and the intimacy spectrum is teleacted to disrupt these dominant frameworks in order to open up new possibilities for conceiving of human-object desire. The Intimacy/Sensuality macroactor also points to the more complex role that gender holds in defining and developing OS relationships.

Gender

One of the most common questions that Erika Eiffel says she receives is how OS people determine the gender of an object and how this impacts the way OS people label their sexual preference (i.e., does a female loving a female object mean they identify as a lesbian?). Erika responds by saying:

I can't lift a leg and check, but there is a general persona that I sense about my objects and they do have a distinct gender. I love both male and female object lovers. Although some OS people see their objects as only male if they are female and vice versa and some do not sense gender.

In other words, gender is teleacted outside of dominant perceptions of gender as biologically, socially, or even performativity perceived. Gender, instead, is sensed. Objects may give off particular gendered auras that may come from senses about personality, other people's perceptions of the object (e.g., the labeling of the Eiffel tower as the Grand Madame of Paris), or gender might not be involved in the loving and desiring of objects at all.

In fact, many OS people also identify as cisgender, transgender, intersex, asexual, gay, bisexual, polyamorous, and androgynous because object desire complicates dominant links between gender and sexual preference. In other words, as a macroactor,

gender is teleacted in ways that contradict traditional perceptions of gender identity, especially in relation to sexual identity. For OS, gender instead may or may not become an influential dimension of object love; and love, as another macroactor of OSI, also works against dominant conventions.

Love

Love is one of the most frequent and complex actors in OSI rhetoric. The macroactor of love is teleacted in opposition to mainstream idealized and monolithic notions, such as love as always positive and expressed in similar ways across all relationships. Instead, it is teleacted as obsessive, abstract, and metaphorical. One of the questions that OSI responds to in the “What is OS?” Q&A section of the Web site is “what makes OS different from an obsession?” The response is that “truly there is not much difference.” To OSI, “Love is a feeling that preoccupies one's thoughts,” which is the same thing as obsession. Love is putting all focus on the one desired, which is a level of obsession. The site goes onto suggest that because desire of objects is “unorthodox,” it is often labeled obsession instead of love in order to make it seem like a negative relation. Therefore, instead of teleacting OS love within its perceived role of positivity, love is aligned with negative connotations of obsession in order to disrupt these traditional notions of love, which do not account for object love.

Object love is also described as residing on a spectrum, where humans have certain things to offer relationships and objects have others. All humans and objects, therefore, can and should be loved, but this love happens differently. Love, on the OSI Web site, is described as a bell curve where various loving relationship exist together but emerge differently. At the middle and top of the bell curve is “the majority of those

whose relationships that can be characterized by the similarities to whom and how they love.” In contrast, “Objectum-Sexuality finds its place at one end as a minority.” In this metaphor, all relationships where partners are similar to one another, such as human-to-human love, are represented as mainstream love. OS love, then, is love where partners are not recognizably similar to one another, and therefore falls outside of traditional notions of love.

OSI states that their position as a minority on the bell curve of love is what “facilitates the criticism of our way of love and life.” The bell curve emerges to suggest that if definitions of love are expanded to include the fringes of the bell curve then people will see that OS still falls under the larger curve of “the enigmatic emotion known as love.” In other words, OS love challenges dominant or mainstream perceptions of love by teleacting it within a wider and more complex definition. Because love is a nonverbal actor, it is more ambiguous and contextual. Its teleaction works to exploit this ambiguity in favor of inclusion of OS definitions of love. In order to do so, love is opposed to dominant roles. Rather than an idealized state of emotion, love is teleacted as a perception of positive or negative relationality and an emotion based in difference rather than similarity. Love, for OS, is also influenced by and connected with the macroactor of animism.

Animism

Animism, the belief that objects bear souls, is described as forming the basis of an orientation toward loving and desiring objects. For example, Erika Eiffel state in her FAQ that “if the object possesses no spirit, than love is not reciprocated.” The macroactor animism, then, is teleacted as a type of spiritual belief based in reciprocation, respect, and

interconnection of all beings, which is opposed to dominant understandings of religion. On the “What is OS” section of the OSI Web site, animism is described as “the innate belief that objects are not inanimate but possess a spirit, soul, or energy to which one can connect with.” In the “Links” section of the Web site, a link to Eija-Riitta’s homepage provides a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between animism and OS. She states, “We believe that all objects (things) are LIVING and having a SOUL, (Animism). I think that is very important to see objects as living, if one should be able to fall in love with an object [emphasis original].” In other words, for OS, a belief in animism facilitates an understanding of objects as intelligent, feeling, and communicative.

Animism is also about the belief that “artifacts (objects) have the same level of awareness as human beings.” In other words, animism views beings as hierarchically indifferent. As Eija-Riitta claims, “I see artifacts as equal to human beings, animals and plants.” Animism resists traditional categorizations of beings as biologically determined (e.g., living equals the possession of a soul) and classified (e.g., humans at the top of the proverbial food chain). This belief facilitates a relationship between humans and objects based in interconnectedness and accountability to one another, which leads to a more ethical view of the world.

In her discussion of OS and animism, Eija-Riitta states that people need to challenge the superiority of humans and, instead, adopt a view where all beings exist equally. She states:

The human race is neither more or less worthy than anything else on this planet.

We all are equal, no matter what we are - objects, humans, animals or whatever.

This is called ‘Total Equality.’ We all are inhabitants of this planet - let’s start to

treat each other with respect and THIS ALSO INCLUDE OBJECTS, ANIMALS and PLANTS [emphasis original]!!!”

Eija goes on to compare the human race to the Nazis, claiming that they have made themselves the master race, of which she is ashamed to be a part. Being OS and believing in animism, which to Eija are one in the same, are ways of seeing beyond this horizon of superiority in order to empathize with other beings. She claims that objects do not ask to be built just as “humans do not ask to be born,” therefore, anything that is born (including objects) has the same right to “exist and have a decent life.” As a spiritual belief, animism is about respect for all beings and acknowledgement of their (equal) rights.

Eija-Riitta explicitly compares animism to dominant beliefs in god, suggesting that we cannot call it wrong just as much as we cannot call religion, more generally, wrong. Using the assumption that many mainstream folks believe in some kind of a higher power, such certain gods, morals, and/or ideologies, animism is teleacted in ways that challenge these traditional notions in order to expand these understandings. In doing so, OSI reveals the ways that traditional beliefs are more tenuous, subjective, and multiple than we have been encouraged to think within dominant understandings of spiritual and religious beliefs. Eija’s homepage more abruptly points to this when she suggests that at times, and in certain contexts throughout history, whether we may be aware of it or not, “people have made stupidity their own religion.” In saying this, she suggests that people have been led to believe that there are only right or wrong ways to subscribe to and practice spirituality and religion and, because of this, people have developed close-minded beliefs and perspectives. In contrast, whereas dominant perspectives emphasize the intervention of a higher being, a particular moral code, or

ideology, OS emphasizes interconnectedness, accountability, and equality of beings and perspectives.

Many OS members discuss in their “Expressions” the idea that, in many ways, resistance to OS is more about a different spiritual orientation than it is about “perverse sex.” One OSI member, Rudi from Germany, states:

I think the reason why we objectum sexuals get so much harassment with the normal society is the matter that we consist on the fact that our lovers have a feeling soul and a conscious mind. It is not so much the fact that we have sex with objects or perverse sex. It's that people make sanctions on us in the form of making us look ridiculous and boarding us out [*sic*].

However, OSI and the belief in animism counter this resistance by suggesting that because beings must bear a soul in order for love to be reciprocated; love cannot exist without a fundamental belief in animism, whether we call it that or not. In other words, OSI suggests that the basis for love should be a belief in the life, soul, and rights of other beings, and the extension of this perspective into human-object relations only makes us more accountable and ethical to the interconnectedness of all lifeworlds. Where this tends to confuse many people is at the point of communication. Many sections on OS address the question of how a relationship can develop with an object if an object cannot talk. Therefore, the macroactor animism informs the macroactor of communication.

Nonverbal Communication

Emerging from a belief in the equality of all beings and respect for the rights of objects is a view of human-object communication as non-verbally reciprocal. Therefore, relational communication is teleacted in contrast to dominant presumptions of

communication as both verbal and nonverbal and usually with a heavy emphasis on the verbal. Instead, OS communication is teleacted as almost strictly nonverbal. It occurs through sensations, psychic connection, and telecommunication. In doing so, these alternative forms of communication are enacted as legitimate and ethical interpersonal interactions.

OSI suggests that the mainstream relies so heavily on verbal communication that they often cannot conceive of relationships where nonverbal communication is a primary mode of interaction. Instead, OS suggests that “communication comes in many forms besides verbal.” In fact, many OS individuals “commune” with objects “via sensations.” These sensations are more complex than verbal patterns of communication. They include psychic connection and telecommunication, which emerge from deep senses about an object’s consciousness, personality, and public knowledge about an object.

For example, Eija-Riitta states, “You might wonder how I communicate with artifacts. That is done by thought transference....Artifacts are also telepathic, so although I prefer to speak aloud to the objects, that is not necessary.” The OSI Web site further explains, “It is via our intense feelings that our interests are driven in everything related to the object. The more knowledge we learn and internalize, the more we develop a clearer ability to sense the object.” Many individual “Expressions” discuss the ways that communicating with an object includes getting to know an object, flirting with an object, and initiating and terminating a relationship with an object, which are all mutual processes of nonverbal communication. Objects telepathically communicate their level of interest in a particular relationship just as much, if not more, than their human counterparts and, in many instances, may even initiate a break up with their partner.

Eija explains her process of communicating with her cohabitating objects, specifically scale model objects that she keeps in her home-based museum. She states:

If any of these models doesn't want to be in the museum, because he finds it boring, useless or any other reason—I have no right whatsoever to force this model to take part in the museum. In fact some of them don't want to be in the museum, they prefer to be in my rooms of the house. I have respected their wishes.

Here it becomes clear that animistic beliefs in the soul of objects and respect for their equal rights is what facilitates OS communication with objects and also what encourages an awareness of relational reciprocity as an ethical consideration. In other words, communication with objects means deeply sensing and negotiating impact on and accountability to one another. In other words, the teleaction of communication as a nonverbal macroactor presents interpersonal relationships as not necessarily dependent upon the verbal exchange of messages. Verbal communication may be one way of developing mutuality; however, nonverbal communication requires a deeper and less definitive way of developing relational connection, which is in many ways resistant to dominant understandings of communication.

Resistance to the OS community is acknowledged as coming from an alternative perspective on the nature of communicative interaction. OSI suggests that being identified as having a mainstream sexual orientation is as much about having “noticeable interactions” (which are outward verbal interactions) as it is about having a relationship with a non-object. In other words, fear of OS is tied to dominant perceptions of communication as predominantly verbal; therefore, OS challenges these presumptions to

encourage taking telecommunication seriously and to view it as a more complex and ethical mode of interacting.

Summary

The macroactors that emerge within translations of what it means to be OS include sensuality/intimacy, love, animism, and communication. These macroactors are teleacted in ways that complicate the generalizability of these concepts within OS orientation. Therefore, whereas OS as a term and community is translated using more definitive and agreed upon processes of teleaction in order to label and facilitate the development of the community, what it means to be OS is translated using more abstract, fluid, and resistive processes of teleaction in order to construct object desire in opposition to mainstream desire. When translating OS members' theories and narratives about how they have come to make sense of their experiences, macroactors are teleacted using a combination of these two processes.

OS Experiences

Another primary focus of the OSI Web site is discussing how various OS members' have come to make sense of their experiences and subsequently identify these experiences as an OS orientation. These discussions offer information about the ways people negotiate their attraction to objects, how feelings of OS develop and take form, how marriage emerges to represent OS love and orientation, and what the possible causes of OS are. These macroactors of attraction, feelings, marriage, and medical diagnoses are teleacted in hybrid ways, meaning ways that both align with and diverge from dominant terms of understanding. In doing so, OSI works within these logics in order to appropriate, disrupt, and in some ways assimilate into dominant frameworks, behaviors,

and categories. This process of teleaction translates ways of knowing about OS as both relatable and resistive to the “mainstream.”

Attraction

The OSI Web site carefully navigates topics related to attraction because of its connection with public displays of affection. Therefore, as a macroactor, attraction is teleacted in ways that align with dominant perceptions as an instant and prolonged pull towards specific physical and mental characteristics. However, it is also teleacted in resistive roles as access to public knowledge and information. These processes of teleaction affirm the function of privacy in traditional interpersonal contexts of attraction but contradict and complicate traditional private/public distinctions of affection and definitions of monogamy.

For example, OSI suggests that “just as mainstream are attracted to certain types of people, physical/intellectual, objectum-sexuals develop strong feelings towards objects possessing, in particular, certain geometry/function.” Once initial attraction is felt, OSI explains that OS persons then date objects just as people date each other. In other words attraction for OS people, at least at the interpersonal level, is in many ways similar to human-to-human attraction, which develops privately between members involved. However, where OSI really begins to challenge dominant perceptions of attraction is in discussions of the role of knowledge and information in developing and sustaining attraction through affection.

The OSI Web site suggests that beyond the aesthetic or functional nature of an object, OS persons often develop attraction through knowledge and information available about an object because, as they state, “the more knowledge we learn and internalize, the

more we develop a clearer ability to sense the object” and, therefore, communicate with an object. Similar to getting to know someone’s past in the beginning of a relationship in order to reduce uncertainty and develop a deeper connection with them, access to public and/or historical information about an object increases possibilities for immediate and prolonged connection. This is why many OS individuals find themselves attracted to public objects and also what complicates dominant notions of attraction.

Attraction is more complex than just an immediate appeal to physical characteristics or personality traits. As Erika Eiffel indicates on her FAQ portion of the Web site, “I can find a person aesthetically attractive, but more than that...I just do not feel anything more than friendship with people.” Therefore, it is entirely possible for OS persons to be initially attracted to humans but not develop anything more than friendship with them; and although psychic connection and telecommunication allow people who identify as OS to sense the personality and intellect of an object, information about or histories of objects are often dependent upon access to public knowledge and/or information about an object. Therefore, because landmark objects, which are often public objects, offer a more pronounced availability of information regarding their histories, OS persons can develop a deeper sense of connection and attraction with them.

OSI rhetoric reflects an awareness of resistance to (queer) public displays of affection, particularly with landmark objects. Therefore, even though there is more availability of information about landmark objects, their publicness presents distinct challenges for OS desire and affection. The OSI Web site suggests that people who love landmark objects “may face complications similar to people in long distance relationships.” Unless they are able to interact with this object on a regular basis, they are

not able to develop a strong connection. Therefore, “to overcome the challenge, many objectum-sexuals build or acquire scale models” because they “provide a link as an extension of the object,” which is “similar to people carrying photographs or articles such as jewelry to remind of their distant lover.” However, when possible, most OSI states that “we prefer to be with the object we love.”

Because getting to know public objects is imperative to developing a relationship with them, public affection is sometimes uncontrollable. Therefore, although OSI acknowledges normative prescriptions of affection and sexual propriety, they implicitly challenge assumptions of public versus private love and attraction. In other words, attraction is teleacted in new and oppositional ways that suggest dependency upon access to public knowledge as a basis for relational development. The teleaction of attraction in this way reveals that human-to-human relationships may develop privately or publically but human-object relations develop through a complex negotiation of private and public through traditional notions of private physical and mental attraction and public access to information and knowledge. Attraction as both private and public in this case reveals how, for OS, these processes are intertwined, rather than separate.

Discussion of the nature of human-object attraction also informs a unique definition of polyamory. When responding to the question, “Do OS people love more than one object,” OSI states that “indeed, polyamorous relationships exist amongst objectum-sexual individuals and may involve objects that are related via structure, location, and/or function.” The site goes on to explain that because object attraction occurs based on geometry, function, and access to information, objects that are related via structure, location, and/or function are considered kinship objects and a

relationship with multiple kinship objects (multiple New York based bridges, for example) for some people can be considered a non-polyamorous relationship. On the other hand, loving more than one type of object (bridges and buildings, for example) for some people could be considered polyamorous. For example, Erika Eiffel states on her FAQ page:

Until a few years ago, I only loved one type of object. If I loved Bridges, I could only love Bridges because I was influenced by society and did not believe in polyamorous relationships regardless if I had feeling for another type of object, such as a Fence.

Whereas dominant prescriptions of attraction define polyamory as desiring and being intimate with more than one (human) partner at a time, this is not necessarily the case for all OS. An OS person can be attracted to and in love with more than one object and consider themselves non-polyamorous but not necessary monogamous either.

Again, attraction is teleacted in ways that align with and diverge from traditional expectations. In alignment, attraction is physically based and may determine entrance into a polyamorous relationship. However, in contradiction, attraction is the predominant actor that defines polyamory (rather than maybe love and sex) and complicates binary and monolithic distinctions between monogamy and polyamory. Instead, the teleaction of attraction on these terms offers many combinations and levels of attraction that may lead to identification as polyamory or something different entirely. Therefore, attraction works within more complex and flexible levels and combinations while still maintaining the stability of certain categories and definitions. Similarly, the macroactor of feelings is teleacted in both definitive and flexible ways.

Feelings

The macroactor of feelings forms the basis for identifying as OS and experiencing OS. Feelings are teleacted in dominant and contradictory ways as both genetically controlled, or innate, but emotionally uncontrollable, or unpredictable. Feelings as innate are teleacted to suggest that OS is not a choice and therefore cannot be changed. People are essentially born with unique feelings toward objects and these feelings then become desire during a sexual awakening in puberty. For example, Eija-Riitta says she came to understand sexuality in puberty when “love was in the air.” She knew she felt love and she felt love towards objects but she just did not know exactly what to call it.

On the “Expressions” section of the Web site, many people who identify as OS suggest feeling a sense of helplessness and not being able to change something that comes so naturally. Rhetorics of the inborn nature of sexual feelings tend to be used over rhetorics about sexual feelings as a choice. Innateness is often used to challenge arguments that people can be changed and should therefore be accepted. In many ways OSI aligns with this dominant interpretation of feelings, however, at the same time they also point to an often unacknowledged complexity of feelings by discussing them as external to the self and unpredictable.

In particular, in the “Expressions” section of the OSI Web site, D from Berlin states “We do not choose the way we feel, do we? We do not always choose the easier way. Our heart makes the choice, and we have to find a way to live our love.” In many instances, people describe feelings as unpredictably emanating from oneself, an uncontrollable freeing of the body, and an opening up of oneself to new experiences. Although the teleaction of feelings as outside of the person takes a back seat to the

teleaction of innateness, the combination of these teleactions reveals the ways innateness is also always wrapped up in moments of unpredictability. In other words, feelings are innate in so far as they orient us in specific ways but the unpredictable actions of our heart, body, and experiences all work together to make choices on behalf of our feelings. Therefore, feelings are not unchanging. Innateness is not fixed and monolithic. Rather, if we let go of our feelings to a belief in innateness we open ourselves up in unpredictable ways. The expression of these OS attractions and feelings are often expressed through macroactors of marriage and medicalization.

Marriage

Marriage to objects, as discussed on the OSI Web site, is often a topic that non-OS people have a hard time comprehending. Marriage is teleacted in dominant ways as a legitimizing institution but also as a representative institution that signifies a life of loving objects in order to complicate and expand the function of marriage. Two of the founders of OSI, Erika Eiffel and Eija-Riitta Eklöf Berliner-Mauer, have married objects and changed their last names to signify these relationship. However, their stories about why they decided to symbolically marry objects and change their names reveal that marriage for OS is less about being interpellated into a legal, religious, or even normative institution and more about utilizing marriage as a representative institution that taps into an already established legitimizing capabilities; a category that symbolizes that love and desire are real and true.

In particular, marriage is about symbolic identification with a particular kind of love, in this case object love, in a publically recognized and acknowledged way. For example, the OSI Web site states that “Erika came out about her long-time affection for

the Berlin Wall and also iron bridge structures, including the matriarch of Bridges, the Eiffel Tower, which she unofficially married April 8, 2007.” In her personal expression she elaborates on her decision to marry and change her name, saying it “that spring day in Paris, in the company of close friends, was my personal dedication to the Eiffel Tower and merely a manifestation of my love for and commitment to Bridges, not marriage by any conventions was,” and changing her name was a “measure to illustrate my love for Bridges and a commitment to what I am, an objectum sexual [*sic*].” In other words, marriage is not teleacted as legally sanctioned rights and privileges, moral and/or religious affiliation, or even socially prescribed norms about monogamy. As Erika and Eija acknowledge, objects cannot participate in many of the rights afforded by marriage and many OS individuals are polyamorous. Therefore, labeling OS relationships as marriages teleacts this macroactor as a strategy for utilizing an already established and legitimized institution of love to publically declare and recognize a particular orientation to love objects. Teleacting macroactors to work within and outside of dominant frameworks of understanding is especially relevant to OSI in answering questions about what potential causes of OS might be.

Medicalization

The macroactor of medicalization, which represents actors that signify professional diagnoses, is teleacted as a discourse of legitimation but also as flexible and contextualized categories. OSI implicitly acknowledges a history of using medical labels and diagnoses to stigmatize, pathologize, and control deviant behavior. They even explicitly state on the Web site that “we are not looking for a cure but more comprehension into our make-up as an emerging part of society.” However, they still

engage a line of Q&A on the Web site called “Are there factors that cause one to be OS?” In this section, they discuss psychological explanations for why some people might become OS. They suggest that many studies of OS that attempt to diagnose it as a disorder have found that OS people are no more prone to various psychological conditions than non-OS people. Therefore, the teleaction of medicalization is less strict than traditional notions of medical diagnoses as all-or-nothing. Instead, because OS is a complex and diverse orientation, some people find identification with various psychological conditions significant to their own personal understanding about what it means to be OS and where it comes from. Additionally, teleacting medicalization allows OSI to dispel certain negative presumptions about OS within familiar frames of knowledge.

For example, the OSI Web site indicates that some OS individuals fall on the autistic spectrum, specifically labeled as Asperger’s syndrome, where they experience impaired social functioning from childhood. This impaired functioning may cause mainstream bonds with humans to be difficult but bonds with objects to be more intense. Similarly, some OS persons experience synesthesia, which is cross sensory perception that causes additional senses such as seeing colors of words or tasting sounds. This heightened level of perception allows people who identify as OS to connect with objects in different ways beyond the limitations of the traditionally prescribed five senses. Other discussions about causes of OS include sexual trauma and gender dysphoria. Although a survey of OS members revealed that many had experienced sexual trauma, the average number was no higher than that experienced by non-OS persons, and identification with OS usually predated the sexual trauma, suggesting that the trauma itself was not

necessarily a cause of OS. Gender dysphoria is a more complex label for people who identify as OS since objects have no physical gender. However, because physical gender is not present, and gender identity of objects is often either psychically perceived or nonexistent, the OSI Web site states that this can “call into question one’s own gender” because “there is no polarity.” In other words, because we often determine our own gender based on attraction to other genders—comparison—this is confused in OS relationships. Therefore, gender dysphoria is less a reason for OS than a perceived effect of OS.

Summary

The teleaction of attraction, feelings, marriage, and medicalization in hybrid ways provides OS members who prefer to utilize dominant logics a way to navigate their own feelings and desires while also providing outside consumers of OSI rhetoric a familiar framework of understanding. The complication of dominant perceptions as non-monolithic also reveal the ways that these various macroactors, often considered stable and generalizable, can instead be perceived as more malleable and contingent categories and experiences. Beyond processes of teleacting within and outside of the presumed dominant expectations, OS also engages in the construction of new symbolic macroactors in order to call OSI readers to action.

Public Pleas for Acceptance

The fourth translation of experiences and information that emerges as a primary focus on the OSI Web site is public pleas for acceptance. Most specifically, OSI calls readers at many different points in the Web site to be open-minded, to suspend judgment, and to be respectful to others. Discussions of the pain and suffering experienced by OS

persons is common in the “Expressions” page, most of which are followed by pleas to readers to allow OS individuals to live their lives openly and without external criticism. The macroactor that emerges as representative of these public pleas is the Red Fence. This macroactor is a symbolic actor, meaning it is created specific for the context of the OSI Web site and, therefore, transforms traditional expectations about this actor in new, creative, and unexpected ways. The Red Fence, in particular, is described as the emblem of OSI and is prominent throughout the Web site.

The Red Fence

Many expressions on the Web site reveal that OS members are invested in opening people’s minds. For example, Erika Eiffel claims that even if people who encounter the OSI Web site do not change their minds about OS, it is sufficient just “to have people simply thinking about what it is like to be objectum-sexual.” This desire for OS perspective taking is also described by A. L., who says “it is clear that I will never be able to come out until people get a better understanding of objectum-sexuality from our point of view.” The macroactor that represents these collective please is the Red Fence, which is symbolically teleacted.

For OSI, the Red Fence is teleacted as a way to unify and symbolize a shared enduring of pain and a hope for a more accepting future. In reference to the significance of the Red Fence as a community symbol, the concluding paragraph of the OS Web site’s first two pages states:

The Red Fence is cherished by Eija-Ritta as an object she holds dear to her heart. As a tribute to her courage and devotion, Röda Staketet is to the objectum-sexual community...our symbol. Fences exist throughout society. We put them up to

protect ourselves but not to shut people out. One can look over a Fence and see what's on the other side. If the grass is indeed greener or not...that we decide for ourselves.

In this case, the Red Fence is teleacted in a hybrid way that both aligns with and diverges from dominant understandings of fencing properties (such as using fences for protection but not shutting people out and also demarcating grassy areas) but its overall meaning transcends this hybridity to become a new symbol of hope and acceptance.

For example, the Red Fence is described as a significant companion of OS founder Eija-Riitta. Therefore, it is not only a symbol that unites the community more broadly but also a friend, ally, and potential member of the OS community itself. It is both a definitive symbol of the safety and open-mindedness that the community hopes to cultivate toward OS as well as a central actor in the development of OS relationships with each other and the public more generally. In doing so, OS develops a complex macroactor that encourages people to “see over the fence;” in later segments of the site this is also referred to as seeing “beyond the horizon.”

Summary

Through teleacting the Red Fence as a unique macroactor, OSI combines fencing properties and object companionship in creatively interconnected and complex ways, which eventually move it beyond its dominant or resistive characteristics and into new symbolic territory. Doing so encourages readers to contemplate the translation of OS experiences and the impact of outside actors on these experiences through a new lens that might not have otherwise been available to them.

Rhetorical Strategies

Each of the primary translations presented on the Web site are reflected through macroactors or categories and languages that punctuate various histories and understandings of OS and that are teleacted in strategic ways. The emergence of these macroactors and processes of teleaction can also be interpreted as higher level, or transcendent, rhetorical strategies that reveal more broadly how OS members communicate human-object desire, challenge unfavorable reactions to human-object desire, and contribute to and expand theoretical approaches to queer identities and human-object relations. In this case, the OSI Web site presents the development of new and alternative terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological approaches and understandings. More specifically, terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological rhetorical strategies emerge in layered and overlapping ways through the translation of histories related to how OS became a term representative of sexuality and community, what it means to be OS and orient to objects, how individuals experience OS and understand these feelings, and OSI's public pleas for acceptance.

Terminological strategies emerge through OSI's communication about the interrelationship between terms and their community or the emergence of OS through mutual language use. Ontological strategies emerge through OSI's communication of a higher-level philosophy about the existence of beings and the meanings and modes of being, existing, living, and loving. Axiological strategies emerge through the development of criteria for ethical values and judgments in relation to OS. Epistemological strategies emerge where ontological and terminological networks meet; where the nature and scope of knowledge about OS is represented. Together, these four

transcendent level interpretations of OSI rhetorical strategies facilitate both the rhetorical construction of the OS community and critiques of anthropocentric frames of love, desire, and sexuality. An unpacking of each of these rhetorical strategies as constructive of the OS Internationale Web site, the OS community, and OS as an orientation to love object more generally is the focus of the following sections.

Terminological Strategies

OS is dependent upon a sharing of common experiences and access to common sociomaterial systems of objects, such as people and communicative devices, in the construction of a community with shared goals. Therefore, OS as a sexuality and a community is about terminology, the interrelationship between terms and particular cultural experiences, or the development of an identity through shared systems of reference, language, and objects capable of verbal exchange. Without terminological rhetorical strategies, OS as a term would not exist, and OS as a sexuality and community is dependent upon this term. Therefore, communicating OS and, subsequently, human-object desire, in understandable and relatable ways is dependent upon terminological rhetorical strategies. Terminological strategies structure and facilitate the emergence of OS ontological, axiological, and epistemological rhetorical strategies.

Ontological Strategies

Largely, through ontological rhetorical strategies OSI challenges dominant categorical and hierarchical separations of beings and posits a layering of experiences as an interconnected mode of living and loving. For example, the comparison of OS to hetero and homosexuality, often labeled “mainstream” sexuality, suggests that the project of OS is not only about constructing a community but also implicitly about critiquing

normative prescriptions of living and loving that are based in human-centric assumptions. Therefore, OSI rhetoric reveals that normative ontological prescriptions are not only related to heteronormativity but also anthropocentric normativity. In doing so, they offer an alternative ontological framework that merges queer and posthuman perspectives in ways that complicate normative desire and present possibilities for a multiplicity of desire and relationality.

OSI does this, for example, by disrupting various binaries such as human/non-human, sex/gender, public/private, monogamy/polyamory, and controllable/uncontrollable, in favor of in-betweenness and ambiguity and in resistance to generalizations. In doing so, OS rhetoric implicitly argues that hierarchical categorizations, binary categories, and generalizations reinforce (hetero)anthropocentrism. Although, on the surface OSI seems to be striving in many ways for inclusion into mainstream understandings, they do so on a deeper level that also interrogates the contradictions and limitations of anthropocentrism in order to construct nuanced understandings of love and desire. Surprisingly, where anthropocentric desire is often about objects of desire or the construction of the desiring self in relation to objects OS is about radical accountability to all beings as a foundation of desire, which includes desire of and with objects.

Additionally, at first glance, the cloaking of conversations about sex and sexuality as sensuality and intimacy on the OSI Web site might suggest some level of recognition that when “pleasure is called sexuality, the spillage of eroticism into everyday social life seems transgressive in a way that provokes normal aversion, a hygienic recoil” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 560). However, an analysis of the ways sexual and orientation

emerge distinctly from one another, instead, provides a view of the ways sex is predominately conceived of within anthropocentric frames of understanding and orientation, separate from sexual, unfold as more dynamic, less restrictive, and communicatively more complex. Additionally, the human/object intimacy spectrum points to the ways that categorizations and definitions of sexual behaviors from an object-centric, or queer-posthuman, ontological framework are more complex than variations on penetration and reproduction.

In terms of love, as Foss (2009) points out, metaphors are often more about framing rather than interpreting a particular perspective. Metaphors “organize attitudes toward whatever they describe and provide motives for acting in certain ways” (Foss, 2009, p. 269). In this case, metaphors provide motives for viewing the world in a particular ways, thus influencing perceptions of reality. In using the metaphor that love is obsession, OSI attempts to construct a reality where OS is only perceived as a perverse desire because of the ways it is framed. Therefore, when love is viewed metaphorically, in comparison to obsession, it becomes clear that OS is in actuality not dissimilar from human-centric love and desire. With a slight ontological shift, OS becomes visible and viable within a different framework of reality.

The emergence of sensuality/intimacy, gender, love, animism, attraction, and feelings reveal an emphasis on non-verbal communication as a mode of constructing and perceiving reality that is often unintelligible within anthropocentric ontological frames. Sensuality and intimacy as spectral, gender as fluid and perceptual, love as metaphorical, animism as psychic interconnection, communication as sensation, attraction as public knowledge, and feelings as both innate and unpredictable all create new lenses for

conceptualizing desire and human-object relations. These ontological shifts inform axiological rhetorical strategies, or the criteria that OS proposes for ethical values and judgments.

Axiological Strategies

As another higher level project, OSI presents many suggestions for interacting with the world and others more ethically. Adam M. points out in the “Expressions” section of the OSI Web site that changing our perceptions of reality automatically leads to more open-mindedness. He states “all someone has to do is open their minds beyond the confines of preconfigured reality, and view the world as their own—a world in which reality is so much more than instincts and hard-set ideals.” Therefore, taking on an OS ontological perspective opens up more options for understanding and interacting in ethical ways.

Additionally, in terms of animism and nonverbal communication, actors such as the soul, higher order beliefs, psychic connection, and telepathy are teleacted outside of dominant perceptions in order to construct an ethical (and posthuman) foundation for OS ontological rhetorical strategies, thereby, critiquing anthropocentric beliefs as unethical. Therefore, OSI presents animism as an ontological and axiological orientation where love and desire *with* objects is not only possible and legitimate but anthropocentric beliefs and understandings are illuminated as limited and unethical. Therefore, OSI claims to present a more ethical standpoint on the reality of human and object interconnection than many anthropocentric standpoints that have dominated and continue to dominate views of relationality. Thus, through ontological and axiological strategies, OS not only reveals the ways that beings are interconnected but also the ways that ethical relationality and desire

emerge out of higher level beliefs in the nature of being, living, and loving. However, as a project of intelligibility, OSI is still faced with negotiating questions about and positions within dominant institutional logics, which the following section on epistemological strategies addresses.

Epistemological Strategies

Epistemological rhetorical strategies emerge from the overlap of terminological and ontological strategies because OSI teleacts mainstream concepts such as marriage and medicalization in appropriated ways in order to communicate their own terminological, ontological, and axiological standpoints via mainstream ways of knowing. A common theme throughout OSI rhetoric, particularly within the individual “Expressions” section, is that the unknown leads to fear, which leads to sensationalism and resistance to OS. Therefore, OSI is faced with having to limit the unknown in order to limit fear and sensationalism. In order to do so, institutional logics such as marriage and medicalization are teleacted and appropriated to translate OS in ways that are intelligible for mainstream consumption.

As described by Erika Eiffel, marriage is not evoked as an institution of privilege but, instead, an institution of representation that signifies OS desire is real and true. Marriage is a way to publically cultivate knowledge about OS and recognition of OS as legitimate through a recognizable actor. Similarly, medical diagnoses are not teleacted to necessarily pathologize OS but rather create a way of knowing that OS is real and can be understood through familiar epistemological actors. Therefore, medical diagnoses are teleacted more as ways of knowing that OS is different but not abject, meaning it is not completely outside purviews of intelligibility. Therefore, epistemological rhetorical

strategies of OSI are critical of dominant ways of knowing and generative of new and alternative ways of knowing.

Conclusion

The translation of how OS became a term and community is represented by the macroactors of people, communicative devices, and purposes of OSI, and teleacted through verbal actors in alignment with their dominant roles. OS emerges as a specific term, label, or signifier that facilitates verbal connections, acceptance, and the creation of a supportive community. OS as a collective identity, or sexuality, is dependent upon language, those who agree upon it, and technologies of dissemination. It provides a way to talk about shared orientation for support, reckoning, and resistance to sensationalism. Actors such as language, specific OS members, OS pamphlets, the Internet, and the OS Web site, all support and facilitate the translation of OS community identity.

Much of the translation of what it means to be OS and public pleas related to OS are about communicating a broad orientation toward loving objects and developing an ethics of interconnection and acceptance. Through an emphasis on non-verbal macroactors that are teleacted in resistive and contradictory roles, OSI challenges hierarchical categorizations, binary separations, and stability and generalization in favor of equality, interconnectedness, complexity and ambiguity. In doing so, OS develops a queer-posthuman paradigm that encourages people to “see over the fence,” and “beyond the horizon,” which anthropocentrism often obscures and discourages.

The translation of how OS members’ come to make sense of their experiences is teleacted in alignment and in contradiction to dominant institutional logics. These processes of teleacting the macroactors of marriage and medicalization suggest that OS

epistemological strategies emerge through an overlap of terminological and ontological strategies. In other words, marriage and psychological disorders are teleacted in ways both consistent with and resistant to dominant perceptions. Therefore, epistemological strategies allow OSI to appropriate existing languages and logics to comprehend and share complex orientations with each other and an unpredictable (public) audience. This both reaffirms and disrupts traditional understandings of marriage and medicalization as social control.

Together, these different layers of actors and networks within the OSI Web site work to affirm and/or critique traditional ideas about love, desire, and sexuality. Overall, the teleaction of macroactors in dominant, contradictive, and creative ways leads to the development of OS terminological strategies, which are about creating ways to communicate OS ontological strategies in order to cultivate OS axiological and epistemological strategies. In doing so, OS works to translate their experiences in ways that are intelligible and mitigate sensationalism and fear, which come from the unknown. Together, these actor networks not only construct OS and the OS Internationale community but also facilitate a higher level project of critiquing taken-for-granted assumptions about human-centric desire as natural, stable, and all encompassing.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

In this dissertation, I sought to answer the following research questions: What rhetorical strategies emerge from the OS Internationale Web site to communicate human-object desire to a larger public? How is the OS Internationale Web site challenging unfavorable reactions and responses to human-object desire? How does the rhetoric of the OS Internationale Web site contribute to or expand notions of queer sexuality? How does the rhetoric of the OS Internationale Web site contribute to or expand perspectives on human-object relations? To answer the first question, what I found is that the OSI Web site creates new terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological rhetorical paradigms that function strategically for the organization. To answer the second question, from these strategies two major rhetorical moves are evident in the Objectum Sexuality Internationale Web site. First, the Web site simultaneously communicates and adapts to internal and external audiences, and second, the Web site moves from specific meanings to larger paradigmatic shifts that reveal the function of OSI as a social movement within a single rhetorical text.

Adapting to Internal and External Audiences

In order to communicate and adapt to internal and external audiences, OSI constructs new actor-networks by working within existing and established networks. The construction of these new actor-networks in relation to existing and established networks happens at terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological levels. These strategies make the OSI Web site a very effective rhetorical tool for communicating a new and unusual message.

Terminological Level

First, at the terminological level, OSI takes basic terms that are familiar to its audiences, acknowledges these traditional meanings, and then transforms these meanings. This strategy positions OSI rhetoric within familiar terminologies in order to establish common ground with internal and external audiences. In doing so, publics that are not familiar with OS or its terminology are easily brought into its rhetoric through basic and familiar terms. OS then acknowledges the traditional meanings of these terms and transforms these meanings.

For example, actors such as attraction and marriage are recognizable terms and their existing and familiar meanings are acknowledged. Attraction is recognized as physical and intellectual and marriage is recognized as a political institution that grants rights and privileges. However, the meanings of these terms are then transformed by adding new actors. For example, dimensions of geometry/function and information/knowledge are added to attraction to change its meaning and the representative function of the term *marriage* is added to change the meaning of marriage. Changing the meanings of the terms attraction and marriage, then, means changing and expanding the actor networks they exist within.

The Web site acknowledges traditional networks of actors, supporting actors, and connecting links that lead to the emergence of existing and familiar meanings. However, the Web site then shows how those actors can be linked differently within expanded networks, thus expanding the agency of these actors and of OSI more broadly. This strategy allows publics who are not aware of OS to feel comfortable with the terminology on the Web site because traditional definitions are acknowledged; at the same time, those

terms are expanded in line with OS experiences so that (potential) members of the OS community also are comfortable and find themselves represented with familiar but new terminological frames. Therefore, members of the OS community can find themselves in a network, and members of the inquiring public can find themselves in the new networks as well—thus allowing both audiences to expand their terminologies.

Ontological Level

At the ontological level, this same appeal to internal and external audiences is evident. Beyond expanding the meaning and use of terms, OSI recognizes existing actor networks of belief about the nature of the world and then changes and expands these beliefs. For example, the OSI Web site recognizes the traditional view that humans have souls. They then suggest that this is the basis for interaction and reciprocation of love and desire. However, they then expand this belief to include objects and other non-human entities. In this case, the existing networks include humans, souls, and interaction, which are all recognizable actors that are linked in expected ways. However, objects and other entities are then added to this network to reveal new links and, thus, different possibilities for conceiving of the nature of the world.

Again, the OS Web site starts where its audiences are and then moves to expand their networks of belief to include new actors such as objects, plants, and animals. From this context, actors emerge in new agentic ways that urge audiences to contemplate the nature of their existence. In doing so, audiences who might not be familiar or are uncomfortable with the concept of animism can build understanding and acceptance based on existing and familiar ontological assumptions; and audiences who may share this ontological framework can see themselves and their experiences within the expanded

network. Internal and external audiences can then contemplate and engage with these networks at varying levels of comfort and understanding.

Axiological Level

The OSI Web site also addresses both internal and external audiences through axiological strategies. By expanding networks to include new ontological dimensions where objects and other entities have souls, consequences of value are also able to emerge. Using existing networks of value and judgment, OSI adds new actors and new ways of linking actors to expand axiological assumptions. For example, whereas traditionally humans have been given greater value than objects, the Web site expands this notion, treating humans and objects equally. Humans are acknowledged as being traditionally considered as a superior species with the ability to act within and against their world. However, the negative impact of these actions is added to these existing networks to show how humans and objects are interconnected. The equality and interconnection of objects, then, expands traditional notions of value to acknowledge the agency of other entities and present a system of value that embraces and contemplates this agency.

Once again, those who come to the Web site with dominant understandings about the value of humans versus objects encounter networks that acknowledge this as the norm. However, they are then shown additional possibilities for conceiving of this network of value that may expand their dominant understanding. Persons who might identify as OS who come to the Web site encounter this dominant network but then can find alternative positionality within the expanded network that contrasts human exceptionalism.

Epistemological Level

Finally, at an epistemological level, the OSI Web site acknowledges that existing networks of knowledge and ways of knowing are based in heteronormative and anthropocentric assumptions but then expands these to include queer and posthuman ways of knowing. For example, sex is acknowledged as often physical, determined based on penetration or reproduction; and orientation is acknowledged as sexual preference. However, OSI adapts to these existing assumptions to expand knowledge about sexuality and orientation to combine and include complex mental and spiritual networks of love, sensuality/intimacy, animism, and nonverbal communication. In doing so, nonverbal, psychic, and spiritual connection are given agentic value in new ways and knowledge about orientation in connection with sexuality is expanded. Thus, possibilities for orienting outside of heteronormative and anthropocentric networks are also strategically presented.

In other words, the site starts from traditional knowledge about humans, sex, love, and intimacy as defined within a heterosexual and human-centric setting. Choosing a queer posthuman frame instead, they argue for an expanded definition and conceptualization that complicates and multiplies what counts as love and desire. This allows external audiences to build knowledge from existing networks of knowledge and internal audiences to find and cultivate these new ways of knowing.

Summary

The emergence of rhetorical agency and strategies for the OSI community, then, is dependent upon working within existing actor-networks and expanding these networks by changing the role of actors at terminological, ontological, axiological, and

epistemological levels. In other words, the ability for various OSI related objects and humans to emerge and act on behalf of the community is dependent upon appropriating and expanding existing and dominant actor-networks. By doing this, OSI expands external audience frameworks, or paradigms, in ways that do not immediately confuse or alienate them but rather encourage them to consider OS within broader networks of comprehension; and internal audiences find new frameworks, or paradigms, that begin to more fully encompass their feelings and experiences.

Therefore, this process of changing and adding to existing actor-networks allows audiences to find themselves and their perspectives within recognizable networks of meaning, understanding, and assumptions but then also see how these networks can be expanded and changed. They do so in order to avoid alienating external audience in hopes of providing them with the information needed to mitigate fear and sensationalism; and in order to avoid discouraging internal audiences in order to provide them with the language and connection needed to find support and hope. Each terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological level informs the other. These strategies build upon one another to acknowledge existing and dominant actor networks as safe and comfortable starting points of conversation. These networks are then added to in order to expand dominant assumptions but also include OS experiences that have traditionally been left out of these assumptions. The building of these strategies is what facilitates a worldview where OS can be understood and accepted. These various levels of adaptation reveal how the OSI Web site engages and micro and macro level strategies, which facilitate a larger project of social change.

OSI as a Social Movement

To answer the third and fourth research questions, by adapting and adding to existing actor-networks, OSI rhetoric strategically functions to shift audience paradigms, thus expanding notions of queer sexuality and perspectives on human-object relations. Although rhetorical strategies are often conceived of at the level of terms, themes, or ideologies, combining actor-network theory with rhetorical criticism reveals the various levels of rhetorical strategy building that, in this case, eventually build up to a shifting of existing philosophical paradigms and a construction of new philosophical paradigms. OSI shifts and constructs paradigms at terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological levels.

At a terminological level, OSI creates a language for sharing and understanding experiences of object-desire and generating new ways of talking about object-desire that were not previously made available or did not appropriately account for OS feelings. For example, actors such as people and communicative devices are brought together in order to articulate the importance of OS as a term that signifies legitimate rather than traditionally pathologized feelings of love and desire. The bringing together of these actors also demonstrates how terminological strategies facilitate an online presence for OS and the building of the OS community, which helped people to know they are not alone and facilitated the communication of human-object desire as objectúm-sexuality.

At an ontological level, OSI proposes a view of reality that changes the way objects are conceptualized. They construct a worldview where objects become living beings with souls capable of receiving and reciprocating love, desire, and communication. In doing so, OSI rhetoric works to change perceptions about the

unexplored worlds of objects and the potential for objects to interact within these worlds. At an axiological level, the interconnection of all beings is emphasized. Viewing objects as soul bearing and reciprocal encourages a valuing of all beings through equality. This equal valuing and interconnection of beings implicates humans and objects within each other's lives in a way that challenges human exceptionalism and reveals the consequences of negativity, harm, and violence toward objects. Finally, at an epistemological level, these ontological and axiological assumptions emerge in ways that appropriate existing ways of knowing and develop new ways of knowing. This knowledge production facilitates the communication of OS as intelligible in order to reduce fear and sensationalism and instead facilitate acceptance of OS.

Uncovering these transcendent rhetorical paradigm shifts not only shows a movement in rhetorical strategies from micro to macro levels but also suggests potentially larger implications for OSI. In particular, this analysis reveals how OS has come together for “collective worldmaking and political action” (Warner, 2002, p.18). Therefore, although OSI suggests that their Web site is for support and reconciliation it can also be read more politically as a social movement. McGee's (1980) argument for understanding social movements as meaning rather than phenomenon suggests that social movements should be proved through analysis of rhetoric rather than presumed and analyzed on an *a priori* basis. He claims that “when people use new words—or obviously attribute new meaning to old words” then “we can assume that consciousness of their environment has ‘moved’ by measure of the difference in descriptors themselves or in meanings” (p. 243). Therefore,

Social movement' ought to be a *conclusion*, a carefully considered and well-argued inference that changes in human consciousness are of such a nature that 'social movement' has occurred, or that the rhetorical activity of a group of human beings would produce 'social movement' if it were effective" (p. 244).

OSI's adding and changing of existing actor-networks, which led to the shifting of terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological paradigms, reveals processes of moving audience perspectives in new directions and toward new possibilities. Although McGee's conception of social movements focuses on the changing of descriptors and meanings, this analysis reveals that concept level changes also factor into larger networks that can eventually lead to higher level shifts in philosophical paradigms. In other words, the networking of actors and agency within one rhetorical text can lead to larger paradigmatic shifts that move toward social change. Therefore, beyond offering support and reconciliation, OSI also engages in rhetorical strategies that can be interpreted as bases of a larger social movement project.

Implications and Limitations

Since an ANT informed rhetorical criticism focuses so heavily on emergent practices of communication, the absence of explicit discussions of OS as it intersects with race, class, and nation suggests that there are unmarked sociomaterial resources that the OSI Web site implicitly relies upon in communicating human-object desire and adapting to internal and external audiences. In other words, there are symbolic systems of power and privilege that facilitate the emergence of OSI rhetoric and its overall efficacy. Although the scope of this study cannot account for all of the unmarked sociomaterial resources that OSI draws upon, the one in particular that presents important implications

for this study is OSI's reliance upon Western based assumptions in adapting to presumably Western/European audiences.

In particular, reliance on languages such as English and German, the Internet as a dominant form of communication, the appropriation of animism, and an emphasis on coming out publically and naming sexuality all suggest that OSI is making Western based assumptions about access to the Web site, spiritual beliefs, and the marking of sexuality. For example, although OSI claims to be an international community, their dominant representation of Western nationalities and reliance on European based languages suggest that their conception of internationality is limited. The emergence of the Internet as a significant macroactor within OSI rhetoric and OSI community building suggests that persons without Internet access and/or access to the OSI Web site are representatively excluded.

Additionally, animism is appropriated by OSI without positioning it within a larger cultural history. The consistent assumption throughout the OSI Web site that animism is not a dominant belief positions this rhetoric within a Western ideological framework. Finally, publicly naming, defining, and describing OS is a culturally specific coming out process. Object desire, and sexuality more generally, exist and occur in more tacit ways in various cultural contexts, which are not recognized or accounted for in the OSI Web site. Therefore, the project of OSI and this study are significant within a culturally specific context.

Contributions

These conclusions and implications regarding OSI rhetorical strategies also offer contributions to feminist/queer/posthuman theories, theories of human-object relations,

actor-network theory, theories of nonverbal communication, and reaffirm the purpose and importance of OSI community rhetoric. This project can also be used as a springboard for future research projects related to OS or queer community building and social movements more generally. The following sections address the contributions this dissertation makes to much of the literature that has been reviewed throughout previous chapters.

Feminist/Queer/Posthuman Theory

This analysis of OSI rhetoric offers implications for understanding queer community building in mediated public spaces (Warner, 2002). First, this analysis clarifies the processes by which OS not only articulates object-desire as queer but also challenges the anthropocentric underpinnings of normative prescriptions of desire. In doing so, OSI challenges and takes advantage of heteronormativity to mediate and represent human-object desire. As Butler (1993) points out, there is no ontological or discursive “thereness” outside of (hetero) normativity, however, it is possible to work within this system to expose its borders and think of new possibilities. Therefore, the emergence of actors within dominant, resistant, and new frameworks of understanding facilitates the construction of OSI as a queer public and queer social movement by way of taking advantage of and (re)appropriating anthropocentric heteronormative logics. These logics are then disrupted as stable and monolithic not only in regard to the ways that they limit multiplicity of love and desire (heteronormativity) but also in regards to the ways they discourage the interconnection of all beings (anthropocentrism). Therefore, the construction of OSI is also the deconstruction of hetero and anthropocentric normativities, which reveals the ways these frameworks are implicated within one another and also highlights their inevitable tenuousness.

Additionally, not only do I attempt to bring feminist/queer/posthuman literatures together in new and interesting ways in this dissertation, but this analysis of OSI also contributes to and expands many of the important projects being done within feminist/queer/posthuman theoretical trajectories. In particular, this study contributes to linguistic and discursive reworkings as productive of a multiplicity of desire (Cixous, 1976; Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1995); the disruption of binary pairings in order to challenge restrictions of gender and sexuality and promote livability (Butler, 2004; Halperin, 1997; Jagose, 1996; Martin, 1994; Sedgwick, 1990); the negotiation of normalization in communicating queer experiences (Butler, 1993; Sloop, 2004); the embracing of feelings as felt experiences (Cvetkovich's, 2003); the revealing of heteronormative influences on constructions of the human and vice versa (Giffney, 2008; Halberstam, 2008; Haraway, 1991, 2003, 2008); the disruption of heterofuturity (Ahmed, 2006; Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Runions, 2008); the discouragement of human exceptionalism (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2008; Franklin, 2006; Turkle, 2011); and the construction of object oriented ontologies (Bogost, 2012).

For example, OSI constructs new languages and definitions in place of those they deem essentializing in order to construct OS in intelligible ways but also to encourage a proliferation of living and loving that is restricted within essentializing discourses. They are also faced with working from within normative categories through appropriation, which challenges the stability of categories such as marriage and medicalization, for example, while also allowing OS to evoke some semblances of normalcy in order to mitigate fear and sensationalism. These communicative processes that OSI engage in contribute to ongoing conversations about the tension between possibilities afforded by

discourse versus the structural constraints of discourse. This analysis of OSI reveals the coexistence of both of these processes and the implications of this intertwining.

Beyond disruptions and reworking of discourse, OSI also emphasizes the function of the soul in understanding desire, which Kristeva (1995) suggests is an area within research that needs to be more thoroughly understood. In particular, Kristeva argues that contemporary society tends to neglect attention to the soul in understanding social and psychological wellbeing, which encourages over prescription of medications that are only concerned with curing the body and not fostering the development of the soul. In contrast, OSI emphasizes the importance of the soul as a basis for social interaction and for mutual love and respect. This emphasis on the soul also relates to de Lauretis's (1994) discussion of psychic fantasy. De Lauretis suggests that psychic fantasy is a process that influences physical object choice, bodily desire, and "instinctual satisfaction" (p. 284). OSI rhetoric expands on de Lauretis's theory by discussing how psychic fantasy and connection can function solely as mental, or instinctual, processes of sex and desire outside of physical object presence and bodily drive.

As discussed in chapter 4, OSI rhetoric also disrupts binaries that reinforce hetero and anthropocentric normativities, such as human/non-human, sex/gender, public/private, monogamy/polyamory, and controllable/uncontrollable. In doing so, OSI constructs new meanings for orientation and sexuality that resist heterofuturity. Specifically, the construction of desire as delinked from penetration and reproduction and the construction of forms of kinship based on object similarity and geography rather than biology suggests possibilities for conceiving of queer lines of relationality that deviate from straight lines (Ahmed, 2006). In other words, the future for OS is not dependent upon a strict process

of marriage and reproduction in the same sense that human-to-human love and desire is pigeon-holed into, which expands these queer theoretical approaches. Additionally, this disruption of binaries, particularly the controllable/uncontrollable binary, emphasizes feelings as experiences to be embraced rather than resisted and pathologized. Adding to Cvetkovich's (2003) perspective, then, OSI's embracement of feelings suggests that feelings be viewed not as trauma or burden but as experiences external to us, waiting to be enacted and expressed in ways that present new and exciting journeys of desire.

New and exciting processes of (inter)connection are also afforded through this study of OSI rhetoric. Specifically, OSI reveals that heteronormativity is also linked with distinctions between human and non-human and, subsequently, the construction of human exceptionalism. Although, many other posthuman projects have made these claims, they are often done on the basis of revealing the interconnection of humans with other species or animate machines. OS adds to these arguments an understanding of the link between normativities and humanism that emerges as resistance to inorganic and non-corporeal object desire as well. Additionally, OS offers a new perspective on animism and anthropomorphism. For example, queer/posthuman approaches to anthropomorphism are becoming increasingly polarized. While Haraway (2003) suggests anthropomorphism can create ethical awareness and empathy amongst humans in regards to the lives of animals (specifically dogs), Halberstam (2011) claims that anthropomorphism leads to a stunting of ethical awareness because "the human projects all of his or her uninspired and unexamined conceptions about life and living onto animals, who may actually foster far more creative or at least more surprising modes of living and sharing space" (pp. 33-34). OSI suggests, instead, that when ethical awareness

arises from the belief that all entities are soul bearing, conscious, and capable of reciprocity, processes of anthropomorphism are nullified. Anthropomorphism, then, is only a concern for debate in so far as human exceptionalism is still at the forefront of theorizing. Therefore, emphasizing the animism as the basis of human-object interaction construct processes of communication that are not necessarily dependent upon processes of anthropomorphism.

Finally, these various theoretical extensions also work to construct object oriented ontology. In his own discussion of object oriented ontology (OOO), Bogost (2012) claims that objects are no more comprehensible than aliens. Therefore, in order to begin a process of comprehension it is “our job is to write the speculative fictions of their processes, of their unit operations...our job is to go where everyone has gone before, but where few have bothered to linger” (p. 34). In other words, even if there is speculation about the interactive capabilities of objects in relation to OS desire, OSI is still engaging in a process of constructing and conceiving of objects in new and exploratory ways. At the very least, OS is providing posthuman theoretical approaches a space to stop and contemplate the life of objects and the possibilities for living and loving that emerge from these contemplations. The pondering of object interactivity also extends into theoretical approaches to human-object relations more broadly.

Object-Human Relations

OSI communicates mutual concern and desire for and with objects that is not accounted for within Mead’s (Mead, 1938) discussion of objects as central to constructions of the self, Baudrillard’s (1987, 1990, 1996) discussions of the consuming and seductive power of objects, or Knorr Cetina’s (1997) discussion of object-oriented

sociality based in mutual obtainment of scientific or knowledge based goals. Knorr Cetina (1997) points out in her critiques of the former approaches to object relationality that when the self is conceived of reflexively to objects, both are perceived of as external to one another. This perspective leads to a line of thinking where the self, in relation to objects, tends to be understood as “negatively affected; as alienated by technological production and a technologically changed environment from which risks ensue; as overtaxed by the complexity of a knowledge society, as estranged by the contradictory content and uncertainty of science” (p. 23). This can lead to a pathologizing of humans in relation to objects rather than a view of human-object relations as defining productive and sometimes positive processes of sociality. Knorr Cetina’s corrective to Mead and Baudrillard’s approaches, among others, is to show how object-oriented sociality leads to knowledge production and solidarity. However, the study of OSI rhetoric further extends these various approaches to account for object-sociality that can lead to love and desire.

In other words, this study of OSI presents an approach to human-object relationality or sociality, where objects emerge in queer ways and define queer relationships. OSI provides a glimpse into romantic interactions with objects and explanations about these interactions that lead to the construction of a queer community and the emergence of objects as queer. This rendering of objects attempts to work outside of human-centric or perverse renderings of human-object relationality and desire. OSI rhetoric provides a new lens to theorize and conceive of the interactive role of objects, which is not necessarily always about reaffirming the human self, emphasizing the material and symbolic function of the object in practices of consumption, or even

important in the pursuit of scientific research. Objects can also be valued within contexts that promote love, desire, and intimacy.

Actor-Network Theory and Rhetorical Criticism

Actor-network theory was originally developed by sociologists for the study of human/object networks and the emergence of collective agency among humans and objects within science and technology. More recently ANT has been taken up as a qualitative method for observing and understanding the organizing properties of interaction as social (Latour, 2005), and it has been developed in communication studies for theorizing organizational communication (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The application of ANT that this research project utilizes works to extend ANT as a theoretical approach to understanding human-object desire and online queer community building. Additionally, this study uses ANT as a methodological framework for textual and rhetorical analysis, which extends it beyond its uses in primarily ethnographic settings. These uses show the applicability of ANT within feminist/queer/ and posthuman theoretical trajectories and account for constructions of love and desire as socio-material networks of communication.

Additionally, the application of ANT in conjunction with rhetorical criticism expands both ANT and rhetorical criticism to account for the complex layering that occurs within rhetorical strategies and larger processes of paradigm construction. For example, ANT encourages rhetorical criticism to attend not only to the micro level moments of agency that emerge within communicative utterances but also the more complex macro level developments of terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological paradigms. Therefore, this project expands the applicability of ANT

within new contexts, broadens the theoretical purview of ANT, and increases the methodological possibilities available by combining ANT and rhetorical criticism.

Communication

Beyond the implications for and contributions to rhetoric and communication discussed thus far, this study of OSI presents possibilities for conceiving of posthuman, and even queer dimensions of communication. More specifically, OSI's emphasis on telecommunication as a neglected dimension of nonverbal communication reveals potential for taking seriously a form of communicating that goes beyond the 5 senses. This expansion potentially presents possibilities for developing queer lines of relationality; lines that do not necessarily extend dominant frameworks of what counts as legitimate communication.

For example, nonverbal communication predominantly focuses on the following 9 dimensions, which do not account for telecommunication or psychic connection. (1) Kinesics: facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and body postures; (2) Gestures: emblems, illustrators, regulators, and adaptors; (3) Vocalics: loudness, pitch, rate, and tone; (4) Haptics: touch; (5) Proxemics: use of physical distance; (6) Chronemics: organization and uses of time. (7) Physical appearance: hair, clothing, body type; (8) Artifacts: possessions displayed; and (9) Environment: structure of physical surroundings. These dimensions highlight the centrality of the (human) body in communication and engagement with nonverbal communication is often dependent upon the five senses (i.e., touch, sight, and sound) or perceptions developed via human-centric consciousness (i.e., chronemics and environment). Although objects (i.e., artifacts) are included in theories of nonverbal communication, it is based on assumptions of utility

and symbolic capital rather than interactivity. As nonverbal communication is in many respects considered one of the most stunted branches of communication theory, this leads me to question what the possibilities are for taking seriously telecommunication and psychic connection. OSI suggests possibilities of radical accountability to all beings, valuing of interconnection, and even more pronounced senses of love and desire and the reciprocation of these emotions within the development of relationships.

Additionally, emphasizing telecommunication and psychic connection as dimensions of nonverbal communication could lead to taking seriously a wider range of forms of connection that are not yet within dominant scopes of understanding. In other words, adding dimensions of telecommunication and psychic communication to the study of nonverbal communication could reveal possibilities of relational connection that are queer, posthuman, and even currently unintelligible. Therefore, the study of OSI offers an expansion to understandings of communication, and particularly nonverbal communication, and pushes the boundaries of what counts as communication, especially when conceiving of queer and posthuman forms of love, desire, and sexuality.

Objectúm-Sexuality

This study of OS also presents contributions to the OS community itself. For example, the top of the “What is OS page” on the OSI Web site prominently displays the following disclaimer:

NOTE: There is little known about OS other than data our community has gathered from our personal relationships with objects and from a small number of professionals interested in this topic. So we are not claiming to have solid clinical

basis, only the practical knowledge gained from each other and recent studies. We welcome and currently seek professional input and study in regards to OS.

This note delegitimizes information generated from within the community in favor of the presumed legitimacy of external researchers deemed experts or professionals. In fact, on the “Contact Us” page, another note reads: “If you are a Doctor, Therapist, or Psychologist seeking research, we would be delighted to involve professional people in fields that will better help us comprehend and recognize our orientation to love objects.”

In this study, I do not attempt to claim expertise about OS or even offer “clinical” or “professional” input. Rather, I attempt to reveal how information about OS generated from within the community based on the communication of personal experiences, histories, and theories leads to the emergence of legitimate data about the community. In other words, as Hallenbeck (2012) suggests, an ANT informed rhetorical approach to the OSI Web site shows how agency and legitimacy are enacted from within the community, not against it. Therefore, the contributions of this study to the OS community are an in-depth analysis of rhetorical practices that reaffirm what OSI is doing as already an important and legitimate project of data collection and knowledge production.

Future Research

This study of OSI rhetoric can be used as a springboard for future research projects as well. For example, future projects could include looking at private communication between OS members via the OSI Web site’s interactive forum, looking into implicit rhetorical strategies by OSI that do not emerge from an ANT informed methodological approach, looking at other online queer community building projects, and understanding human-object relations at differing levels outside of the OS community

specifically. Although this project was explicitly interested in public communication about OS via the OSI Web site, private interaction between OS members could potential answer research questions relating to cultural influences on OS identity and desire, how OS members engage in strategies of support with another, how CMC is used to maintain community membership, and what ways romantic partner communication with OS objects emerges within interpersonal communication between OS members.

Additionally, since an ANT informed rhetorical criticism focuses so heavily on emergent practices of communication, the absence of explicit discussion related to topics of intersectionality such as race, class, and nationality have not been developed through this analysis. In particular, because this study only looks at the public representation of OS, very little is known about OS members' cultural backgrounds and the impact of these standpoints on OS identity construction. A few OSI members are identified as being from primarily Western countries. This suggests that much of the paradigm shifting the OSI engages in is from a Western standpoint and that their assumed audiences are situated within similar standpoints. Future exploration into these factors of OSI rhetoric could potential yield interesting analysis regarding cultural and symbolic resources that OSI more implicitly pulls from in constructing their community and human-object desire more generally.

There are also many other online queer community building projects that have facilitated the emergence of sexual identities and communities (via terminology) and that represent a small number of persons who have only been able to connect due to the more recent geographic and temporal flexibilities of the Internet. For example, the Asexual Visibility and Education Network has developed a robust and interesting Web site where

concepts such as sexuality and orientation are defined in unique ways in order to make this particular identity and community intelligible. The theoretical and methodological frameworks outlined in the analysis of OSI used here could potentially provide a starting point for understanding the specific communicative strategies that emerge within this community and implications of these strategies for conceiving of queer relationality and online queer community building more broadly.

Finally, since starting this project I have found that conversations with people about objectúm-sexuality often evoke two general responses: (1) curiosity that emerges similar to many of the FAQs presented on the OSI Web site; and (2) comparisons between people's own ties to objects and OS ties to objects, which often leads to their contemplation about whether or not they would be considered OS. These responses suggest to me that object-human interactions within everyday contexts, outside of high theoretical ponderings, often go unquestioned. There are many dynamic everyday interactions that occur between people and objects that fall somewhere between un-acknowledgement and loving desire. Therefore, it is important to explore sociality with objects even beyond the contexts offered in the literature from chapter 1 and the context of OSI offered in chapter five. Studies of social interaction with and about objects provide important glimpses into these communicative worlds that so often go unnoticed.

Final Thoughts

Overall, OSI engages several levels of rhetorical strategy. First, they construct new meanings and values for various object, human, and concept actors. In doing so, they adapt to and expand existing dominant actor-networks in order to engage with and expand audiences worldviews. These worldviews are expanded through paradigmatic

shifting at terminological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological levels. This process of rhetorical strategy building positions OS within intelligible frameworks of understanding in order to provide information about OS that will mitigate fear and sensationalism and facilitate acceptance. Together, these strategies not only work to construct an OSI community identity and human-object desire more generally but they also present a larger project that can be read as a movement for social change. This social movement directs people away from heteronormative and anthropocentric worldviews and toward a queer posthuman worldviews of love, desire, and connection.

Evoking the language of OSI, I hope that by taking human-object love and desire seriously, this study encourages readers to look over the fence and beyond the horizon. OSI reveals possibilities for expanding modes of being, living, and loving that should not go unnoticed and will hopefully continue to multiply and flourish. At the very least, I hope that this project will encourage exploration of the unpredictable, untold, and interconnected worlds of objects. In doing so, we may secure a future where in fact “every ‘one’ and every ‘thing’ can be loved.”

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