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THE EMBODIED INTIMACY OF SURVIVAL:
PEER, PARTNER, AND CLIENT INTIMACIES OF
TRANSFEMININE SEX WORKERS OF COLOR
IN *TANGERINE* AND *AFUERA*

Emi Wyland

Mentor: Amber Musser

Using close readings of scenes from the films *Tangerine* (dir. Sean Baker) and *Afuera* (dir. Steven Liang), I analyze how transfeminine sex workers of color (TSWOC) negotiate and navigate intimate relationships with peers, romantic partnerships, and clients through a lens informed by queer of color critique, Black feminism, and Chicana feminism. Attending to the significance of touch between TSWOC, I argue that TSWOC peer intimacies in these films embody a form of deep alliance predicated on cooperative care labor and interpersonal accountability. Alternatively, verbal conflict with romantic partners illustrates how partnered intimacy relegates TSWOC to liminal space between co-dependent, yet oppositional determinations of colonial capitalist womanhood, and emerges as platform to negotiate TSWOC's relationship with capitalism and subject determination. Grounding these intimacies within the landscape of sex work, I engage my analyses of touch, labor, and subject determination thus far with the inherent uncertainty and power hierarchies in sexual labor. I argue that client intimacies serve as a conduit for physical and sexual violence against TSWOC, which queers Delany's theory of "contact." Ultimately, the imbrication of violent "contact" and analgesic "networking" within the sex trade produces ruptures in the bodily discourse of sex, which radically open ways differently raced, sexed, gendered, classed, and naturalized bodies can interact with one another and produce new meanings, mobilized to disparate ends of national discourse reification and queer world making.