The Montreal Conversation: #MeToo, Film, & the Feminine

Heidi Arsenault, Shanna de la Torre, Kristine Klement, Tracy McNulty, & Fernanda Negrete

This discussion began as a conversation we had on March 9, 2019 in Montreal, during the "Clinical Days" of the École freudienne du Québec (ÉfQ), an annual event consisting in an evening of public lectures by Willy Apollon, Danielle Bergeron, and Lucie Cantin, followed by two days of case presentations by members of American circles of the school and of teachings by Apollon, the analyst responsible for the clinical framework and conceptual innovations of the ÉfQ. The topic of the event was "A Psychoanalytic Clinic in the Time of *Mondialisation*: Childhood, Adolescence, Masculinity, Femininity." For Apollon, "*mondialisation*" is distinct from globalization in that it has as much to do with ethics, civilizations, and politics as with economic frameworks (*Mondialisation*, 14). That is, *mondialisation* does not privilege an economic interpretation of late capitalism, but rather names the fact that, given that the city spaces and online spaces that we inhabit are traversed by many civilizations, norms and ideals are no longer operative in their repressive function. That is, the concept names the unforeseeable results of globalization: a space marked not only by potentially unlimited exposure to the demands of the superego, but by new, sometimes confounding possibilities for the subject's quest of desire.

Following the publication of *Mondialisation: Défis pour l'humain* in 2016, Apollon asked that members of GIFRIC (Groupe interdisciplinaire freudien de recherche et d'interventions cliniques et culturelles [Freudian Interdisciplinary Group of Clinical and Cultural Interventions]), the nonprofit organization behind the ÉfQ as well as the «388» (Centre psychanalytique de traitement pour jeunes adultes psychotiques

[Psychoanalytic Center for the Treatment of Psychotic Young Adults]) and other projects, form working groups on the subject of "men in *mondialisation*" and "women in *mondialisation*." The participants in this conversation form one of the latter groups. While the intention of the group is to discover more about what diverse women with analytic experience can say about the feminine in the time of *mondialisation*, there is also a preliminary work to articulate the changing forms of what Apollon calls the "montage culturel du sexuel," the cultural construction of sexuality, which encompasses all the different means by which civilizations maintain ideological reproduction by proposing, for example, "satisfying sexual relationships" as a solution for a man to the question of what he wants, and "maternal jouissance" as a solution to the question of what women want.

This working group took shape when Heidi Arsenault invited the participants to present on a panel with another "women in *mondialisation*" group at the "Journées Cliniques Intercercles," the "Inter-Circle Clinical Days" of the ÉfQ in Montreal in February 2018. The text produced for that occasion discussed an opinion column that had appeared in the pages of *Le Monde* the previous month, written against the #MeToo movement by French women who have shaped the image of female sexuality in the Francophone world. Titled «Nous défendons une liberté d'importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle» ("We defend the right to importune, indispensable to sexual freedom"), the column was written by Sarah Chiche, Catherine Millet, Catherine Robbe-Grillet, Peggy Sastre, and Abnousse Shalmani, and signed by 100 French women, among them the iconic actress Catherine Deneuve, and the German actress Ingrid Caven (who appeared in several films by her once husband Rainer Werner Fassbinder, a director who incisively and subversively interrogated sexuality and its discontents). The column regrets that in the #MeToo movement that has emerged in the wake of the allegations against Harvey Weinstein, women are portrayed as man-hating helpless victims, as puritan children who need protecting. For the authors and signatories, a touch on the knee, a "stolen" kiss, or a turn to private matters in conversation at a business lunch should be welcomed or tolerated—and should most certainly not have consequences. Men are free to offend, as one of their title headings aptly puts it, and, according to the collective behind the column, this freedom is indispensable to women's sexual freedom, which they define as the freedom to both have a professional life and enjoy being the object of a man's desire.

On the basis of this provocative column, that initial project explored the perspectives of different generations and different linguistic cultures of women, and coalesced around issues of both maternity and sexual violence, arguing that the social link cannot function without restrictions on sex and violence. In broad terms, the working group was troubled by the stakes of the column, and with the column, and various aspects of this disagreement served to situate the conversation that follows. We would suggest that if we want to live as a family, we of course cannot treat the members of our family as objects of our primal fantasies. Perhaps we can say, then, that the minimum requirements for the public spaces of our social link – the workplace, state institutions, social spaces, and the commons: public transit, streets, parks, etc. – is that we will not treat one another (or be treated) as objects of sex or violence. As long as men retain the right to treat women as objects of sex and violence, women remain dehumanized and disempowered. Under these conditions women cannot be equal to men. It is not a surprise, then, that until now the vast majority of power, wealth, prestige, has been held by men. Within these conditions, one way that women are dehumanized, and so excluded from holding power, is that their speech is not believed. The French women who signed the letter that appeared in *Le Monde* fairly recently do not believe women who say, "We do not want to be treated like sexual objects anymore." Therefore, this instance of French opposition to #MeToo did not seem to us truly supportive of the feminine, but rather supportive of a woman's satisfaction in being a pleasurable object for a man, which is one way in which women and others repress femininity.

From the perspective of the ÉfQ, femininity stands apart from the cultural construction of sexuality, the "montage" which represses the feminine in anyone (he, she, they, or ze)—indeed, one of its primary functions is to control what is at work within the body. Femininity, far from having to do with attributes that, within a given culture, ostensibly render a person desirable, has to do with aesthetics—specifically, with articulating the drive within us *with* aesthetics. Masculinity, on the other hand, refers to that part of the subject that makes a space in language and culture for that which the feminine expresses. Masculinity, in these terms, describes the work of taking responsibility for the expression of the feminine on the social scene. For Apollon, a subject has access to or a possible experience of both masculinity and femininity "whether you're a man or a woman" (November 2, 2019).

In this sense, the opinion column provides a glimpse into some of the work entailed in any subject's quest to express a desire beyond the cultural construction of sexuality, where desire is repressed by the fantasy that one could "be" a (good or bad) "object." It also brings to mind Apollon's insistence, in the essay "Four Seasons of Femininity, or Four Men in a Woman's Life," on the importance of the distinction between "the *other* and the *object*":

> This necessary distance between the *other* and the *object* guarantees a symbolic space where the signifier in love can anchor the excess towards which desire opens, in the imaginary, a search for the impossible. In this space, love finds and creates the words with which this excess is made sufferable for lovers, just short of the violence of passion. A structural inadequacy between the *other of the social tie* and the *object of desire* in the phantasy can stimulate unsatisfied violence, but it can also find its limit, and motivation for transformation, in everything love manages to make into metaphor or poetry. The *other* obliges drive to find its path along the signifying routes of the lover's discourse, at the same time as the phantasy structures, in the imaginary misadventures of desire, the aims of drive. Any problematic that positions the feminine as *objects* in this structure without regard to the position of the *other*, reduces the distance that separates the social tie from the dominion of phantasy. Woman is reduced to the illusion of being the object of man's phantasy.[1]

Apollon here explicates Lacan's formula "woman is the symptom of man," insisting on the important distinction between other and object to find another path for the drive (here presented in terms of love and lover's discourse), different from that of sexual violence. Woman as subject, Apollon shows, introduces stakes of jouissance that neither the role of object of a man's fantasy nor that of mother can capture. With this in mind, the opinion column seems to wish to efface both the space for women's speech about their desire not to be objects of desire, and the difference between the

[1] Willy Apollon, "Four Seasons of Femininity, or Four Men in a Woman's Life," *Topoi* 12 (1993), 102.

social tie and the dominion of fantasy. Correspondingly, it does not name the difference between the fantasy of "being" objects of desire and the work at stake within working-at-being subjects of desire, which is a work at creating access to "her own word,"[2] a work at finding an aesthetic means of expressing unconscious desire.

#MeToo, created in 2006 by Bronx-based community organizer Tarana Burke to support women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, became a major movement when celebrities such as Salma Hayek raised the profile of the hashtag by speaking publicly of the sexual violence they have endured in their professions, specifically denouncing sexual predators in positions of power, such as Harvey Weinstein. Yet while this movement offers a reaction against the cultural construction or montage of sexuality – its violence, and its oppression – we wonder about whether it may or may not provide an exit from the fantasies that this construction sustains. Psychoanalysis points toward an aesthetics of femininity beyond the montage, and in which a masculine ethics in any of us may support the feminine, rather than erasing it. With this in mind, we would like to ask, in which ways might the movement be powerful or limited? What is the reach of its relevant protest against the cultural construction? The French women's letter against #MeToo suggests that one solution to the construction proposed by women in Anglophone Protestant culture in the struggle for justice and equality is to erase femininity. This critique is wrongheaded because it attempts to defend not femininity in its aesthetic and psychoanalytic sense, but instead "femininity" in the conventional sense that implies women's objectification. For this reason, the women signatories of the letter are firmly on the side of a defense of women's capture in the dominion of fantasy against the work of the feminine finding another expression. We wonder whether the #MeToo movement may support the aesthetic expression of the feminine or whether it may also be complicit with women's objectification, albeit from another angle.

The present discussion considers film, music, and art in general, as a field for aesthetic expression. Film is in particular a rich field and context: on the one hand, cases of sexual violence in the film industry have turned to and fueled the #MeToo movement, and on the other, some of these films make an effort at representing a young woman's experience of the social link

[2] Ibid, 104.

and her subjectivity, and can be, in themselves, works attempting an aesthetic expression of something in the subject that resists generalization in language. This topic also introduces questions about whether intersectional differences like race and class present different challenges as well as opportunities for exiting the cultural construction of sexuality.

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Tracy: One thing that interests me about the #MeToo movement is that it erupted within the cultural domain and involved women in the arts. In the film industry in particular, many of those women recounted the experience of being turned into an object there where they were most exposed as artists, in terms of what they were trying to put out there. I was thinking in particular of that guy who has been in the news recently, a music producer who abused a number of women. He's kind of a white hipster dude, Brooklyn type guy, Ryan something...

Fernanda: Oh Ryan Adams!

Tracy: Right! So it turns out that this guy has been sexually exploiting one woman after another in his capacity as a well-known music producer. His modus operandi is to go out and find these women, typically very young teenagers who are doing something really exciting. Then he presents himself as a kind of fan, saying to this young woman, "here's what I hear in your music," or "here's what I see in what you're doing." It is as though he's offering to this young woman what Willy Apollon would describe as the words that would allow something of this girl's experience to be poeticized, to become nameable in a way that it wasn't previously. But then very quickly it changes to, "Send me a nude selfie of yourself." So now he's in hot water because it turns out that one of these girls was fourteen at the time he made this demand, and had made that clear in their text communications. So now he may actually be arrested for underage sex.

[3] Special thanks to Skylar Woods for her transcription of the audio file on which the following discussion is based.

Heidi: That's a troubling example. From what you describe, Ryan Adams led these young artists to believe he hears what is unique in them, what only they can offer, before revealing that his only interest in them is as sexual objects.

Kristine: It makes me think of the recent remake of *A Star is Born*. The older male alt-country star finds this young singer who's very talented but is just stuck singing in nightclubs. He brings out in her this incredible confidence and voice and musicianship, really made possible by her encounter with him and his talent and his suffering. But I wonder what story *A Star is Born* is telling about these dynamics that are being recounted in very different ways in the #MeToo Movement. Lady Gaga's character is discovered, like the young women are discovered by Ryan Adams, but in the Hollywood film version the tragic romance is because of the tragedy of *his* aesthetic genius leading him to ruin in spite of the love of a good Woman. As #MeToo reveals, in the real Hollywood, the bad romance is one in which women's aesthetic genius is preyed upon and exploited by powerful men.

Tracy: It could be interesting to look at the different versions of that film, actually, because the original version of this character as a singer was the Judy Garland version. And I have not seen it, I've just heard about it. Apparently it's quite amazing, especially with Judy Garland: it really couldn't be anyone else in that role. But then why is it redone and how is it redone?

Kristine: ...and Barbara Streisand...

Tracy: The same old story has to be retold in several different ways. I saw the recent version, directed by Bradley Cooper, who also plays the male singer/addict who discovers the female star, and I basically liked it. But it's a formula movie, which has real limitations even though it does a lot with the form. A number of people have identified that formula: "only one of them can have a career, and if it's the woman who succeeds as an artist then the man has to die." So the message is ultimately the success of the woman is deadly for the man. This version does try to amend that formula somewhat, suggesting that the man is very much to blame for his own problems: and it implies that he kills himself so as not to stand in the way of her career. It's

as though Bradley Cooper is aware that there's a problem there and he's trying to address it somehow, but it remains a structural problem in the story he's inherited.

Kristine: But it is a good question of why this story gets retold, and why now again is this one of the big films of the last year in the context of #MeToo. The story of "only one of them can have a career" is basically supporting the cultural construction of (hetero)sexuality, where a man maintains his power by subordinating women.

Heidi: I like that way of thinking about it, Kristine. I didn't know that the most recent version was directed by Bradley Cooper. In a way, this makes the film more interesting. "An older man whose career is on the downturn poetizes something in a woman": in itself, a tired trope, but if such a man is unfortunate enough to hit the gold mine in terms of the woman's talent, what happens? Ryan Adams has to move quickly to demanding nude selfies, so as not to be confronted by anything real in the girl. Whereas in this version of *A Star is Born*, there is an interest in exploring the consequences for a man, today, of allowing that initial offer to stand.

Fernanda: I'm struck by the narrative in the trailer for the first, 1937 version of the film, with Janet Gaynor. The trailer's narrator advertises the film as a peek into "the truth of Hollywood stars behind the scenes," their pain and fear, "the price that must be paid" and how "screen careers are ruined"! This resonates strongly with the way in which some of the #MeToo stories reveal, exactly, Hollywood stories behind the scenes, but stories that speak of something else than what it is to be famous and try to have a personal life, which is the classic approach that in fact sustains that star industry and leaves it intact (I'm thinking of celebrity scandals and such kinds of narratives). But we would have to examine what the effects of #MeToo are for Hollywood, its "Weinsteins," and the actresses...

The "star" becomes a singer in 1954 with Judy Garland in the role, although here the man still plays a Hollywood actor. Then, in 1976, the two partners are musicians, with Barbara Streisand and Kris Kristofferson in the roles. In the 2018 version, with Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper the context shifts slightly, from 60's and 70's rock to country and pop music. Something this recent version of the film seems to repeat is the question that followed

Barbara Streisand everywhere in her career, about her appearance, specifically about the shape of her nose, which did not fit some ideal of beauty, even if she had a beautiful voice. This is also the issue with Judy Garland's and Lady Gaga's own paths to becoming recognized. In the recent film, the young singer, "Ally," states that she has been told that she will never be a famous singer because of the look of her nose, and "Jack" (Bradley Cooper) convincingly tells her he loves, specifically, her nose, her voice, and the songs she writes but is afraid of singing in public.

In terms of why the story gets retold, and of the fact that the film is a formula, the way in which music is explained at the end of the latest *A Star Is Born* interestingly speaks to this, somehow: the tragic hero who helps the girl rise to the stage, sees (Western) music as a repetitive structure in itself, with twelve tones between each octave, several times over. He says something like "all artists can do is express how they see those twelve tones," and "he loves how she [Ally] sees them." So, indeed, this brings us back to the point of this man who can receive this real thing that seeks expression for a woman.

Heidi: If I recall, this is an anecdote "Jack's" brother tells "Ally" after his suicide. It is a kind of poetizing of the thing in her, which goes so far as referencing the defect in language: music, like language, is limited in its possibilities, and it's a question for the subject of working to express something receivable within that structure. The anecdote, in suggesting she does it well, leads to her singing a song he wrote, in his memory.

Tracy: What I like about that example of *A Star is Born*, as well, is you know there's always the danger when you try to use a film as an example. The film is necessarily internal to the cultural montage if it has any success as a film. The film is ostensibly trying to break out of that, and yet it can't. It aspires to be an affirmation of feminine creativity and yet it fails.

Fernanda: What we are pointing to is put very clearly in the script for the Judy Garland version, where the man who discovers this woman as a singer explains to her that she has "that something extra," and later she explains to someone else that she is going to try to make it after this man helped her "see herself in a way she never had." This version presents this man's interest in her as somehow different from the question of the woman being a desirable

object in that he wants to hear her life story. It's interesting, too, that she has a scrapbook with what, she says, "she knows about her life," indicating repeatedly that she does not know everything about it, and, after she makes the big decision to try to audition and be recognized, at his insistence after she shows him the scrapbook, the film itself goes into a long sequence of photomontage to tell the audience what happened to her after making this choice. It is as if the story of her life, as a collection of scraps, disrupted the illusion of continuity and synchronicity the Technicolor musical film can offer! When she finally "makes it," and watches the public release of her musical film within the film, it tells, precisely, her life story, including the painful process of knocking on doors and asking for a job. This is represented with a song whose lyrics, uncannily, say, as Judy literally climbs and spreads her body on the agents' desks, "I have no will,/ You've made your kill/ 'Cause you took advantage of me!" So she is trying to convince them to consider her, by offering herself up as an object to be exploited… After a series of agents respond with a loud "no!," she walks into another "office" where the agent who hears her song begins to chase her excitedly around the desk, and gives an enthusiastic, "yes!," to which she replies, as she escapes through the door, slightly horrified, "no!" This is presented as comical, and she keeps trying...

Kristine: It is remarkable because it is true to Judy Garland's own life. She was extorted and drugged and objectified by Hollywood producers, directors, agents… And yet in the film version of her life, the violence is removed.

Shanna: I haven't seen the older versions of the film, but I found the recent version to be very sad and very moving. Working with the terminology Apollon has proposed, where masculinity is understood as something that helps you to encounter the sublime – to take responsibility for what goes beyond the limits of culture and civilization – I wonder if we could say that the recent version depicts something like a failure of masculinity. I don't know… Bradley Cooper's character has managed to help poeticize that thing in her, and there's something that's coming out, something she's producing, that he's now living with – and maybe failing to live with, I guess, I don't know. It could be a failure of masculinity in her, as well – for example, a failure to accompany him in what's at work within him as well. It seems

important that he's a serious artist as well. There's this discord around the pop song she's written, with that lyric, "Why'd you come around me with an ass like that" – speaking of the montage! And this stands in such sharp contrast to the song with which the story starts – you know, "We're far from the shallow now." It could be interesting to think about where the problem of masculinity is emerging here too, as we're asking ourselves about feminine creativity...

Kristine: That's a really interesting perspective, Shanna. I think your reading of the film as presenting a failure of masculinity is right on. I wonder if we could go further to say that the tragedy is that he is unable to accompany the feminine in himself. He suffers terribly from something in him that he is unable to find a way of living with, even though music has offered him an outlet at times. He sort of loses all hope in music as the vehicle for something beyond the shallow when she becomes the shallow, the pop star. This is a sort of counter current to the alternate reading of the film as "when a woman succeeds a man must fail..."

Heidi: In those terms, it's interesting that the female lead's response (Lady Gaga's character's, as well as Judy Garland's character's (those are the versions I've seen) to her husband's spiraling addiction is to scale back her contracts and take on a maternal role, putting her marriage first. In both films, the male lead commits suicide after being exposed to his wife's agent's opinion that he's holding her back in terms of her art, or business interests. It's an act that seems perhaps possible to explore in terms of masculine ethics in the Judy Garland version, in that it's credible that she'll give up singing, and in that the death is received as an accidental drowning. Whereas in the most recent version of the film, I completely agree that there's a failure of masculinity.

Shanna: Right, and going back to his suffering in the Bradley Cooper version, it's interesting that his first suicide attempt takes place in his adolescence, right at that time when there is the surge of the free drive, when there is the first opportunity, in a way, to find a way to express something of feminine jouissance in the social link.

Fernanda: Right! This is indeed an important detail in the recent version. The man has tinnitus as a result of an exposure to the speaker his father had at home. His father was an alcoholic who loved music, and the film mentions that the man as an adolescent had already taken the role of the father's drinking buddy, while the older brother was trying to survive and make money in this household where the mother is absent. The film presents drinking as self-medicating for this ear buzz that conflicts with his performance as a musician already; the addiction to alcohol and his tinnitus medication is an additional layer to a symptom that has to do with the surge of the free drive, which makes his falling in love with a woman's voice, song, and poetic words "we're far from the shallow now" quite logical.

Kristine: And that's one way of thinking about the crisis of masculinity today: The cultural construction of masculinity functions to control the feminine in people of all genders, where being a man means to dominate and control his own femininity by displacing it onto women (or queer and trans folks) and controlling and dominating them. Bradley Cooper's character is caught up in this...

Shanna: Hence repression of femininity and a failing to imagine masculinity as well.

Tracy: Right: the feminine is just the end of the masculine as opposed to an opening for a man as well. In the domain of politics, there is a push currently to take something like paid maternity leave for women, and repackage it so that instead of framing it as something that benefits women, it is presented as something that benefits men. That's the way to package it. If it just benefits women, it's like, "Who cares?"

But another thing that's interesting about this version of *A Star is Born* that apparently is somewhat different with the other versions is that the Bradley Cooper character plays this alt-country music star who's all about authenticity. But his authenticity is also his downfall, because it drives him to drink.

Fernanda: And to refuse to put in his earplugs to play in concerts and protect his ears, because he fears that they will distance him from the audience, the authentic experience.

Tracy: He's so immersed in the authenticity of his experience that he can't ever lie. He's presented as so real that he kind of exists outside of the standard psychic structures in a way. But the woman, who's of course played by Lady Gaga, is assigned a kind of a musical persona. So initially she's also in this register of authenticity, soaring notes, and so on. But then when she begins to break away as a star it's as a Gaga-type musician: but now played as almost a mechanical puppet, with like the glittering eyeshadow, the dance moves, the choreography, and all of that. So it's kind of funny because it constitutes a kind of mockery of her as a musician, also. It's odd given that she's not *only* that, obviously, you know she transcends that genre. But within the movie it's as though she needs him to find her authentic relation to things… that he's trying to save her from this crass commercial packaging, right? But you're kind of left in suspense when he kills himself. Is this sacrifice on his part going to make her realize that she can't give up on her own authenticity, so that she'll be true to what was ultimately his path in a weird way? Or is she going to continue to be this pop star? So it really puts the experience on the side of the man. It's much more his story in this telling, and she's kind of the occasion for his story.

Kristine: The real man reminds me somehow of Trump's America with its fantasy of the Real American Man that's held within a kind of nostalgic fantasy world. And it is also an aggrieved masculinity, one that is angered about losing its former position of power and glory to women, immigrant, and racialized people who are all simultaneously feminized in this discourse. This seems to me also one of the dangers of drawing attention to the psychoanalytic insight that we are highlighting here, that there is something in women that they are seeking to express, and that gets addressed to men, and that men take advantage of, by reducing women's value or quest to sex. Perhaps we could de-essentialize this structure somehow, to say instead that there is something about the feminine in anyone, that calls to a masculine ethics for help putting it into language, whether through writing, speech, music, or poetry. And it is a failure of the masculine in people of any gender, when they repress or exploit the feminine instead of taking responsibility for supporting its expression. This could include women for whom #MeToo functions more for attention than solidarity, and certainly includes men like Weinstein or Adams.

Tracy: Yes: that real man seems much more like an ideal. This guy is authentic to himself. It would be interesting to think about what is called authentic, or how a certain idea of authenticity represses something more singular… that authenticity is itself an ideal, and not an expression of subjectivity.

Shanna: Yeah it does sound like the idealizing of authenticity would totally miss the idea that the subject is radically absent. Like authentic to what? It seems like the next step would be "you must keep some kind of fidelity to your own authenticity" or something…but to what?

Tracy: Yes. Authenticity is reduced to the receivable in a certain way in *A Star is Born* because it's precisely what's received by the audience of the concert. It's the authenticity that makes the music real, that makes it meaningful to other people.

Shanna: And the movie is indeed very touching... which to me suggests that there is something going on there that transcends the idealization of authenticity.

Kristine: I have a friend that was so moved by that film and who would play those songs all the time and demand that all of her friends see the film. But there's something about the experience of watching this film – and particularly it being a musical – that provokes an intense affective response, an aesthetic response.

Tracy: There is something very real in it which I think has to do with Bradley Cooper's acting. He took a kind of stock character and made that character very real, made him sympathetic in a way that was very hard to do so. I think that's what people responded to, because officially, in the story, the guy is kind of a bastard. But the backlash that it gets is really interesting because at the time that it came out, it was expected that it would win Oscars for her and maybe for the movie. And then very quickly it just fell like a rock in award season, and then all it won for was the song. And people even began to kind of mock it, there was a turn against the movie. And then *Green Book* won, which was this terrible, uplifting narrative of race

relations, where the white person really gets it. It's kind of *Driving Miss Daisy*, but this time the driver's white and he's driving the cultivated worldly black guy around. But it's all about, you know, how we can ultimately get along. There's much more going on in *A Star is Born* than that.

Kristine: Different portrayals of masculinity, too.

Fernanda: I agree with your insistence on the feminine and the masculine in anyone, Kristine, because it introduces a dimension that gender roles and interactions don't really grasp… I propose that we continue thinking about #MeToo, film, and femininity by coming back to the Salma Hayek story we had discussed in our previous conversation, around the French letter against #MeToo.

Let's come back to the Salma Hayek story we had discussed in our previous conversation….

Tracy: The Ryan Adams thing reminded me of what happened with Salma Hayek, as well. In the piece she published as the Harvey Weinstein story was unfolding, she identified herself as one of the women who had been abused by him. It happened when his production company was financing her film on Frida Kahlo, for which he was the producer. For her this film was a passion project, because she had an intense relation to Frida Kahlo and is also Mexican. So she was passionate about bringing this story to the screen. Weinstein, however, was just obsessed with her big breasts. He manipulated her in this astonishing way in the late stages of production of the film, where it was as though the film either was or was not going to see the day based on whether she—

Fernanda: —would perform actions with him (take a shower with him, expose herself, etc.).

Tracy: Right. But he also demanded that she insert a scene in the movie, a lesbian sex scene.

Fernanda: Oh that's right! I accidentally discovered that scene through YouTube, in the context of searching for a way start a discussion with undergraduate students about Frida Kahlo's self-portraits. I thought that Hollywood movie might somehow offer a way in through pop culture or mainstream film, but that scene, where she puts on a show with another woman for the men's satisfaction, seems quite distant from what Kahlo expresses in the portraits.

Tracy: Apparently a number of people came out later and said, "Yeah that scene made no sense in the movie." All of a sudden there's this hot lesbian sex scene, but it's like, "Why?" Salma Hayek described how she agreed to do it simply because, at this point, not only the film itself, but everyone who worked on the film, was going to be affected if he pulled the plug. So she decided to kind of swallow hard and just do it, but she was so overcome in her body during the scene that she was vomiting between takes, completely out of control, and she and this other woman were just weeping between takes, holding each other. So he really put them through hell. And what made it torture for Hayek was not merely the fact that this scene would be put out there for all to see, but that it was all being performed for his benefit, for him to see. So she was essentially reduced to a lap-dancer in that moment.

From a psychoanalytic angle, what interested me in both this and the Ryan Adams example was how they dramatize the importance of aesthetics in femininity, how a woman might seek to give aesthetic expression to something unaddressable in her own experience, and how that risk of speech or creation was exploited by a man to turn her into an object of pleasure, a thing and not a subject. A number of the women musicians who were screwed over by Ryan Adams said that as a result of this experience they lost interest in music. And so the very means of expression that had been so precious to them previously was turned into a kind of prostitution. It's something I can certainly relate to from personal experience, as well: you put something out there and have the impression that you're being recognized or heard in a way you haven't experienced before, only to discover abruptly that there where you thought you were being heard or seen you're just being reduced to a piece of meat.

Shanna: Yeah, the timing of it seems like a key factor in how this unfolded for Salma Hayek, that he decided to wait until the end to make this demand of her, for this thing that she's been working on...

Tracy: Yes, exactly. And in terms of this whole question of culture and language, it is very much reducing what for her was a passion project, to bring to the screen something about the life of Frida Kahlo and her own relation to her, to a pornographic sex scene for a man to jerk off to. Aesthetics is violently reduced to the montage. Whatever was going to see the light of day there is now corrupted and translated into this other medium.

Fernanda: Yeah, and it's also very tragic in terms of Frida Kahlo's story, and a trajectory in film dealing with her story. Laura Mulvey in a documentary co-directed with Peter Wollen in 1983 attempted to showcase a friendship Frida had with Tina Modotti, an Italian photographer who gave up being a Hollywood star, as well as the beautiful woman and beautiful model of the photographer Edward Weston, in order to be a photographer herself and a social activist, a communist in Mexico during the interwar period. The documentary's focus is on the ways in which these two women were breaking out of the claims of what a woman was supposed to be at the time, in Mexico and globally… so what Salma Hayek and Ashley Judd, as Tina, went through with Weinstein in this more recent return to the figure of Frida is all the more horrifying. Frida and Tina are forced back into being objects for the pleasure of men. If Frida and Tina, through their art and even their friendship, found a way to break out of the demands of their cultures, inspiring Laura Mulvey to experiment with film beyond "visual pleasure and narrative cinema," this lap-dance between Salma Hayek and Ashley Judd in the 2002 *Frida* insists on their objectification.

Heidi: Could it be kind of fallacy of the #MeToo movement that making space for a woman's speech about abuse credible for the legal system also makes more space for the kind of poetization that we were speaking about earlier? It seems to me that one unfortunate side effect of the #MeToo discourse is a false promise that a structure of consent, when combined with speaking out about the really violent failures on the part of men to respond adequately, will be soothing to the suffering some women experience in

repeating an address to various others. In fact, a complaint about abuse or about objectification has nothing to do with the question of the address in psychoanalytic terms. One is about justice in the social, and the other about creating space for speech, for the aesthetic.

Tracy: But it seems important in these examples that there's no address on the part of the woman. In other words, the woman is just existing, doing her thing. It's the man who instrumentalizes her. None of these women are actually going and looking for something, you know? And that's kind of interesting because to some extent there's backlash to #MeToo that says, well, these people are trying to advance their careers, right? So a number of women said, "Well, you know, I couldn't do anything about it because then my career would be over in Hollywood" and so on. But there's a response that implies that the abuse was deserved, as if these women went out in the world seeking some advancement of their careers and this is what they got…

Shanna: Yeah that does seem very interesting. Nonetheless we could imagine the scenario in which someone would have a complaint, right? About some sort of failure on the part of men in her life. The distinction you're proposing—between justice in the social and the question of a space for speech—is helpful, Heidi.

Kristine: Isn't #MeToo addressed to women? Women addressing themselves to other women but in a public way, so with a multiple audience. In that sense it seems to straddle the distinction between complaint and addressed speech.

Heidi: It's certainly the case that in this movement women stand together, identify with each other's experience, often publicly.

Tracy: But is that identification though? I mean in a psychoanalytic sense? Formally there is identification in that it's "me too." But does it imply, inasmuch as identification is repression; identification as the ego's repression of the unconscious? Is that what it means, or is it actually speech? So it's not to say… if you focus on some of these specific women, who were central to the issues coming out. Some of the singularities of these cases show that it's

not so much about identification, but on "I'm going to say this happened to me."

Kristine: It's a risk of speech. And they are making diverse complaints, but what they all point to is a real failure on the part of the law to address the issue of the objectification of women.

Tracy: Right. Because I think it is very easy as a woman to kind of go along with being reduced to an object, even if one doesn't like it. That's implied in the question "Why didn't they say something earlier." There are all the usual power reasons why one can't say something earlier, but more fundamentally it's so much a part of what it is to be a woman: these abusive seductive things happen to you. And for the most part you don't say anything about it. And if you were to say something, what would you say?

Kristine: Not only 'what would you say?' but also 'who would listen to you?' and' do your words even matter?' We had a very good example of this with the testimony of Christine Blasey Ford. She was the most credible witness that could have been found: white, wealthy, educated, no direct political ties, etc. She gave testimony that, I would say, everyone believed. And like Anita Hill before her, she took great personal risk to testify so publicly against an appointed supreme court justice. And it didn't matter. Even though unlike Hill, Ford was believed, it didn't matter. It didn't matter that Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her, because apparently sexual assault is allowed under the law for certain men. In this context I can see why women are not motivated to come forward, or do so only in a more passive way—because what hope can they really have that taking more direct action will make a difference??

Fernanda: Indeed! If sexual assault is allowed under the law, in a particularly prominent way in the United States in this recent context with Kavanaugh, maybe we are seeing a refusal of the limits that make civilization in the Freudian sense possible. In other words, a rejection of the prohibitions of incest and murder that sustain collective life. But if in patriarchal society this means, for men, no sex with the women in your family, and, in its place, an exchange of women, in sanctifying the objectification of women it seems committed to preserving a bit of the primal father whose power is unlimited,

of this illusion that someone is not vulnerable to the defect in the structure of the social link. This is the masculinity of the cultural montage, whereas masculinity and paternity as ethical positions necessarily give up the fantasy of the primal father, in favor of sustaining the defect aesthetically.

I would like to come back to Heidi's question, on the distinction between justice in the social and the creation of space for speech as aesthetic. I would say there is surely a masculine ethics in the effort of making speech about abuse credible and making consent matter in the legal system...

Kristine: Well that's what I mean by the risk, one takes a great personal risk in publicly accusing someone. And there's been so many cases where a woman's career ends because she spoke about a powerful man's sexual abuse. Women are often responded to with accusations of "You're crazy. You imagined it. You wanted it" in order to silence her speech. I think speaking publicly can be a risk and a powerful act.

Fernanda: ...but the problem lies in then thinking that speaking out becomes the space where the thing that seeks expression can be heard.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the form #MeToo takes makes me ask to what extent it is a risk of speech to make these confessions. Because, on the one hand, there is indeed something that's very different from... just assuming that you are not going to say anything about that, and that putting up with abuse is just inherent to living your life, but the framing of the speech act before the law as a confession is already limiting speech, what can be said and addressed.

Shanna: Why do you use the word "confession"? That's not the word that would come to my mind, so I'm curious.

Fernanda: I'm not sure why that word came to my mouth! It makes me think of Rousseau or Augustine… and it's Catholic! In those contexts there seems to be something of jouissance in telling the story of these forbidden, unacceptable things, but the one giving a confession is guilty, at least in Catholic confession, and here we're accusing someone else as a predator. Still, the one "confessing" experiences shame in both scenarios. Perhaps a confession often involves shameful things having been happening for a long time and then finally one decides to tell, and set a limit… And then you say,

"this is going on," and in the #MeToo stories it aims at the consequence of some kind of punishment "Oh that guy is going to be dismissed," "He's going to be out of a job… because you have decided to accuse him."

Tracy: Although not out of a job for very long. I mean actually very few of these people have paid any type of price at all.

Fernanda: Like in Catholic confession and penance! It's a cultural montage, complete with its repertoire of interdictions transgressed all the time, and its solutions that clear up the mess of shame and guilt, and of appearing shameful or guilty, to then start over.

Shanna: Yes, it reminds me of a further difference, too, between stating something—like, this happened and I'm saying no to pretending it didn't anymore, a speech which may be an act—and making an accusation. The two might effectively coincide, should the address for the statement be the legal system—but the position one speaks from might be subjectively different.

Fernanda: That makes sense! Heidi's previous point about the structure of consent and speaking out when there is abuse appears as a more Protestant mode. It makes me think of political correctness in the U.S., and the current alt-right's need to transgress it, in the name of some kind of authenticity (male, particularly, to come back to Tracy's earlier point with Bradley Cooper in *A Star Is Born*). This phenomenon seems to make evident the failure of political correctness as a strategy to make the social contract possible. It's an emergence, or return of repressed sexist, racist, xenophobic, misogynous ideas that politically correct speech does not resolve. So there's something important in the failures of these constructions that calls for a mode of attention that welcomes speech, and that can distinguish the positions from which one speaks, as you say, Shanna.

Tracy: Yeah, it does seem important to talk about specific cases. What did someone actually say, what was their account of it? Because if we talk about it as a movement then something is lost. Because obviously people have different experiences, but it's the singularity of some of those cases that are very interesting.

Kristine: I think Rose McGowan has been maligned, although she was one of the key accusers against Weinstein.

Tracy: That's interesting too because then she's accused of harassing this younger guy, right? The Michael Jackson thing is interesting as well, although I'm not sure it concerns femininity. But the whole "Leaving Neverland" thing, all of these people thinking that the strangeness of Michael Jackson had to be read through the lens of pedophilia. Before it seemed that perhaps maybe he was just very strange, and had an unusual and incomprehensible relation to these boys that defied easy categorization. But now a number of people who had that position are saying based on the testimony of these two men who came forward that he's a monster. But in all likelihood, it's not so simple. For that person, too, abuse is often a part of a repetition, you know? Michael Jackson, whether or not he did these things, is also very much a victim in other respects. I think the Rose McGowan is interesting in that way, too. Where would you assign the blame if you're going to assign the blame? Although I personally place it at the foot of this – this hipster weasel, the music producer. It's a particular type of phallic identity that's especially poisonous I think.

Kristine: And pretends to be something else.

Tracy: Right, who pretends to be also this sensitive guy.

Shanna: Yes, and the structure of blame is so limited when it comes to questions of fantasy and sexuality. To your point about Michael Jackson, like, we don't have a way to talk about these things that's not pretty flat, and that's in part because we don't have a way of speaking about the unconscious and the effects of unconscious fantasies in all of our lives, which is where psychoanalysis as a discourse and an ethical practice becomes interesting.

Fernanda: Exactly!

Tracy: But I like also what you said about Frida Kahlo, too, because it could be interesting to follow some of these chains a little bit. Because I was

thinking that if I did something on this particular theme, I would want to concentrate on the Salma Hayek thing just because she wrote this quite long piece on it. So there's a lot there and it's very well done, I think, because she takes the care to really document what that experience was: not just his crimes, but the effect on her. But then it would be interesting to kind of-it's not for nothing that it's a film about Frida Kahlo, you know?

Fernanda: It is and also Frida Kahlo's experience of her body as, like, this sick body. And also that's what she paints if you look at the paintings. It's also trying to make visible something that can't be seen by anyone else; that's all it's about! Giving expression to the thing she lives with in painting.

Tracy: … But also her whole relation to Diego Rivera… and just be this little lady at the side.

Fernanda: Yeah and in the scene of the lesbian hot sex, it's the shots are, like, of the dance, and then there's a shot of Diego's lustful smile. And somewhere between an enjoyment and, like a slight jealousy that's increasing the enjoyment.

Tracy: …And kind of like, "Let me in."

Fernanda: Right, that's what it does. The scene just has one watching this dance and his face and then more men, also just like…

Tracy: Right, like they're all jerking off in the audience, yeah.

Heidi: Salma Hayek's piece was, if I recall, very touching on what it is to be an object in that perverse scene.

Tracy: But it's interesting that so many of the very well-known actresses who were part of #MeToo either voluntarily or involuntarily, for example Gwyneth Paltrow, didn't come forward initially—but it came out that she was also a victim. And she, too, left acting and became a businesswoman. So a lot of these people who had attained a very high level of success decided to leave the world of filmmaking. Sarah Polley, too.

Heidi: I was just thinking of her, too. I recall that Sarah Polley was about going to see Harvey Weinstein one time. And her manager being protective of her in some sense and the meeting still going in the wrong direction. And then she just sort of decides to be a director.

Tracy: It's amazing how many women he got to. Lupita Nyong'o, too. He ruthlessly pursued her when she was a drama student at Yale. And she wrote a long account of it. Among other things he invited her to come to his family house to watch a movie with him and his wife and the two kids, right? And then while they're all watching the movie he says, "Well I'm gonna go talk with Lupita about her career" or whatever. And then he takes her to this other office and tries to rape her while his family is in the next room watching this movie. There is something very perverse about these two scenes that unfold side by side but must not meet.

Shanna: Well, and it's interesting to think of 'the scenes that will not meet' also on the level of, like, whose stories do we get to hear? I think it's interesting that we're noticing that these are artists we are hearing these stories from, but there are so many of those stories that we're never gonna hear about, you know? So many. So I feel like that's always good to remember. Like, a manager coming in to a meeting with you, you know? You have to be a certain kind of person to have a manager come into a meeting with you.

Fernanda: That's already more powerful than it could ever get in many cases.

Shanna: And yet you can be fully—or almost fully—disempowered by that moment.

Tracy: Yeah, there's been that whole movement to think about service workers and so on who are apparently the most abused, most likely to be raped of all women. But I do think there's something about the fact that these women work in the aesthetic domain. Although they're privileged and all that, it perhaps has the value of maybe laying bare something that you

don't see in quite the same way when it's just a question of women who are totally vulnerable. That you see what is being violated...

Heidi: ... violated in the sense that they have something that they are actively trying to express.

Tracy: Right, exactly… The "prey profile" in that of a woman who's actually putting something out there, right? It's not just any female body. If we think of this in terms of a relation to feminine jouissance, It's the perverse thing in a way. The pervert is the one who recognizes that, right, but recognizes it in order to control it, in order to stamp it out. So that combination seems important: it is somehow recognized, but recognized in order to be exploited or effaced, and that's what's key in these cases.

Shanna: I wonder, though… it might be important to add, too, that there's a difference between a woman's experience of that and a girl's experience of it, right? You might think any girl is sort of in the position of the artist, inasmuch as she's trying to become, like, a woman or an adult or something... She's not at that place where she is really actively trying to express something in the way that we think about professionally, but she is actively trying to express something as a human being. So I don't know—I don't wanna lose the girl. And I'm just not totally seeing the difference, between the adult professional artist who gets exploited and any girl—or boy—this could happen to. You could very easily find a Harvey Weinstein-type figure with a 13-year-old girl. I'm still thinking about what you're saying, so I'll keep thinking about it.

Kristine: Well, I think I'm thinking with you because there's also something really horrifying about the everydayness of the objectification and exploitation of women and girls.

Fernanda: Which includes neurotics and not only perverts.

Kristine: Which includes abusers who are neurotics and includes women who are more economically vulnerable being in service industry jobs which rely on tips. There's an organization that represents service industry women in California, and an activist from the organization was invited to the Golden

Globes as part of the #TimesUp response to #MeToo, where more privileged Hollywood women were trying to raise the profile of activists who were fighting for women in different industries. This campaign in California advocates for a set wage for the service industry so that their jobs would not rely on tips, because relying on tips structurally incentivizes women to put up with constant sexual harassment. I think that what we are saying about artists and #MeToo could be made even more powerful if it could be connected to the everyday experience of women, not just artists.

Heidi: I think you're right Kristine. There is a relationship between what Hayek experienced and the scene a restaurant owner might be enjoying by mandating dress codes for servers, for example. But the artist's complaint is explicitly about the ways in which she's limited in what she can express by a culture or specific men who refuse to see her as an artist, whereas a service industry worker's investments are so often elsewhere that the effect of that violence on her projects cannot but pass unremarked. In this general genre, I liked Emma Sulkowitz's response to Columbia not acting on her rape complaint. Sure, she's another artist, but it's not like she was planning a series of performances pieces around rape and a man got in the way of that. Rather, in making these pieces she found a way of creating space in the social for her experience. Whereas the tragedy of Hayek's story is Weinstein's abuse of his controlling interest, making her do this sex scene...

Tracy: Any woman actress might have to do naked scenes, but usually this is when it's required by the story in some way, right? But part of the problem here was that it had nothing to do with the story she was telling. It wasn't about Frida Kahlo as a sex object, it wasn't integral to the story. But she was forced to go through it in order to make her film. So at least in the way that she talked about it, wasn't so much the fact that an audience would see it, but more the fact that she was forced to compromise her creative energy, to turn it into a film that it was not intended to be. I think in the case of Salma Hayek, she was not only the actor, she was the creator, writer, and producer. And that was important. What she wanted was to tell the story, as a woman. And then he turned it into the kind of story that it would've been if a man had told it.

Shanna: Coming back to the psychoanalytic point of view about taking responsibility at some point for something, though... So I'm still on the girl, like, a 13 year old girl, who in a sense could be potentially forced to compromise her creative project because of the dehumanization or objectification of women, nonetheless also still has a responsibility to find a way to express what's at work in her. I wonder if this comes back to what you were saying before, Heidi, about the possibility that some women might mistake what's made possible by the MeToo movement—which you were describing, I think rightly, as justice in the social, and a movement to make women's and others' speech about their abuse credible to the legal system—with, basically, the making possible of an address as such? We don't know yet what all may come politically from the #MeToo movement, which is part of what is beautiful and exciting here, but from a psychoanalytic point of view, we know one thing that won't come from it—it won't make possible an Other of the address who can take responsibility in one's place for one's suffering—or one's desire!

Heidi: Totally—and I think that's in some ways the stakes of *mondialisation* for Apollon, that the structure of the address is in some ways laid bare by the fact that the current montage in North America is so unstable and offers so many different possibilities for repressing the feminine.

Tracy: If we talk about some of the #MeToo examples, the point should be to say something more broadly about the experience of the feminine, right? In other words, it's not like this just happened to these women. That's the point, that this is a fundamental experience of what it is to be a woman-to experience this betrayal… But then it allows us to sort of see something about those moments where we don't hear the speech of the subject.

Kristine: It makes me also wonder about the—so we're talking about the feminine in women, but then what about the masculine in women? Can we think about women coming forward and speaking about these experiences as a way of taking responsibility for that which is unaddressable?

Tracy: Yeah, I don't know, because the coming forward doesn't seem necessarily like taking responsibility. It's speech, but is it taking

responsibility? I don't know, it's an interesting question. What would it mean to take responsibility for that?

Fernanda: I would say that to some extent there is an attempt in that direction, at least. I remember hearing one told by an older woman who talks about her gynecologist and her first orgasm being provoked by this gynecologist during her first visit as a teenager. And this is an 80-year-old grandmother who's telling the story. He was there for the delivery of her first child. And eventually she kind of decided to herself "I'm breaking off this relationship." So when I hear that, I hear some sort of responsible position, even if it's that late in her life. With regard to what it is to be a woman beyond her own story, like, just kind of recognizing that just for other women, for the girl, just recognizing that these things happen, or that this was the experience, and for other girls...

Tracy: Breaking the silence of that, yeah. As you were talking, I was thinking about how the word "feminism" fell out of favor for such a long time. People often say, "Well I'm not a feminist, but…" and it's sort of odd to preface what you're saying.. But a lot of people seem to meditate on that-that for a long time they were not invested in saying "I'm a feminist" or they were even invested in not accentuating this difference. But now they feel it's important again to say, "I'm a feminist."

Shanna: Which I think speaks to what you were saying, Kristine, too. That it seems like the act of speaking out about it nonetheless might depend on the singular subject, you know? You know, what that means for that person, whether or not it signifies taking a sort of responsibility.

Kristine: Yeah and I think it also goes back to the distinction that we were talking about before between the confessional versus the speech act. There's definitely ways in which claiming #MeToo can be a way of not taking responsibility for something and staying invested in the victim status, or wishing someone else would take the responsibility in a particular way. But there's also lots of examples where it is taking a political act of responsibility with other women and other victims or other survivors who-like Tarana Burke, the woman who invented the #MeToo hashtag, for whom it's part of her community activism and has been for many decades. And to return to

Shanna's concern for the girl, Burke is also very much concerned about the teenaged girls in her community, and invented the hashtag as a way for girls to find community and support. If you read interviews with Burke, you get a real sense of the inspiration that she took from her work with adolescent girls, and I wonder if this is another kind of response to the feminine that she saw them struggling to express, specifically as adolescent girls.

Shall we move from the "bad romance" to Roma?

Fernanda: Did any of you watch *Roma*, the Mexican film? It introduces more problems of race and class. *Roma* is about a young maid from the Southwestern state of Oaxaca living and working in an upper-middle class household in the early 1970s in Mexico City, in a fairly well-off part of town still known as the Roma district ("Colonia Roma"). This kind of live-in help arrangement, involving a girl, or two, as the film shows, from marginalized parts of the country was, and still is, very common among middle and upper-class families. These women often haven't finished elementary school, even, and they are helping all day every day except for Sundays, which is typically their day off. The film director, Alfonso Cuarón, based this movie on his childhood memory of growing up in this kind of household; he reconstructs the story of a particular maid he was fond of as a young boy. So to make the film he decided to travel to a small town in Oaxaca and find someone for the role. This meant that the protagonist would not be a professional actress. In the end, the lead role was given to Yalitza Aparicio. I think she and Salma Hayek are the only Mexicans to have been nominated for an Oscar. As she explains in interviews, she kind of rolled into the audition by accident, at her sister's insistence, and ended up with the role without even speaking Mixteco, which the director wanted for the film. Although her parents spoke Mixteco and Triqui, another indigenous language spoken in the region, she had not learned these because, as she explains in an interview with Google, there was no incentive to transmit these languages that only led to more marginalization. So she ended up learning her parents' languages while making the movie, from the woman selected to play the other maid in the household.

Kristine: Loss of language is part of the violence of colonization in Canada as well. Many Indigenous communities are trying to find ways of sustaining their languages and teach them to the next generation.

Fernanda: Yes, the film portrays this in that officially she is not allowed to use Mixteco in the house, but unofficially, this is how she communicates to have privacy with the other maid, and she sings and teaches one of the children, the girl, a lullaby in Mixteco. It's really an interesting film inasmuch as it is showing how this maid in the main role is—as many of the women who work in the household as maids—a teenager who has been deprived of her own adolescence and of her own experience because she's in the service of other women and the whole family. So she's like the proxy mother, and she's the cleaning lady, the waitress, the cook's assistant, and she takes care of the dog's shit, a detail made very prominent in this movie. Since this director was interested in using his own memories of this one maid in his house when he was growing up, Libo, to whom he dedicates the film, he tries to make visible her sexuality, which makes sense because the girl ends up pregnant. And he tries showcase her own curiosity for sex. It has this striking scene with frontal male nudity and no frontal female nudity. Instead we see her face, looking at this man and just making sense of that.

One consequence of the film is that now this woman is on the front page of these fashion and celebrity magazines. And there are a lot of issues about altering her body image through makeup and in some instances dress, making her whiter in certain cases, and changing her features and making them fit a more standard western ideal of female beauty, I guess. I like the passion project of the director, of showing this was a woman too, you know. And, I'm personally interested in how it can disturb the Mexican middle and upper classes, which rely on this exploitation of the native girl who loses her childhood, adolescence, her language, and has very little space to herself. On the other hand, now Yalitza Aparicio becomes this icon and is under a lot of pressure to fit it in to this…

Tracy: Montage.

Fernanda: Yes.

Kristine: I didn't know all of that about the director when I watched the film. The director, Cuarón, gives a very tangible and poignant counterpoint to the examples of failed masculine ethics in Weinstein, Adams, and others. Because here is a director who carries inside of himself this feminine experience, that he is addressing to the maid and his mother, and that he makes an aesthetic space for in the making of this movie. And the movie does not reduce either women to objects, but instead really showcases their own strength in the face of really bad treatment by men who cannot take responsibility for themselves – both men, the wealthy doctor who is Cleo's employer and her lover, abandon their children to pursue a fantasy of masculinity that is very much caught up in the cultural construction of sexuality.

Heidi: That's right, there's a touching scene where the maid tracks down her lover, using the excuse of returning his jacket, which he left behind on fleeing the movie theatre after she told him she thinks she's pregnant. She finds him at martial arts training, and he basically just says, hey, what's up? He refuses any responsibility, threatens her, calls her a servant.

Fernanda: Oh, that moment you mention is especially powerful to a Mexican ear, Heidi, because the expression he uses is a very common insult to women in Mexico, which makes evident something brutal about the class factor in that montage of sexuality. A pejorative word for servant is *gata*, which literally means "female cat," but usually you never hear people call an actual servant that. Instead, it is reserved for degrading a woman, to tell her she has no class and deserves no respect, nothing. Many people say or receive this—like many other awful, uncensored things that are said in Mexico all the time—without thinking of the experience of a maid. So when this guy tells Cleo the servant she's a servant, a *pinche gata*, he is saying she does not deserve to be accompanied by him through the pregnancy and the child of a servant does not deserve a father.

Kristine: And the women in the household, from the wealthy grandmother and mother to Cleo are the ones who step up and demonstrate a masculine responsibility there where the men fail. There's that important scene in the film where the mother has just realized that her husband is not coming home. And in this moment, Cleo also has decided to tell her employer that she is

pregnant. I was certain, like Cleo, that the mother would send her away, finding it all too difficult to deal with. But to Cleo's surprise, and mine, she says, we will take care of you—we will take you to the doctor, Grandma will buy you a crib for your baby, etc.

Heidi: That's right—it's as they're buying a crib that there's suddenly conflict in the street, the Corpus Christi massacre presumably, and Cleo's lover stumbles on them, pointing a gun in her direction. There's something there of a critique, on the director's part, of the protest: the democratic reforms the movement aimed at didn't speak to the oppression of women by the montage. Access to education, yes—but for us, not for you!

Fernanda: Absolutely! Cleo is perfectly invisible to the protesters in the Hawk Strike (*Halconazo*).

Kristine: And so the wealthy women do not respond in the way that we expect them to. They don't close ranks around the mother's trauma and cast out the poor maid who is no longer useful to them because she comes with a baby. Instead they act to support her out of solidarity and love. Their differences are not erased, and the filmmaker does a lot to remind us of the turmoil and injustice that rages inside and outside their doors with forest fires and Cleo's mother being dispossessed of her land, and Cleo goes on shovelling the shit—don't get me wrong, it's not perfect. But they also manage to make a kind of shelter of love around themselves and their children. I wonder if this is the connection to #MeToo, because I think that this is Tarana Burke's vision, women coming together in support of one another, seeing in the trauma of other women not a reason to close ranks or repeat the trauma, but a source of strength in solidarity and community.

Shanna: That movie was a heartbreaker. I like your idea, Kristine, that in the end it provides a glimpse of what could be possible for a way of acting in love and solidarity, rather than repression. And I think you're right to underline that it's not perfect—I like that the film shows very clearly that back at the house it is also back to work for Cleo, despite that beautiful breakthrough scene where the mother says "We love you," which the children have been saying to Cleo all along. And it's said at such a powerful moment—she's just a girl herself, and she has just saved the lives of these

two children she is helping to raise, and her response to that act is something I think we could call a true speech, therefore another act, to say that she hadn't wanted her baby—"*Yo no la quería*." It reminds me of one of the ways Apollon has described true speech—"it comes and it has to be said." It's so complex, because here we have an adolescent girl effectively in the position of a sort of sister-mother-daughter, in the family but not in the family, beloved but put to work. And this can be true for any girl or adolescent girl whose family upholds the montage at the expense of providing space for the girl's freedom, but it is also an aspect of the montage that can be seriously exacerbated and amplified by racism, class, and class differences, as we see in *Roma*.

Kristine: I'm struck by what you've said about the everydayness of the girl's dilemma, between pursuing something in her self-expression and conforming to the montage, and by the responsibility that we might be said to share in providing space for her expression, including through social justice. Maybe that's a good place to conclude?

Heidi Arsenault is a music therapist based in Montreal. Her clinical work is focused on young children with language delays. She has a longstanding interest in the contemporary psychoanalytic clinic. Shanna Carlson is a clinician in private practice in Minneapolis, MN. She received her MSW from the University of Minnesota and her PhD in Romance Studies from Cornell University. Her writings include *Sex for Structuralists: The Non-Oedipal Logics of Femininity and Psychosis* and articles in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, *Transgender Studies Reader, Volume 2*, and *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*.

Kristine Klement is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Toronto, Canada. She teaches in the School of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at York University and at the Toronto Psychoanalytic Society and Institute.

Tracy McNulty is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Ithaca, New York, and a professor of French and Comparative Literature at Cornell University. She is the author of *Wrestling with the Angel: Experiments in Symbolic Life* (CUP 2014) and *The Hostess: Hospitality, Femininity, and the*

Expropriation of Identity (Minnesota, 2007). Her two most current research projects explore, respectively, perversion in libertine mathematics and the intersubjectivity of political acts.

Fernanda Negrete is the author *The Aesthetic Clinic: Feminine Sublimation in Contemporary Writing, Psychoanalysis, and Art* (SUNY, 2020). She is an Associate Professor of French at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where she directs the Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis & Culture. She hosts *Penumbr(a)cast: The Other Scene*, a podcast on contemporary psychoanalysis.