

A queer(er) temporality: A posthumanist analysis of the performative agencies of time with/in gay men's anal fisting

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Abstract

Gay men's anal fisting has been rendered in sharply divided terms through cautionary-toned medico-forensic studies or more affirmative Queer commentary. Despite these paradigmatic and tonal differences, both have tended to share an analytically narrow humanocentric lens. Drawing data from a project with South African gay men who incorporate fisting into their sexual relations, a posthumanist performative account of temporality is put to work in exploring how anal fisting entails the co-participation of the often unacknowledged agency/ies of time. What emerges through this analysis is a peculiar and queer(er) temporality of *slowtime* which actively co-produces the corporeotics of gay men's fisting.

Keywords

Anal fisting; gay men; spacetime; posthumanist; queer temporality; slowtime

Time, temporality, and sex/uality

In recent years, the topic of time and temporality has become of growing interest in critical studies of gender and sexuality (Davies and Funke, 2011; Smith, 2016; Wiesner-Hanks, 2018) as well as queer theory (Freeman, 2007, 2010; Halberstam, 2005; Rohy, 2009). Unlike 'time', which is largely understood to represent or quantify the passage of duration, on various scales of measurement; 'temporality', according to Kadji Amin, refers to the "social patterning of experiences and understandings of time." (2014: 219). Taken together, queer work on time has sought to critically re-examine the long his/tories of Western, industrial-capitalist, and heteronormative forces that have underwritten more dominant understandings of the relationship between temporality, subjectivity, embodiment, and sex/uality – a relationship in which time has traditionally been framed as a regulatory but external force to the corporeally bounded hu/Manⁱ subject and body (Barad, 2007, 2010).

Queer takes on time have brought into question what Freeman describes as the "chrononormativity" (2010: xxiii) of how hegemonic systems of sex and gender temporally order our lives into chronologically consistent, linear and unidimensional hetero-procreative timelines. Yet, on a far more intimate scale, queer work has also unsettled the conventional construction of hetero-and-homo-normative sex/ualities which, when considered under the dominant influence of phallo/gyno-centric modes of sex that are typically genital-focussed and orgasm-oriented, render sexual relations and erotic practice a "linear and rationalized process" (Jackson and Scott, 2002: 104).

For queer writers, the force of time intimately intersects and co-shapes the experience/s of our bodies, selves, and sex/ualities in ways which are far more dis/jointed, non-sequential, multi-dimensional, and non-chronological than is typically understood within more "(hetero)temporal" (Smith, 2016: 989) timeframe/s of life, such

as, in the dis/continuous (trans)formations of trans subjectivity and embodiment (Halberstam, 2005). This queer rendering of temporality articulates the spacetimes (or timespaces) of/for “mode[s] of erotic difference” (Freeman, 2007: 195) which bear “an affective or antireproductive undertone” (Ku, 2010: 323). Queer temporalities therefore recognise the spatio-temporal dimensions of those more non-normative subjectivities, relations, practices and experiences of sex/uality and erotics that are denied public (and private) timespace because they are often deemed unacceptable or ‘perverse’.

For this study, I am particularly interested in exploring how the experience of the temporal dimensions of anal fisting amongst a sample of gay men bring to light a far more radical sense of queer temporality with/in fisting than has previously been considered. What I contend is that gay men’s temporal experiences of fisting do not just point to a spacetime of/for a corpo-erotic practice that has long been considered a form of “queer sex” (Halperin, 1995: 90). Rather, by engaging Karen Barad’s (2007) posthumanist and performative account of *spacetime mattering* (also written as *timespacemattering*), I find that gay men’s experiences of the temporality/ies of fisting illustrate how time performatively works to co-produce the sense of intimacy, consent, as well as safety and expertise with/in anal fisting. What this kind of posthumanist analysis yields is a new account of anal fisting in which time itself and, in particular, the extended durations of time typically entailed in fisting, are not just considered a ‘background’ condition to the corpo-erotic practices and relations of anal fisting, but, rather, can be seen to actively co-participate in constituting the material, discursive, and affective dimensions of anal fisting.

The queer temporality/ies of gay men's anal fisting

Anal fisting can be broadly described as the sexual(ised) and erotic (single or partnered) practice of inserting (a portion of) the hand(s) and/or forearm(s) through the anus and into the rectum (Martin, 2019). It is, in particular, the insertion of the entire hand and/or forearm in anal fisting that makes this a distinct form of anal sex/uality unlike those more common forms of anal play which involve the tongue, fingers, genitals, or sex toys being inserted into the rectum.

While colloquially referred to as 'handballing' or 'fist-fucking' and, in medicalised jargon as 'brachioproctic insertion'; anal fisting has a documented history which extends deep into the annals and archives of sexuality and eroticsⁱⁱ (Peakman, 2013; Taormino, 2006). With that said, and at least within those largely phallogentric, anal-phobic, 'vanilla' and heteronormative cultures which derogate gay men's (anal) sex/ualities (Allan, 2016; Underwood, 2003), anal fisting has typically been regarded as a sexual taboo framed (both explicitly and implicitly) in medico-forensic case study literature as an 'extreme' if not life-threatening sex act that presents with a high probability for sexual injury (such as, perforation of the colon), the contraction of sexually transmitted infections and, in some instances, death (Cappelletti et al., 2016; Cohen, Giles, and Nelson, 2004; Lowry and Williams, 1983; Orr et al., 1995; Reay and Eisle, 1989; Reiner, 1984; Shook, Whittle, and Rose, 1985; Sohn, Weinstein, and Gonchar, 1977; Torre, 1987).

In sharp contrast to these studies, anal fisting amongst gay men has been one amongst the spectrum of those less-hetero-and-more-homo-sexual as well as poly-amorous, non-procreative, and sado-masochistic forms of sex which have long been identified as queer sex/uality (Dowsett, 1996; Halperin, 1995; Huffer, 2013; Rubin, 1991; Wadiwel, 2009). Gayle Rubin's (1991) original ethnographic work on the

Catacombs, the heart of the gay BDSMⁱⁱⁱ and leather community of San Francisco between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, was seminal in providing the first non-pejorative and culturally attentive social scientific account of anal fisting amongst gay men. For Rubin, anal fisting was a subversive “art” (1991: 126) which resoundingly rejected the conventional erotic logics and practices of heterosex/uality.

For its practitioners and participants, anal fisting has always been a deeply relational erotic practice corporeally capable of producing what fisting aficionado Tim Brough describes as a “divine sexual communion” (2005: i). Interestingly, a significant part of the affirmative Queer counter-narrative on anal fisting is the subject of time (Brough, 2005; Dowsett, 1996; Herrman, 1991; Wadiwel, 2009). In particular, the length of time that consensual and mutually enjoyable fisting entails, especially in safely dilating the anus, is argued to underscore how the erotic relations of fisting are predicated on a queer mode of gay (anal) sex/uality which is invested in the “[i]ntensity and duration of feeling, not climax ...” (Halperin, 1995: 91).

Despite the emphasis that queer scholarship has placed on the temporal dimensions of fisting, it remains a recurrent feature of such work that the corpo-erotics of anal fisting are often reframed through a particularly narrow humanocentric lens, that is, a persistent focus on the human bodies, intentions, and discourse at hand. While this is not entirely devoid of merit, especially given that gay men’s anal sex/uality (Hyde, 1970), generally, and fisting (Stardust, 2014), more specifically, have traditionally been marginalised and, in some places, criminalised; I would contend that beyond being an important ‘factor’ in understanding anal fisting as a queer form of love-and-pleasure-making, previous work has fallen short in more fully acknowledging the dynamic force and agencies of time with/in the erotic intensities and relations of fisting.

It is, for this reason, that I turn to Karen Barad's (2007) posthumanist and performative account of the relations between temporality and materiality, in an effort to shed new light on how time performatively co-participates with/in the corpo-erotics of gay men's anal fisting.

A queerer temporality? The performative relationalities and agencies of Karen Barad's spacetimemattering

In *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, Barad (2007) works to reconfigure the relationship between space, time, and matter through a posthumanist account of performativity. In outlining how 'human' and 'non-human' bodies, subjectivities, and forces come to matter – in both senses of the word. Barad extends Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work on (gender) performativity through a posthumanist analytic that endeavours to trace how the "forces at work in the materialization of bodies ... are not all human" (2007: 33-34).

For Barad, it is the emphasis that Butlerian performativity places on the regulatory and materializing effects of (human) discourse which "ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices rather than as an active agent participating in the very process of materialization" (2007: 151). For Barad, "discourses and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to one another; rather the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity" (2007: 149). Barad's (2007) neologism "intra-action" (iv) theoretically articulates "*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies* ... [which] recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action." (33, emphasis original). In doing so, Barad decouples the site and productive power of

agency from “human intentionality or subjectivity” (2007: 177): agency is relationally co-constituted with/in material↔discursive^{iv} and human↔non-human intra-activity.

It is, in this way, that Barad (2007) goes further and, in drawing from quantum physics^v as well as the relational philosophy-physics of Niels Bohr, counters the atomistic and absolutist model of time, space, and matter laid out by Isaac Newton. Contra classical Newtonian physics, Barad “dislocate[s] the container model of space, the spatialization of time, and the reification of matter”^{vi} (2007: 225), to underline the co-constitutive intra-activity and performative relations between both time and space, as well as matter. Thus, for Barad (2007), ‘human’ life, subjectivity, and embodiment are not bounded from and, therefore, occurring *in* (a non-human) time or space, as if time and space were merely the eternal background which mark the ‘context’ of/for ‘human’ activity. Rather, in theorising temporality, spatiality and materiality as co-constituted through their intra-activity, Barad (2007) contends that ‘human’ subjectivity, experience, and bodily materiality is *of* spacetimemattering – and often in ways not always determined or desired by ‘humans’.

Time, no longer an “external parameter” (Barad, 2007: 179), now becomes reconfigured as a relational and intra-active de/generative and disruptive force in how bodies matter, in material↔discursive ways. It is, in this sense, that Barad’s “profound ... ‘queering’ of time” (Juelskjær, 2013: 755, quotations original) as an actively enfolded/ing material force not only resonates with queer work on how “time ... can also fold subjects into [material-semiotic] structures of belonging and duration” (Freeman, 2010: xi), but, going further, draws attention to the relationally performative and (intra-)active agencies of time.

In displacing a human-centred analytic, Barad’s spacetimemattering provides an opportunity to re-examine the ways in which the temporal dimensions of gay men’s

anal fisting are perhaps far queerer than previously considered, that is to say, as actively at work in the performative (re)production of the very corpo-erotics of fisting.

Methodology

Participants

The data presented here is drawn from a study which, at the time of drafting this article, involved eight (self-identifying) gay South African men who regularly incorporate anal fisting into their personally preferred sexual practices and relations. All the participants live and work in the city of Cape Town; ranged between 24 and 49 years of age; and self-identified as cis-gendered males. In ethno-racial demographic terms, five of the participants were 'black'^{vii} and three were 'white'. The years of experience with anal fisting varied amongst the participants from between one year, at a minimum, and 15 years, at a maximum.

Measures

Data for this study continues to be collected through a series of unstructured interviews with each participant. The unstructured format of the interviews has helped to facilitate a conversational space through which participants are afforded the opportunity to discuss at length their understanding and experience of anal fisting. Each participant has always been placed in the (rhetorical) position of an 'expert guide' whose sexual and erotic knowledge and experience is not only valued but also leads the interviews.

In employing unstructured interviews, I have deliberately worked to create non-judgemental and non-pejorative conversational exchanges through which anal fisting could be discussed. In doing so, I have avoided any kind of (semi-)structured inquisition into participants' sex lives, especially given that this study ultimately deals

with intimate and personal stories of sexual desire and practice. The open-ended and unstructured format of these interviews has aided in promoting both casual and sometimes humorous exchanges which have proven immensely important in allaying participant anxiety and promoting forthright discussion.

Procedures

The data presented here was collected through a study vetted and granted ethical clearance by the University of Pretoria's Humanities Research Ethics Committee, as part of a broader project on anal fisting practice amongst gay men. Participants for this study were recruited through a "snowball" sampling technique in which I drew from contacts and networks established from ongoing research within the gay BDSM community of Cape Town.

Prospective participants were identified with the help of research contacts in the community and, thereafter, invited to participate. Each participant who agreed to being recruited also doubled as a 'participant-multiplier' – acting as source for the recruitment of other participants. Such snowball-style strategies to recruitment in sexuality studies are useful where access to sexual minorities and erotic communities sometimes proves difficult by virtue of their peculiar sexual practices and often socially stigmatised status (Browne, 2005).

On recruitment, each participant was given a Participant Information and Consent Form outlining their rights and my ethical obligations within the study. Prior to any of the interviews being conducted, participants were asked to provide written consent agreeing to be interviewed as well as have their interview audio recorded. Each interview was transcribed and then analysed.

Analysis: From human-centred discourse to more-than-human relations

At the commencement of the broader study from which this data is collected, I did not intend to embark on a posthumanist-oriented project. In fact, the principal analytical technique for this study was based on a discursive analysis that sought to identify and examine the ways in which tropes of gender and masculinity/ies came to operate in underwriting the meaning(s) attached to gay men's experiences and practices of anal fisting. While I found the original discursive work of this study remarkably fruitful in helping produce a nuanced account of the complex and sometimes conflicting ways in which this sample of gay men came to understand anal fisting in relation to the interlocking yet always slippery discursive structures of gender, sexuality, and masculinity/ies; I was, at the same time, equally aware of a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the 'fullness' of the analytical picture I had crafted through my discourse-centred analysis.

In returning to the transcribed data I became cognisant of how much *more* was going on in participant descriptions of their anal fisting. In re-sifting through this data, I noticed the recurrent presence and activity of a whole variety of 'non-human' others which I had previously neglected in my earlier analyses. While, at first, my attention was drawn to those more tangible objects, such as, the dildos, 'poppers', butt-plugs, and gloves, as well as materialities, such as, the large quantities of lubricant, which, together, co-created the corpo-material affordances and limitations for fisting; later, I began to recognise those 'less' perceptible forces, such as, space and time, which were co-implicated in constituting not just the discursive repertoires of fisting practice but, also, the material and affective relations of fisting experience.

In re-reading the transcribed data from this less human-centred perspective, I found myself increasingly attracted to following the lively and dynamic ways that these

'non-human' agencies co-participated with/in the corpo-erotic practices of anal fisting, (re)forming its material, discursive, and affective dimensions, simultaneously. With that said, I also found it difficult to fight my own humanocentric habits of analysis which saw me returning to re-centre the 'human' subjects, bodies, and discourses of the data. This difficulty is one which has been highlighted by posthumanist researchers who have drawn attention to the way 'humans' exert "a magnetic power over our [human] gazes" (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010: 525), typically to the occlusion of the material, spatial and temporal networks in which every 'human' body is always already embedded and emplaced.

To resist these perceptual pulls on my analytical attention I found Barad's posthumanist and relationally performative account of spacetime mattering to displace the "human subject or discourse as the starting point for analysis" (Allen, 2015: 126). In doing so, I found it more difficult to narrowly consign my analysis to the human participants that I had previously focussed on. By stretching my own analytical lens wider, that is, by developing a far more capacious analytic through which to trace the dynamic co-participation of a multitude of non-human agencies, it became evident that the corpo-erotics of anal fisting were not just predicated on the desires, intentions, and actions of the human participants, but, rather, were also intra-actively co-produced with/in always shifting more-than-human relations which co-entailed performative work by a range of non-human agencies and, in particular, time.

Findings and discussion

In the findings that follow, I highlight extracts of data which draw attention to the relational and performative agencies of time. Given that different participants brought to bear qualitatively unique accounts of time, I focus on three particular instances

where the performative work of time was shown to co-shape the experience of intimacy, consent, as well as safety and expertise, with/in the corpo-erotics of anal fisting.

“The slowness really changes the entire way you are with a partner”: How the slow(er) times of anal fisting (re)make the possibilities for intimacy

For a long time now fisting aficionados have worked hard to highlight the intense intimacy and trust that anal fisting not only requires, but, also, engenders amongst its participants (Brough, 2005; Herrman, 1991). In one such instance, Reese^{viii} pointed to how the extended duration of fisting was a key factor in emphasising the experience of intimacy and affection in anal fisting:

I've heard a lot of people say fisting isn't intimate but what these guys don't get is that it isn't just a wham bam thank you ma'am kinda thing! It takes a lot of time. It's a slow process. Really slow. Even when you think you're going to slow – then you aren't going slow enough! The slowness really changes the entire way you are with a partner. I mean maybe it's still sex but it's really different, I think there's a lot more tenderness because of the time it takes. For me fisting's more intimate because I'm going to spend more time with a partner for that night, and him with me; and that's part of the turn on.

What is especially interesting about Reese's account is not just the emphasis he places on the length of time that safe and enjoyable fisting requires, but, moreover, how the experience of intimacy itself becomes predicated on a temporal quality of what he describes as “slowness”. For Reese, this is not just a matter of pace, since it

appears to be the very “slowness” of fisting that transforms it into a qualitatively different kind of sexual interaction. Reese goes further by calling into question whether the temporal character of fisting can still be described, in a conventional sense, as “sex”; for him, it simply is “really different” from conventional forms of sexual play, intimacy, and erotics.

In this way, Reese’s description of fisting is similar to existing queer commentaries which highlight how anal fisting cannot be easily defined as a conventional form of hetero/homo-normative sex/uality (Halperin, 1995). This, of course, is not only due to the peculiar corporeal mechanics entailed in fisting, but, more pointedly, because of the way such corpo-erotic practices destabilise dominant modes of phallogentric, genital-focussed and orgasm-oriented sex which are largely “end-driven” (Halperin, 1995: 91) – the end being genital pleasure and climax. In this regard, anal fisting is not so much a means to genital climax, but, rather, a wholly embodied practice in which the experience of fisting/being fisted, and the time this necessitates, is itself of erotic value and significance (Brough, 2005; Halperin, 1995).

In addition, Reese’s account highlights the multi-temporal dimensions of the fisting experience. Reese describes that the slower time of fisting co-creates new opportunities for intimacy, such as, in the greater lengths of time which are now spent with a sex-partner. Here, Reese draws subtle attention to how the anus is itself temporally transfigured in radically queer ways through the slower time of fisting: as the anus becomes both materially and affectively transformed into what Paul Preciado has described as a countersexual “center of arousal and pleasure production” (2018: 30) with/in the corpo-erotic relations of fisting, so too does it become a spatio-temporal gateway, that is, a kind of queer wormhole which affectively opens new pathways to slower and extended timespaces of intimacy infused with a sense of “tenderness”.

With/in the slower times of anal fisting, the anus is stripped of the conventional heteronormative biocodes which render it a de-eroticised organ of expulsion and excretion (Preciado, 2018), and becomes performatively remade as a queer portal of erotic ingress^x.

Interestingly, Reese sharply contrast the extended temporality of opportunities for closeness with a sex-partner in anal fisting with his suggestion that typical sexual experiences are more akin to less intimate and more temporally truncated encounters which he describes as a “wham bam thank you ma’am kinda thing!”. In this way, Reese’s account highlights a relatively uncommon articulation and valuation of time in gay men’s sex, especiall when compared against a contemporary app-powered gay hook-up culture where those times of/for sexual interaction are shorter in duration and described as more impersonal (Freitas, 2013; Ward 2015). In such encounters, it is the shorter amount of time entailed in the hook-up which often underpins the erotic edge of the sexual experience. Yet, for Reese, his sense of the temporal slowness of fisting does not just articulate a quantifiably longer period of time, but, also, alludes to a heightened affective sense of erotic experience. For Reese, it is the slower time/s of greater inter-connection (through the anus) to a sex-partner which is “part of the turn on”.

“I’m giving that consent all the time”: How new kinds of consenting practice are co-entailed with/in the time for anal fisting

One of the ways in which time was shown to actively co-constitute the relational quality of fisting was in how consent between the fisting participants was negotiated. In one such extract, Ryan, who enjoyed being fisted by his life partner, Roland, highlighted how the consenting dynamics between he and Roland were not just informed by the

longer periods of time entailed in fisting, but, more pointedly, were co-shaped by the temporal dimensions of fisting:

The moment I am uncomfortable I am going to tell Roland to ease back or stop. I honestly don't think you really get that when two guys just have sex. In the past when I've bottomed I've obviously let guys do me, but, there are times when I've started to feel uncomfortable feel because maybe the guy is being too rough with me, or not enough lube, or maybe I'm just sore or something. Then I've just kinda had to *vasbyt* because you know this thing will be over in a few minutes anyway. But, if I let Roland fist me then I know we are going to be at it for an hour, maybe two; and ... that entire time he's checking-in, asking if I'm ok. I'm giving that consent all the time. It's not like I just have to play bottom.

What is particularly interesting in Ryan's account of anal fisting is the way in which time comes to co-participate in (re)making a new model of sexual consent and agency with/in the fisting experience. For Ryan, his comfort and consent are paramount to a safe and enjoyable fisting. Ryan contrasts this with previous sexual relations where, as a 'bottom', he has had to endure experiences of discomfort. Ryan describes how he has had to reconcile his discomfort and "vasbyt", an Afrikaans colloquialism referring to remaining stoic when under duress. For Ryan, enduring the discomfort that is sometimes entailed in being a "receptive" partner during anal sex is underpinned by his assertion that such encounters typically do not last very long. This, however, is distinguished from fisting where, as a 'fistee', his personal comfort is essential considering the "hour, maybe two" that fisting will involve.

What is interesting about Ryan's account of time in anal fisting is the way in which the extended temporal duration of fisting now transforms the consenting process. Ryan points out that, rather than an event at the initiation of sex, consent now becomes a process, as part of which an ongoing "checking-in" takes place between he and his partner. This evolving and ongoing model consent(ing) that unfolds over the sexual and erotic relations of fisting between Ryan and Roland stands in sharp contrast to the more conventional discourse and practice the often circumscribes (gay) men's (approaches to) sex and sex between (gay) men, especially where (hetero)masculine/ist values around force, power, and dominance with/in sex come to displace if not negate the comfort and consent of a man's sex partner or lover (MacKinnon, 1987) – be they an/other(ed) man or a woman.

Further, it is not just that this ongoing consent *unfolds over* the extended duration of fisting but, more pointedly, also *enfolds and (re)produces* the power relations with/in fisting. In this sense, Ryan's preference for being fisted is imbued with a far greater sense of participatory power with/in fisting; so much so that Ryan's discursive construction of how consent plays out when he is being fisted appears to queerly disrupt the conventional hetero/homo-normative logics of the top-bottom binary. For Ryan, it is the temporal quality of consent(ing) with/in anal fisting which performatively (re)makes, in material↔discursive ways, a different position of power characterised by no longer having to, in his words, "play bottom". Here, there are distinct similarities between the way Ryan's experience of the inter/personal power of consenting with/in anal fisting mirrors how so-called 'power bottoms' also endeavour to upend the hetero/homo-normative rhetoric and practice of gay men's anal sex/uality by contesting the passivity typically associated with bottoming (Hoppe, 2011).

“Fisting needs time”: How safety, expertise and technique are (re)produced through the time of anal fisting

One of the more persistent connotations of medico-forensic research on gay men’s anal fisting has been both the direct and indirect implication that fisting is an inherently ‘risky’, injurious, and even life-threatening form of sexual and erotic practice. It is, for this reason, that fisting practitioners and participants have worked to deconstruct the perception that fisting fundamentally entails an aggressive or even violent approach to sex (Brough, 2005). This, however, has not been made easier by contemporary gay pornography which has portrayed fisting with theatrically aggressive rhetoric and gestures which reinforce and amplify the top/dom-bottom/sub binaries of hetero/homo-normative sex/uality (Mercer, 2017); a sentiment which Reagan also shared:

Reagan: ... people stigmatise fisting because it has this reputation from porn that its rough and that you can get hurt or something. I’ve been into this for 6 years and I’ve never had it ever be rough, and I’ve never gotten hurt. I’ve got more friends who got hurt from regular [anal] sex because the guy they were with was just too rough, too fast. Fisting needs time. I think that’s what makes it safer ... [than ‘regular’ anal sex].

Researcher: Ok. So, porn has had a big role over what people think about fisting?

Reagan: Definitely. If you look at the [web]sites that just focus on fisting. There’s always a shit load of lube – which is good, but clips are edited down to the standard 20, 30 minutes. I really think a lot of guys just think that if they have lots of lube then its that’s all it takes; and I think people get

hurt that way. You can't just get a bucket of lube and hope for the best – it's all about technique, knowing when ... and how to lube up. But you gotta take time to build up experience and really become an expert, and then bring that experience into every time you do it, or it's not gonna be safe.

In highlighting what he believes to be the misperceptions about the safety of anal fisting, Reagan foregrounds his personal experience of “regular [anal] sex” being far more injurious because of the shorter timespan it seemingly requires, in comparison to anal fisting. For Reagan, it is in fact the temporal considerations of fisting which make it a safer form of sex. Indeed, Reagan's assertion here is not surprising given that much of the affirmative academic commentary as well as subcultural and sexual health literature on anal fisting places a sustained emphasis on it being, in simple terms, “done slowly” (Dowsett, 1996: 180). In doing so, Reagan's account of anal fisting, much like Reese and Ryan's, emphasise anal fisting as a unique kind of sexual and erotic activity which is, in large measure, characterised as such because of the unique temporal dimensions which distinguish it from more conventional forms of anal sex.

However, what is particularly interesting in Reagan's account of anal fisting is that the length of time is not just a practical consideration for the sexual health and safety of the participants involved, but, also, something which is built up in the materially embodied corporeal expertise and experience of fisting participants which, for Reagan, is most evident in knowledge of lubrication. In arguably one of the few posthumanist accounts of anal fisting, Dinesh Wadiwel's essay *Sex and the lubricative ethic*, draws attention to the slippery materialities of lubricants as one of the most

important “nonhuman actors that facilitate” (2009: 492) the corpo-erotic practices of fisting. For Wadiwel, it is the material agency of lubricant that “makes possible what would otherwise be impossible ... most graphically portrayed in erotic situations that stretch and contort the body beyond imagined physical boundaries” (2009: 495). In doing so, lubricant performatively co-produces, together with human bodies and non-human sex toys, an “erotic assemblage” (Wadiwel, 2009: 493) of more-than-human relations, which would be possible without the material↔affective participation of lubricant. Yet, while Reagan clearly acknowledges the necessity of “lube” to safe and enjoyable fisting; he nonetheless critiques the impression that fisting only requires the material presence of “a shit load of lube” – something he argues is conveyed in representations of fisting in pornography.

According to Reagan, the use of lubricant in fisting is significantly underpinned by the corpo-erotic knowledge of “knowing when ... and how to lube up” – a temporal knowledge of lubricant and lubrication which is itself seemingly acquired through experience. Lubrication is a matter of both time and timing. In doing so, Reagan invokes the temporal dimensions of fisting experience when he asserts that: “you gotta take time to build up experience”. For Reagan, it is only through the time of developing “expertise” in fisting that the knowledge and techniques of working with lubricant, in a way which maximises pleasure and safety, can be developed. Reagan’s sense of time here does however underscore the way in which the corpo-materialities of his body cannot be analytically foreclosed to the material force of time, because it is the time/s of this corpo-erotic experience which performatively co-shape the embodiment of this expertise with/in the bodily practices of/for anal fisting.

Furthermore, Reagan’s account sheds light on how the corpo-erotic practices and relations of anal fisting are ‘thickened’ through a multi-temporal quality. By

referencing the way knowledge of fisting practice, developed in 'past' time/s of fisting, (e)merges into the 'present' times of fisting experience, through corpo-erotic expertise and technique, Reagan describes the performative force of fisting time as a far more fluid, iterative and recursive multi-temporal timespace of past↔present experience. While this fully embodied immersion in a temporally dense and sensually heady presentness is typical of the attentiveness entailed in fisting, it also points to the way in which the queer temporalities of gay men's anal fisting resists the temporal ordering characteristic of heteronormative "reproductive futurity" (Davies and Funke, 2011: 7).

Understanding time as a linear and continuous backdrop to hu/Man activity has been a longstanding feature of humanocentric Western culture and science (Barad, 2007). To this effect, time has been persistently (re)cast within Western humanocentric thought as a sequential timeline composed of spatially distinct time-zones (or temporal orders) representable as a progressive (although spatially disconnected) movement from 'the past' to 'the present' and, ultimately, to 'the future' (Grosz, 1995) – a model of temporality which divests time of any material agency and liveliness as it is rendered nothing more than a 'background' to human agency (Barad, 2007; Højgaard et al., 2012). Yet, for Reagan, any conventionally spatialised sense of time is in fact queered, if not fisted, as multiple timespaces of fisting experience become intra-actively and materially enfolded with/in the spacetime-mattering of fisting participants' bodies and, in this instance, through the corporeal techniques of working with lubricant.

The queer(er) temporalities of anal fisting's slowtime: A conclusion

By drawing from the data generated from unstructured individual interviews with a sample of South African gay men who regularly incorporate anal fisting into their sexual relations, this study sought to provide a posthumanist analytic through which

to re-examine the performative work and agencies of time with/in the corpo-erotics of anal fisting.

Elsewhere it has been observed that “[n]ot only is the critical social scientific study of anal fisting (be it with gay, straight, or other identifying people) virtually absent, but, ... what little academic literature exists is often sharply divided in disciplinary approach, tone, and audience” (Martin, 2019: 9). Yet, whether it is in medico-forensic studies or queer counter-commentary, both trajectories of scholarship have shared what I argue here is an especially narrow humanocentric lens which analytically (re)produces anal fisting solely in terms of the human subjects, bodies or discourse involved; with little-to-no attention given to the evolving webs of more-than-human agencies with/in which the corpo-erotic practices and experiences of anal fisting become co-constituted. What this study highlights is that rather than an exteriorised ‘background’, time and, in particular, what appears to be a queer *slowtime*, becomes an active co-participant which (e)merges with/in the material, discursive and affective relations of anal fisting.

By analytically engaging Barad’s (2007) posthumanist and performative account of spacetimemattering I was able to trace how the subjective constructions and experiences of intimacy, consent, as well as safety and expertise with/in anal fisting become performatively entangled and co-produced through the material↔discursive↔affective forces of fisting’s slowtime/s. It is with/in these slowtime/s that a much queerer temporality becomes evident – this is an affectively intense multi-temporal “thick time” (Neimanis and Walker, 2014) charged by erotic relations through which new durational qualities of connection (e)merge and are enfolded with/in the human and non-human subjectivities, bodies, and forces which, together, become performatively productive of fisting practice and experience.

Slowtime draws direct attention to the particularly queer ways with/in which the corpo-erotics of fisting are performatively co-shaped by temporal forces while, at the very same time, how the sense and experience of time with/in anal fisting is also transformatively warped. The slowtime/s of/for anal fisting are more mutual, more consensual, and more-than-human timespaces of intimacy which disrupt the stabilisation of the hetero/homo-normative as well as chrononormative relations which typically circulate with/in gay men's sex/uality. It is, in this sense, that the concept of slowtime shows analytical promise in its relational ontology, even beyond anal fisting. Rooted in an "ontological politics of vulnerability and intimacy" (Mellström, 2016), slowtime joins those posthumanist-inflected sexuality studies which increasingly render sex/uality as assemblage (Alldred and Fox, 2015), as well as those critical studies of men's masculinities and sex/ualities which actively endeavour to undo the tropes of corporeal abstractedness and boundedness that have his/torically subtended the ideological scaffolding of biologically male bodies and, by extension, men's dominant and more problematic modes of sex/uality (Garlick, 2016 Mellström, 2020).

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ⁱ From the outset of this article I want to stress that the ontological status of the 'human' and, for that matter, what and who is 'non/less-human', should not be taken as given. The his/tory of a Western society informed by the intertwining influences of patriarchy, cartesianesque humanism, and colonialism have worked to render Western culture and science as a great "anthropological machine" (Agamben, 2004, p. 29) which (re)produces (and polices) the 'human' and 'non-human' binary as the central organising structure of Western thought (Sheets-Johnstone, 1996). With that said, I acknowledge that my use of the phrase 'non-human' remains

problematic in the way it reiterates a “prioritizing of the ‘human’, against whom there is ‘non-’ ” (Bourke, 2011: 13, quotations original).

ⁱⁱ Anal fisting is however not solely localised to the erotic predilections of gay men, non-gay identifying men who have sex with men (MSM), or, for that matter, men altogether. There exists a vast body of sexual and erotic health literature which details the practice of anal fisting amongst straight (or heterosexual) men and women (Taormino, 2006) as well as lesbian women (Califia, 1988a, 1988b).

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘BDSM’ is the abridged umbrella term for a diverse set of sexual and erotic practices related to bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism.

^{iv} I am inspired by Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) use of the double arrow in “material↔discursive” (110) as a “gesture towards a removal of the hyphen or slash used to indicate the relationship between the material and the discursive without privileging one over the other” (110). I employ the double arrow in this article with the aim of disrupting the conceptual discreteness which is often assumed in understanding the relations between both the human body and non-human world, as well between matter, discourse, and affect.

^v Space limitations prevent me from more fully outlining Barad’s complex rendering of “quantum queerness” (2010: 244). I recommend the reader to her work for a fuller elaboration.

^{vi} In Newtonian physics, space and time are dislocated from one another. Space is like a ‘grid’ in which material objects are separated from each other by space and time. In their discrete state these entities relate to one another largely through a model of mechanical causality, that is, linear cause and effect. Here, time is spatialised into a linear and universal timeline which localises time in singular periods of ‘the past’, ‘the present’, and ‘the future’.

^{vii} The continued use of apartheid-era racial terminology remains highly contested in South Africa. In this study, the term ‘black’ is used in place of the ethno-cultural label of ‘African’ to communicate political solidarity between all those peoples and communities of colour historically marginalised and segregated under apartheid including those ethnically classified as ‘Africans’, ‘Indians’ and so-called ‘Coloured’ (or ‘mixed race’) South Africans. While this article does not focus on the material↔discursive ways in which race influenced participants’ corpo-erotic experiences of fisting; this does not mean that complicated and overlapping configurations of ‘ethnicity’, ‘race’, and ‘culture’ did not matter. Rather there is, for example, a queer and subversive import attached to when a ‘black’ fist (with all the anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-apartheid political iconography that such a clenched fist carries in South Africa) is inserted deep into a/the ‘white’ man’s anus, especially when this act of fisting is a form of connection, intimacy, and love-making between differently racialised subjects. Such symbolic significances are not lost on the participants of this study. The role of ‘race’ with/in fisting will be the focus of a future paper.

^{viii} All participant names are pseudonyms.

^{ix} I would like to thank the reviewers of this article who helped bring to my attention that it is not just the anus which is transmogrified with/in the erotic temporalities of anal fisting. Indeed, the conventional erotic cartographies of the body are entirely undone. The penis, for instance, loses its erotic primacy as fingers, hands, and forearms become the “tentacular” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31) modes of sexual exploration, pleasure/ing, and connection.