

Dissonant Destabilizing: Queering the Construction and
Performance of Relational Norms

by

Emma Fuller-Monk
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Introduction

Even if heterosexist constructs circulate as the available sites of power/discourse from which to do gender at all, the question remains: What possibilities of recirculation exist? Which possibilities of doing gender repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilized? - Judith Butler¹

Butler situates the subject, the “do-er” of gender, within an inescapable matrix of heterosexist logics. She still asks— because there is no alternative— what possibilities for resisting exist in that space? Butler’s question situates dissonance as a potential avenue through which that queering, which is possible within a heterosexist schema, can unfold. This thesis works to tease out dissonance, working toward an understanding of how it can facilitate queer potentials. Though gender is inextricably linked to sexuality (Butler places heterosexism as the mode through which gender is done or undone), I attend more specifically to queerness— or rather the doing of queerness, the queering. I propose dissonance as a framework to mediate a conversation and play with queer relationality at two specific institutional sites: the family and the university. In this introduction, I give a brief exposition of dissonance and a contextualization of the theory surrounding queer relationality. In doing so, I lay the theoretical groundwork for the proceeding chapters. In my first chapter, I expand on how I arrived at dissonance as my object for study, sort through it as a concept to understand its metaphoric potential, and lay out its capacity and shape as a framework. The following chapters work with the family and the university

¹ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999: 41-42.

respectively to practice a dissonant framework; conversely, those chapters work to serve as evidence for its potential. By approaching my chapters with methodological and tonal variety— taking up wobbly poetic texts at times and straighter theory at others— and working through different questions and lenses across each chapter, I work toward a performance of the dissonance I construct as a framework.

An Introduction to Dissonance

Dissonance is a word densified by its accumulation of meaning across disciplines. Psychology, Music, Physics, and Literature are just a few fields that contribute to its wide circulation in, out, and around the academy. Yet, ‘dissonance’ remains a fairly nebulous concept that demands a more robust account of both its ubiquity and various specificities.² In order to work through the urgency and relevance of dissonance within queer studies, a definitional and genealogical project is necessary.³ The first chapter sorts through existing conceptualizations of dissonance in order to not only read dissonance as queer, but also repurpose the concept of dissonance (which lends itself to visual, aural, and affective imaginations) for

² This piece will focus on dissonance within music. In music alone there is an extraordinary variety of approaches to dissonance. Music will present the opportunity to engage with relationality and open the discussion to performance, affect, and becomings.

³ To access the potentials of dissonance as a framework, I start by grasping towards it as a term or a metaphor. Before I read dissonance into theory, activism, and praxis (or read them through it), this project builds an understanding of the key characteristics of dissonance, its qualifications, how it looks and feels and sounds. Ultimately, I work toward the ways in which dissonance can function as a framework for thinking, acting, and feeling— the way we move with and through our affect.

interrogation and imagination, presenting potentials for the construction and performance of queer relating.

The first entry in the Oxford English Dictionary for the adjective ‘dissonant’ is “disagreeing or discordant in sound, inharmonious; harsh-sounding, unmelodious, jarring” (a reference to dissonance in music), while the second applies to a general disagreement or difference.⁴ The word is simply broken up into the latin roots *dis* meaning “‘in twain, in different directions, apart, asunder,’ hence ‘abroad, away’” and *sonāre* meaning “to sound.”⁵ Dissonance’s second definition entry does not appear to have taken great leaps in meaning from its roots, and provides an openness to affective possibilities by its vagueness. There is an interesting hue to the first definition, which focuses more on literal sound, that cues unpleasanties and pain. In the first entry, dissonance is characterized quite negatively and harshly, which appears to be in line with both its colloquial use and the way it is defined by music theory/history laymen. Working through the historic transformations, in music theory and praxis, and the inconsistencies of dissonance across the board, the ways in which dissonance has been both given a bad name and celebrated as rich and desirable begin to unravel.⁶ So, dissonance as a term, not just in definition, is fraught with disagreements and potential for mutability. This mutability will be a key component

⁴ *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ My genealogy on and explorations of dissonant characteristics are limited to music theory; however, I also find a praxis of dissonance in performance studies and a visualization of dissonance in philosophy and phenomenology.

of dissonance and for our justification to play with it in the choice theoretical realm: queer studies.

Prepping to Play with the Queers

For this project, dissonance will enter queer relationality. I will play with each through the other within two specific institutional sites: the family and the university. I explore the characteristics and uses of dissonance in the first chapter so that I can apply it as a framework to analyze queer relations and disrupt normative ones within the family and the university in the second and third chapter. So, before we embark on that journey, I must take a moment to briefly situate this project within queer studies and highlight the theory I pick up to execute that play. Queer studies emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an academic field and grew in conjunction with queer activism.⁷ Queer studies is a broad field that has branched out, finding different iterations across various disciplines and theoretical modes; therefore, I do limit my analysis to queer studies that specifically theorizes relationality. I identify three main ways relationality has been taken up: through post-structuralist theories of subject construction/ formation through relational categorizations (symbolical and discursive

⁷ In a piece on the term “Queer” for the *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* collection, Siobhan Somerville writes, “The use of ‘queer’ in academic and political contexts beginning in the late 1980s represented an attempt to reclaim this stigmatizing word and to defy those who have wielded it as a weapon. This usage is often traced to the context of AIDS activism that responded to the epidemic's devastating toll on gay men in U.S. urban areas during the 1980s and 1990s. Queer Nation, an activist organization that grew out of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), became one of the most visible sites of a new politics.”

identity categories are constructed relationally and with queerness this also plays out more literally in the realm of interpersonal relations), the antirelational polemic, and the turn to relationality for collectivity and its queer potential.⁸

Relationality serves this project by allowing me to focus on the not yet formed, and to move away from the concretized subject— or any subject, stable or not, rather than a relation.⁹ I find queer relationality and queer studies that de-centers the subject most compelling for my particular project. Constructions of subjects as stable are key to the formation of normative relationality because they promote static relations; therefore, a queer relationality requires a destabilization of the presupposed concrete subject. As Juana María Rodríguez argues, “decentralizing the subject in space does not erase her significance; instead it highlights the process through which subjects negotiate a localized time-space framework of knowledge.”¹⁰ As I proceed with a dissonant framework, I treat the subject as Rodríguez does when she takes up Norma Alcarón’s notion of the ‘subject in process’ in order to conceptualize how the subject and identity are formed. For Rodríguez, the subject is always in the process of becoming, of being and doing. In line with Rodríguez, I return, throughout my thesis,

⁸ Separating these three categories proves a sticky task as each does not necessarily preclude the others. All three modes of consideration for relationality speak to both ontological and epistemological uses of relationality, but each focuses one of them over the other and makes a distinct conclusion accordingly.

⁹ As I will tease out in later chapters, a dissonant framework asks us to look at process and becoming, which will be necessary to work with the concept of the subject I employ.

¹⁰ Rodríguez, Juana María. *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*. New York, NY: New York, NY: New York UP, 2003: 6.

to queerness as a becoming, a being (through performance) and a doing (through disruption).

Focusing on becoming leads this project to focus on relationality. I shape queerness not as identitarian, but as the act of perpetual desire for alternative interactions with and relations to (or within) normalizing institutions. Identity is not disengaged as an important site of analysis, but is displaced as the determinant of queerness. When analyzing the discourse of identity, Rodriguez questions “under what circumstances is it constructed and whose interests does it serve?”¹¹ Therefore, while I am aware of the hesitation to adopt a framework that rejects prescriptive characteristics of queerness for its potential to identify queerness where it is not, I perform that same weariness but of queerness constructed through identity throughout this thesis by approaching with a dissonant framework as an interpreter for queer becoming through relationality.

In taking a magnifying glass to relationality, we must confront that tricky complex between relationality and subject formation, which has been a key relational related object of study for queer theory. Queer studies takes up a post-structuralist framework for understanding how queer subjectivity is constructed through interpersonal relations.¹² Butler places lesbians and gay men in contrast to the construct of the ‘human’ subject because they, “along with other sexual minorities,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² I use post-structuralist for its deconstructive tendencies and its analysis attending to relations that cannot be encapsulated by oppositional binaries, but also somewhat as shorthand to describe this use of ‘relational’ in queer studies. Those queer theorists I encapsulate in this term, might be hesitant to identify themselves as such.

are not perceived as sufficiently ‘human’ given their estrangement or opposition to the normative kinship configurations by which the “human” becomes recognizable.”¹³

Relational subject-identity construction plays out in two different modes in Butler’s theorizing. First, the ‘human’ is destabilized as a category because it is defined not as an isolated entity but also in relation to other categories and in the context of both systems of power that produce discourse, and the matrices of domination in which they are entrenched. Second, ‘human’ is defined by the performance of proper kin relations, and thus the relational defining happens at an intensified site of relationality. While that theoretical position on relationality does aim to destabilize the presupposed subject as a concrete actor, it nevertheless focuses its object of critique on the subject who is being constructed by relations, rather than on the activity of relationality.

The second school of queer studies I gesture toward has argued for the antirelational hypothesis.¹⁴ In *No Future*, Edelman contends, “the Child remains the perpetual horizon” and resolves for an essentially antirelational refusal of the social

¹³ Butler, Judith. "Against Proper Objects: "Introduction"." *Differences* 6, no. 2 (1994): 14-15.

¹⁴ The antirelational hypothesis was first presented by Leo Bersani in his book *Homos*, and most famously taken up and extended by Lee Edelman’s *No Future*. Queer negativity, which derives from a Laconian framework of refusal, plays a key role in antirelationality. I do not directly critique queer negativity, but I do steer away from it. My project, which centers the concept of dissonance, could easily appeal to queer negativity because dissonant affects are not always positive; however, I remain weary of aligning the dissonant affect with queer negativity. All of that said, I argue for dissonance as a framework that can take up contradictory stances, so as does Muñoz (see footnote below), I do not completely reject Edelman’s work.

and futurity as it is steeped in heteronormative teleological logics of reproduction.¹⁵ Queer of color critique theorists make an important intervention to the antirelational scholarship by both criticizing the privilege such an antisocial stance takes and arguing for the queer potential within collectivity and relations.¹⁶ I engage most thoroughly with the branch of queer studies that takes up relationality as a potentially subversive site because it lends itself more to the queer becoming I focus. The necessity of embracing queer relationality has been worked through by queer of color critique theorists like José Esteban Muñoz in opposition to Edelman and Leo Bersani.¹⁷ Muñoz writes of his book, “to some extent *Cruising Utopia* is a polemic that argues against antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity.”¹⁸ Muñoz’s argument cares less about relationality in its epistemological renderings of a framework for understanding subject formation and legibility, and more about how it can serve as an affective or material site in which we can imagine *doing* subversive relating. In other words, Muñoz disagrees with Bersani and Edelman’s condemnation of relations as the

¹⁵ Edelman, Lee. *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Durham : Duke University Press, 2004: 3.

¹⁶ In contrast to Edelman, Muñoz argues for queerness as horizon, which I will delve into more deeply in the following chapter.

¹⁷ I should note here that Muñoz does not denounce Edelman’s *No Future*. In fact, he calls it “a brilliant and nothing short of inspiring polemic,” and notes that Edelman’s “argument and the seductive sway of the antirelational thesis energizes [his] argument in key ways” (Muñoz 2009, 11)

¹⁸ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York : New York University Press, 2009: 11.

platform for queer creativity and subversive generation. Muñoz's critique of them focuses less on the epistemological matter of how queerness (or the queer subject) is shaped as a relational category.

For Muñoz working outside of relationality is an impossible task for anyone and especially for queers of color.¹⁹ He writes:

The act of accepting no future is dependent upon renouncing politics and various principles of hope that are, by their very nature relational... Relationality is not pretty, but the option of simply opting out of it, or describing it as something that has never been available to us, is imaginable only if one can frame queerness as a singular abstraction that can be subtracted and isolated from a larger social matrix.²⁰

Relationality matters to queerness (and queer relationality matters) not only because its sound materializes in a 'not pretty' way in a subject's ear, but also because it is linked to (and affects the subjects navigation of) systematic racism and classism that renders a subject more vulnerable due to their race, class, or gender. Those theories that challenge normative relationality as it is implicated in racism, classism, and heterosexism complicate queerness as an identity itself (or questions its singular transformative viability); thus, I argue that understanding queer relating as collectivity, through an intersectional lens, also complicates what it means to queer relations, not just do them, because it incorporates alternative engagements with relationality beyond sexuality.

¹⁹ Essentially, the queer theory I pull from, and I think plays best with dissonance, takes an intersectional lens as key to its understandings of relationality.

²⁰ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 94.

Affect and Stakes

How does that “not pretty” relationality invoked by Muñoz materialize or substantiate through affect— or what does “not pretty” look, feel, and sound like? To answer that multivalence question, I turn to affect theory, and in doing so chip away at realizing both the ramifications of (queer) relationality and the potentials of a dissonant framework. Affect has been a staple of queer theory since Eve Sedgwick took up the psychoanalytic concept and applied it to cultural studies.²¹ *Queer* affect theory emerges from psychoanalysis but diverges from it by moving its object of analysis to focus on queer (and if intersectional, on other marginalized identity markers as well) feelings, discursively locating itself within and through queer colloquial language concerning emotion.²² “The ‘doing’ of emotions,” Ahmed suggests, “is bound up with the sticky relation between signs and bodies: emotions work by working through signs and on bodies to materialise the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds.”²³ Therefore, I argue through queer affect theory that affect negotiates and structures the material conditions for experiencing relationality, and that queer affect can explain, or serve to expose the phenomenological realm of

²¹ According to the “Affect” entry in *Keywords in American Cultural Studies* Sedgwick first did this in a 1995 cowritten article for a collection of Silvan Thompkins readings and later more extensively in *Touching Feelings*.

²² Affect theory’s history of engagement with psychoanalysis steers the mind to cognitive dissonance. Though I do not discuss cognitive dissonance in depth, I am aware of its implications for the broad, social understanding of dissonance.

²³ Ahmed, Sara *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. *Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edited by Sara Ahmed. 2nd ed.. ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2014: 191.

perception and experience which encompass the material consequences for failing (or refusing) relational norms.

Queer performances of affect can expose the material and emotional result of relationality and demonstrate through their augmented public and demonstrative nature, the way queer affect can take up difficulty to navigate through hard or bad emotions.²⁴ Relations are difficult. The material affects of performing improper relational norms produce heightened vulnerability to death or harm (especially when queerness colludes with other minoritarian identities), illegibility, and detrimental psychological tolls. Affect can hold difficulty, but it can also explore hope.²⁵ There are not only affective (which represent and materialize in ‘real’) stakes in navigating difficulty but also in exploring hopeful potential through queer relationality.

Queer relations can be titillating: desire both serves to shape queer relations and to function as a survival tool. Dissonance, as we will discover by exploring it in the first chapter, is as deeply affective as it is relational. Affect is a key avenue through which dissonance enters queer relationality at various institutional sites.

²⁴ In *Hold It Against Me*, Jennifer Doyle references the affective performance art of Nao Bustamonte and the exceptionally scandalous works of Aliza Shvarts, Ron Athey, and David Wojnarowicz to highlight artists who do that exact taking up of difficulty. I call upon affect theory to find a source for the embrace of difficulty; however, I remain weary of the potential for such a move to turn toward the antirelational queer theory. My project is not invested in queer affect theory enmeshed in queer negativity and antisocial hypotheses, I do find the dissonant potential to handle difficulty compelling.

²⁵ I take this from Duggan and Muñoz’s conversation on Hope and Hopelessness. Duggan and Muñoz are both weary of hopeful rhetoric, but they also reject a full embrace of queer negativity. Thus, they argue hope and hopelessness remain in a dialectic that must be accepted in order to imagine queer potentials of collectivity.

Affect (and affect theory) serves not only to facilitate the play between queer relationality and dissonance, but also to offer a perspective on the material consequences and stakes of this project. Thus, the stakes and potentials of our dissonant framework are those of queer relationality, so dissonance's utility as a tool of play holds those potentials and consequences in its hands.

Site Specific Relations

The attention given to the family in work on queer relationality is unsurprising — when people hear relations, they think kin; this project takes a clue from that and works with the family as the first institution through which to sort out queer relationality and dissonance.²⁶ Other scholarship, which often takes the form of ethnographic work, has taken on the task of sorting through the messy reality of queer and LGBT families and relating.²⁷ What attention to LGBT families can lack is a focus on queers who are most vulnerable to injury or death and those whose relations are complicated by more than a lesbian or gay identity (i.e. race, class, gender).²⁸ I

²⁶ This can be found in Butler's "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual and Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex."

²⁷ Rivers's *Radical Relations* goes through a history of lesbian and gay parents and their families, their visibility, and their collective organizing toward political and lawful 'equality'; *Queer Families, Queer Politics* edited by Bernstein and Reiman collects ethnographic and critical essays that span from queer relationships and parenting to political activism; and Kathy Weston's famous fieldwork in *Families We Choose* investigates the ways lesbians and gay men navigate kinship and form alternate conceptions of relationality that are separated from blood ties.

²⁸ I use Liz Montegary's work in *Familiar Perversion* to ask this question and investigate more deeply in chapter two.

will apply a dissonant framework to collect the radical work that is beginning to fill those gaps and to generate perspectives. In the third and final chapter, I extend queer relationality to the University where I contend it has been less theorized. Melinda Cooper's analysis of *in loco parentis* in her *Family Values: Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* traces the manifestation of normative relationality in the University and specifically how the rhetoric of "family values," which place blame for the failure to comply to family norms on individual families, connects relationality in the university to that in the family. My project also works to highlight how relations within the university, and the constructions of relationality the university develops and perpetuates, speak to the broad context of normative and queer relationality.

I find insights on relationality in the family regarding how normative relations are *performed* and *solidified* through discourse, affect, and citations of norms; whereas I find them in the university regarding how relations get *shaped* and *constructed*. Thus, I look for and to dissonance: 1) in the family to answer how one can perform relations queerly and queer the way the collective navigates relating, and 2) in the university to answer how one can change the orientation of knowledge productions regarding relationality that construct proper relations, and how one can practice resistance to the confusing and multilayered structure of relations that are both vertically (i.e. student to university) and horizontally (i.e. student to student) demarcated. Though the family and the university each execute functions as sites of both the construction and performance of norms, I choose to highlight one for each in

order to have the space to tease out the connections between relationality and dissonance while funneling both through specific questions provoked by each site and the scholarship and activism within and around them. That being said, I still speak to both performance and construction in each institution because they are deeply enmeshed in each other and queer relationality.

This project's goal is to theorize and propose dissonance as a framework; however, that mission statement does somewhat obscure my ultimate motives. I find the theoretical tool of dissonance helpful as a framework (and I do work to show that), but I also do so in service of arriving at a methodology for considering queer relationality and how queerness is complicated by thinking through the lens of relationality rather than identity. None of the chapters has a strong conclusion, and that is because this project looks for neither answers nor stable ideas, but instead for durational frameworks that destabilize normative relationality and conceptions of queerness. My investment is most heavily in the material affects and titillating potentiality involved in the pursuit of questions like that presented by Butler which began this thesis.

Chapter One Detailing Dissonance

When we refuse, Moten and Harney suggest, we create dissonance and more importantly, we allow dissonance to continue – when we enter a classroom and we refuse to call it to order, we are allowing study to continue, dissonant study perhaps, disorganized study, but study that precedes our call and will continue after we have left the room. Or, when we listen to music, we must refuse the idea that music happens only when the musician enters and picks up an instrument; music is also the anticipation of the performance and the noises of appreciation it generates and the speaking that happens through and around it, making it and loving it, being in it while listening. And so, when we refuse the call to order– the teacher picking up the book, the conductor raising his baton, the speaker asking for silence, the torturer tightening the noose– we refuse order as the distinction between noise and music, chatter and knowledge, pain and truth. — Jack Halberstam²⁹

As the excerpt from Halberstam's preface to Fred Moten and Stefano

Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* exemplifies, dissonance creeps its way into theory.³⁰ For Harney and Moten, dissonance opposes order, it refuses power. Through Halberstam's description of the creation and experience of dissonance, a resistance to power can be read. Harney and Moten provide glimpse into the world of dissonance and where it can take us. Additionally, dissonance expands perceptions of the temporality of resistance. When dissonance

²⁹ Halberstam, Jack. "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons." In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, edited by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013: 9.

³⁰ *The Undercommons* will be a key text in my third chapter, so I will not delve deeply into it here. Stefano Harney is a professor of Strategic Management Education and the Singapore Management University, and Fred Moten is a poet and professor at NYU.

continues (and is permitted to do so, is perhaps even sought), its perpetuation integrates components of the music act that refuse conceptions of a movement, of a moment. In a general sense, dissonance expands thinking, but more specifically, it disorients normative understandings of time such that not only is the order of an act subverted, but also the orientation to duration is troubled.

The meaning of dissonance— not what it does but what it's composed of— remains unclear. I contend that dissonance is not meant to be known. I only intend to demonstrate its messy, provocative potential. Dissonance's messiness will unravel in this chapter, and I ask the reader to follow me through ruminations on dissonance— what theories it resonates with, what I think it can describe, how it is described—and the varied disciplinary or methodological approaches necessary to get to an understanding of dissonance as a metaphor and framework. Through an exploration of this constellation of interpretations of dissonance, the chapter culminates in a reading of the concept that constructs how dissonance can manifest in a framework, which I then employ in the following chapters to approach queer relationality. I approach dissonance with messy intentions— with an orientation toward disorder. Dissonance functions within messiness— dissonance is its sound, its affect, the way it is perceived; so, I care for messiness, I feed confusions, and at times, I reject clarity, order. Without embracing the disorientation and confusions of multiple partials that work together, I would ignore the necessary engagements with the complex material

affects involved in relationality.³¹ This first chapter also glances toward conversations where dissonance and queerness or matters of identity are already held together. Claiming originality for highlighting the queer potentialities of dissonance would be antithetical to the project. Ultimately, this chapter focuses on how dissonance is messy in its affective existence, queer and provocative, and already deeply embedded within queer theories of relationality. Dissonance exposes parts of theories that may be submerged, and I use it to focus my application of those theories.

This loosely structured exploration of dissonance will be followed by a review of the conclusions I have drawn for its potential as a framework. I will reign the scattered, fractured exploration of dissonance into the shape of the tool I use for the rest of the project and explain how I imagine the tool to function. I consider a variety of definitions for dissonance paying specific attention to musical conceptualizations of the concept, and then turn to practices of dissonance through the lens of performance. Dissonance functions as a tool to explain the ways in which lines interact with a focus on resistance. This chapter's conclusion serves to tie together the varied approaches I take in a way that does not reject the messiness I foster (or prevent potential for the use of dissonance in a way that features other qualities) but corrals them into the shape with which I will move forward in my analysis of queer

³¹ A partial is a single wave or tone that contributes to a complex tone— a complex tone can be broken down into partials and understood as the composite of their interactions, their relations. I continue to reference partials in the following sections that discuss lines and musical definitions of dissonance.

relationality and demonstration of a dissonant queer theory in the family and the university.

Defining Dissonance Musically

Theorists and musicians have made general conclusions about the functioning of dissonance, which shy away from defining the actual construction of dissonance and understanding what its sound quality actually is.³² Before the language of dissonance became standardized, there was generally a vague discussion of the relatedness of tunes—concepts of harmony or symphony— and from there the concept of dissonance evolved as a qualifier to and subcategory of relatedness.³³ Dissonance is thus, in its most basic understanding, a way to explain relations between notes or tones— it is a form of relationality.³⁴ In addition, the most consistent characteristic of dissonance musically is that it is defined in contrast to consonance. Both dissonance and consonance are relational concepts, and are always

³² For instance, dissonance is a sound that leads. It makes the ear want resolve, and thus serves as a lead-in to consonance. This ‘beg for resolve’ of dissonance will continue to pop-up.

³³ Tenney, James. *A History of Consonance and Dissonance*. New York: New York : Excelsior, 1988:10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11; Also, I will delve deeper into concepts of tones soon. What is important to note here is that tone can be made up of, measured as, or be perceived as a single wave of sound or multiple waves known as partials.

inherently related to one another by contrast.³⁵ Dissonance can be understood as that which is oppositional to consonance. In other words, dissonance refuses consonance, which is understood as a resolve or a complacency. James Tenney, a pioneering composer and musical theorist, attempts to organize the different ways dissonance and consonance are defined in his book *A History of 'Consonance' and 'Dissonance'*. Tenney proposes the 'consonance/dissonance-concept' or CDC, and suggests that developments in Western concepts of dissonance could be delineated into five different categories. These different strategies for considering dissonance are all essentially reframings of ways to consider the ratios of the frequency of tone waves.

The five historic stages Tenney proposed for the CDC are: the pre-polyphonic era (CDC-1), the early-polyphonic period (CDC-2), the contrapuntal and figured-bass periods (CDC-3), Rameau and his successors (CDC-4), and Helmholtz and the theory of beats (CDC-5). With each stage of defining dissonance (and consonance) came different distinctions and classifications for specific intervals and notes to varying degrees of grouping and specificity. While I will not go into the specifics of which intervals were considered what at which point, a basic understanding of Tenney's work can provide a clue towards the intricacies involved in defining even 'classic'

³⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary, as referenced in the introduction, defines dissonance in contrast to harmony whereas in musical contexts, dissonance and consonance are both considered types of harmony— ways to think about two notes, tones, or sequences of such together. That divergence of definition has implications for how this project frames communal action as a collective of dissonance rather than geared toward resonance.

notions of dissonance before I begin to utilize it as a tool for critique and imagination.³⁶

CDC-1 considered dissonance in terms of relatedness of notes with specific attention to certain intervals or ratios being either consonant or dissonant— a tone's ratio to a root note determines the dissonance of the complex. CDC-2 derives from CDC-1 but it begins to think more in terms of dyads (two tones that are simultaneous), so it marks the shift in referent from successive to simultaneous. Dissonance can result from an assemblage of simultaneous relating and constant renegotiations of relations. Dissonant relations thusly shift the framework for (or at least require a new attentiveness to) the temporality of relationality, destabilizing and expanding considerations of forms of relating to include a large breadth of temporal logics. Such a shift in temporal logic is one way to foster dissonance and potentially queer understandings for how relationality can form and be conceptualized. Queer relationality is constantly reconstructing; it takes no relation as set or permanent, but also embraces a deep connection to the legacy and history of queerness that makes up the texture of dissonance.

CDC-3 is based on what Tenney calls 'operational' distinctions, or specifically 'rules of counterpoints.'³⁷ Counterpoint understands how dissonance can be formulated by holding two independent lines together. A deviant line functions as a counterpoint with the norm so as to produce dissonance. Dissonant relations can be

³⁶ Classic being canonical Western understandings.

³⁷ Tenney, 39.

thought of as intervals with less mutable relations (as in CDC-1), as functioning simultaneously or at the same tempo(rality) (as in CDC-2), or as defined in terms of counterpoint (like foils or reactions to one another as in CDC-3). According to Tenney, the CDC-4 was a reckoning with all the differences and also an important reversal of some consistent aspects from the first three. Formulated in its entirety by the revolutionary music theorist, Jean-Phillip Rameau, the CDC-4 focuses on a specific source that serves to generate consonance and dissonance, formed around fundamental sounds, specifically “harmonic roots” and “chordal inversions.”³⁸ Referents are the biggest key to understanding dissonance in Rameau’s view. That is to say, a referent to a ‘root’ (or perhaps for this project’s purposes, a norm) produces dissonance based on the specific note (or that specific deviation) relating to that root.

Proposed by Hermann von Helmholtz, an influential 19th century physicist and physician, the CDC-5 introduces beats to concepts of dissonance. Beats are what produce roughness in a sound, and Helmholtz considers ‘roughness’ as dissonance. Beats are the result of partials interacting in a way such that they cancel each other out at times— they are heard as oscillating moments of silence and noise.³⁹ Lastly, beats are crucial to thinking about gendered and queered existence due to their materialization in the body. Bodies interact with the beat and each other through motion, and so an embodies dissonance can teach inform a queer relation beyond

³⁸ Ibid., 70.

³⁹ You listen for beats to tune an instrument— they are the sound of being out of tune.

resonance.⁴⁰ Queer relating in this sense would not be bodies in tune with each other, but moving together out of tune.

What is important to recognize about the various CDC's is that while they follow one another in a somewhat neat chronological order, each CDC does not undo the work being done by the previous one. While CDC's may 'contradict' their predecessors, it has never been the case that one 'disproves' another. Consonance and dissonance may find new dominant conceptualizations, but all of those concepts, which have successfully ruled the discourse at one point in time or another, still remain not only relevant but also integral to the concept of consonance and dissonance as a whole. Dissonance can be produced in a host of contradictory and cooperative ways— dissonance as a production can be, and as a concept always is— about relatedness, ratios, succession, simultaneity, counterpoints, roots, roughness, beats, and noise/ silence.

As a genre of music that has strongly invested in the praxis of dissonance, Jazz supplies an alternative music theory definition of dissonance. Jazz theorist, Ajay Heble crafts an understanding of dissonance that does not fit neatly into the categories of the CDC. Jazz theorist. Heble defines dissonance as “sounds (and more generally, cultural practices) that are ‘out of tune’ with orthodox habits of coherence and judgement” that “occasion a disturbance to naturalized order of knowledge

⁴⁰ As John Mowitt argues in his piece “A Musician Is Being Beaten” music can serve to set a groove, one set by beats (in his case the beat of a drum to which he draws connection with a child being spanked), that resists political oppression.

production.”⁴¹ That resonates with Halberstam’s epigraph, which also attends to disrupting order. Heble’s words “out of tune” function as a stand in for dissonance throughout his book and call to mind dictionary and popular definitions of dissonance as well as sociopolitical metaphors for oppression and non-normative existences—both objects of which situate jazz discursively in the context of society.⁴² Thus Heble’s shorthand for dissonance will function as one working definition for the purposes of this framework.⁴³ I turn to jazz for another definition of dissonance, not only to broaden the purely definitional project, but also to reference a definition more grounded in the social, the relation.

Performing Dissonance

As I work through three sites of dissonant performance (jazz, blues, performance art), I make moves to steadily transition from a purely musical understanding of dissonance to one that is situated purely in affect and the social. I find Heble’s work particularly helpful as a guiding text and will employ it as such, for he uses dissonance as a way to connect the musical (and musical theoretical) to the

⁴¹ Heble, Ajay. *Landing on the Wrong Note : Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice*. New York: New York : Routledge, 2000: 9.

⁴² The fact that this jazz definition is entangled in popular understandings is significant no matter the directionality of its interpretation— that is to say whether jazz shaped popular discourse or worked to navigate around traditional ‘academic’ theory by using language circulated socially— because either way, and it is probably both ways, the enmeshment of jazz and the social realm is exposed.

⁴³ I note here that Heble’s definition is also not so far from CDC classifications. The process of tuning involves listening to the beats understood as dissonance by the CDC-5 that persist until the object is no longer out of tune.

sociopolitical.⁴⁴ In Heble's argument, the divorce of Jazz from traditional music is realized in the music of Charlie "Bird" Parker, who was instrumental to the development of bebop. Importantly for this project's understanding of dissonance, Parker marked the move toward an intensified focus on techniques and innovative melodies rather than set diatonic intervals representing corresponding emotions.

Parker begins a shift to the focus on the way

In reference to Parker's jazz innovations, Heble writes,

Not being content to accept the popular assumption that each musical interval contained a particular emotional appeal, jazz, with the introduction of chromaticism, found itself problematizing the relationship between the

⁴⁴ Having suggested I would like to explore a parallel between my and Heble's projects, I must also make a few qualifications. I do not intend to metaphorize blackness and queerness. That is to say, jazz arose out of (and continues to break new ground within) the particular and specific history, experience, and social position of people racialized as black in America. To suggest one can simply transfer the tools and frameworks of resistance from one to the other would be appropriative and not useful at best. At the same time, jazz and its history as a black form of expression or navigation is not in opposition to queerness and itself confronts matters of gender and sexuality, but blues perhaps lends itself more specifically to queer theory because of its direct interaction with Black female sexuality. So, I first understand the complexity of dissonance in jazz and then turn to blues for that explicit dialogue and connection to blues. I am indebted to the thinkers and players who have demonstrated how music and specifically use of dissonance can function to inform critical practice. Additionally, I must make a few notes on writing about jazz and my positionally as a white cis-woman in an academic context doing it. First, comes the question of writing jazz in general. As a site of resistance Jazz functions somewhat in opposition to traditional forms of analysis and theory. That is to say jazz resists— it creates thought— thusly opposing traditional, white supremacist circulations of knowledge. As such, using jazz as an object of analysis for my thesis at an institution such as Wesleyan proves a sticky task. Additionally, Jazz has been historically consumed and appropriated by white people in our commodification of it for mass markets and fetishization veiled as appreciation.

signifier and meaning in much the same way that Saussure made us realize a word was *not* simply a thing.⁴⁵

Heble makes two key moves in that statement. He identifies jazz with linguistic theory which, through its own identification with jazz, can in turn be of use in discussions of identity. In other words, it is Parker's jazz, his play with chromaticism, that may appear to reflect Saussure's work, but ultimately it is Parker's practice, within the context of a racist and oppressive America, that makes Saussure's theory on linguistics matter. Additionally, Heble's connection emphasizes that. It is the intricate ways in which one arrives at different strings of sound that imbue music with substance and 'meaning.' By invoking Saussure with regards to Parker, Heble highlights how diatonic relations are arbitrary to Parker. Thus, an appraisal that identifies dissonance according to specific intervals is arbitrary. Importantly, while dissonance may be arbitrary, its existence is not neutralized. Parker executes a critical practice of rejecting arbitrary signifiers, which are still expressive of emotion and feeling (not to confuse the existence of emotion in his music with emotion as the substance of music) according to their relation within a tonal system.

So while Heble's definition of dissonance as "out of tune" (referenced in the previous section) serves as an important bridge between musical understandings and applications to sociopolitical environments, it is also complicated by his own argument. That complication contains a ostensible contradiction, which I embrace. For it is perhaps the demonstration of dissonance, or "out of tuneness," along with

⁴⁵ Heble, 40.

that of arbitrariness of the diatonic tradition that highlights how text (those arbitrary diatonic interval signifiers) shapes material reality— that is the feeling “out of tune,” the experience of dissonance. Dissonance serves both as a tool to navigate and as the affective, emotional response to that which theory can never quite define.

Within all of these tricky connections and embraces and/or rejections of signifiers, strategies emerge. Jazz musician and pioneer of free jazz, Ornette Coleman organizes his jazz by conflict. He perpetuates dissonance in improvisation by having all the instruments speak at once, at whatever temporal or tonal logic they choose. He organizes with and through conflict. Coleman contributes to the potentials of dissonance in two ways here. First, he brings directionality into the conversation, further connecting the affective experience of dissonance with the theoretical. The ‘voices’ are coming from all directions and effecting each other in ways that are unmeasurable yet signified through the experience of dissonance. Second, he provides a method by which to critically practice dissonance. Too often are potentials not accessed and voices silenced for the purpose of having one, united voice in the name of some cause. Strategies of unity are exclusionary and more often than not silence the voices that need to speak the most. Through his dissonant jazz, Coleman presents a model for social movements and strategies of resistance. Voices can pick up themes from one another and exist as a unit— making jazz, making music— yet they needn’t all be on the same melody or working with the same logics to create together.

The historic situating of the blues is similar to that of jazz. Ann duCille writes that the blues “are signifying art forms that grew out of and speak to the emotional,

social, and cultural dimensions of both southern rural and northern urban black American historical experiences.”⁴⁶ Blues, like jazz, developed as a black art form, specifically as a site through which early 20th century Black female sexuality was negotiated and discussed in a public way, which seemed impossible outside of that form of expression. I make two main claims about blues. First, blues solidifies music as a crucial site of analysis undeniably linked to the sociopolitical, further justifying taking up of a framework through its musical theorization in an intersectional queer project, due to its centering of black female sexuality, which is also at times queer. Second, blues singers make moves towards dissonance through their performance and invocation of it with radical lyrics that express a contradictory relation to the world—illuminating the dissonant quality of black queer sexuality’s relation to the world. Thus, a blues analysis is integral to connecting intersectional thinking of race and sexuality in music (and thus potentially dissonance). So, blues demonstrates material, historical ties to dissonance that allow us to see how dissonance can be understood to be produced by a combination of language and sound.

Hazel Carby writes:

What a consideration of women’s blues allows us to see is an alternative form of representation, an oral and musical women’s culture that explicitly addresses the contradictions of feminism, sexuality, and power. What has been called the “Classic Blues,” the women’s blues of the twenties and early thirties, is a discourse that articulates a cultural and political struggle over sexual relations: a struggle that is directed against the objectification of

⁴⁶ duCille, Ann. "Blues Notes on Black Sexuality: Sex and the Texts of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 3 (1993): 419.

female sexuality within a patriarchal order but which also tries to reclaim women's bodies as the sexual and sensuous subjects of women's song.⁴⁷

The blues ties music to the historic conditions of Black female sexuality, and does not shy from the messiness involved in that position— blues singers perform, in public, a negotiation of contradictions. Blues singers not only asserted reclamations of black female sexuality— an active of resistance in itself⁴⁸— and specifically explored the potential of lesbian sexuality. For that, Angela Davis explores the work of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday. She writes, “what gives blues such fascinating possibilities of sustaining emergent feminist consciousness is the way they often construct seemingly antagonistic relationships as noncontradictory oppositions.”⁴⁹ In other words, a woman can sing of being mistreated by a man while still asserting autonomy. Most provocative in our understanding of blues in the context of this project, is understanding how those contradictions are performed as a way to navigate ‘antagonistic relationships.’ That is to say, what Davis shapes as “noncontradictory oppositions,” I understand as contradictions that produce a critical (read oppositional and dissonant) affect.

One example of this can be found in Ma Rainey's oft cited song, “Prove It On Me Blues,” in which she explicitly sings about a lesbian relationship:

⁴⁷ Carby, Hazel. *It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues*. Norwood, NJ: Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988: 474.

⁴⁸ As Evelyn Hammonds sums up, “black women's sexuality has been constructed in a binary opposition to that of white women: it is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses” (93).

⁴⁹ Davis xv

They said I do it, aint's nobody caught me
 Sure got to prove it on me
 Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
 They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men⁵⁰

Rainey places her sexuality (her black, female, queer sexuality) in a liminal space between the public and the private. Additionally, to take up more recent rhetoric, Rainey is 'out,' she asserts visibility, yet she does not allow for the hypervisibility that has been a key characteristic in the non-autonomous construction of black female sexuality. To say "I like women, but you will have to prove it," takes up contradiction in order to navigate the hyper-visible and invisible contradictory construction of black female sexuality. Such a performance of contradiction produces a dissonant affect. Or more specifically, the feeling of contradiction within feels off or unresolved—it feels uncomfortable because it doesn't fully make sense, her performance does not resonate with the logics of the world.

José Esteban Muñoz's theory of 'disidentification' also works to form a lack of resonance with normative logics. He coined the term 'disidentification' to specifically address minoritarian resistance to stereotypes and constructions of their race and sexuality and navigation of experience "*through* the performance of politics" (emphasis not mine).⁵¹ Disidentification functions as an alternative to identifying with one's identity culture in favor of disidentifying with the majority culture as a way to

⁵⁰ Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday*. New York: New York : Vintage, 1999: 238.

⁵¹ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics. Minneapolis: Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1999: xiv.

find resistance and survival through repurposing majority culture for minoritarian purposes. Disidentification forges a dissonant relation between the performer and their context, and through their performance demonstrates possibilities for affects to be employed. Through Muñoz's concept of disidentification I arrive at the question: how does dissonance inform an understanding of the political work done by disidentification and the architecture of an affect it creates (the combination of the artist's performance of affect, the audience's affective response, and the affective result of the relation between the two).

Muñoz writes of the queer, Cuban and Puerto Rican-American comedian, Marga Gomez:

Her performance permits the spectator, often a queer who has been locked out of the halls of representation or rendered a static caricature there, to imagine a world where queer lives, politics, and possibilities are representable in their complexity... Spectacles such as those that Gomez presents offer the minoritarian subject a space to situate itself in history and thus seize social agency.⁵²

Muñoz concerns himself with minoritarian subject imagination through performance that grasps agency through establishing an historic positionality and opposing historic, iconic representations. Through its potential as a metaphor, dissonance explains how disidentification can accomplish minoritarian subjective agency through affect.

Muñoz clarifies his usage of disidentification as explanatory:

Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practice in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public

⁵² Ibid., 1.

sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.⁵³

Disidentification is in fact one site of queer theory where dissonant strategies are invoked and essentially taken up or explicitly used, except not in name. In other words, I read dissonance in Muñoz's disidentification just as I read dissonance in the strategies of Blues and Jazz performance; however, there is a utility to Muñoz's discursive move to theorize dis-identification particularly for our construction of dissonance. Muñoz's theorization of disidentification parallels the logics of dissonance, providing conceptual strategies to theorize dissonance as a strategy that uses disidentification as a starting point.

This project posits identification as resonance— one identifies with something/ someone just as someone resonates, they are effectively synonymous in colloquial usage. If identification functions on the logics of resonance/consonance, disidentification functions as dissonance. Muñoz does not argue for the importance of new formulations of identification of resonance as other coalition work does. Rather he is compelled by a performance invoking the experience of a disidentificatory impact. In his celebration of performances of disidentification— he demonstrates how to read for and practice dissonance.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Lines, Desire, and Utopian Landscapes

I arrived at my fascination with dissonance in an attempt to find an answer to a question I believe Sara Ahmed's theory of queer phenomenology leads to: what is affectively produced (or not realized) when one walks a deviant line? Ahmed writes:

It is interesting to note that in landscape architecture they use the term “desire lines” to describe unofficial paths, those marks left on the ground that show the everyday comings and goings, where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow. Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can even help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire.⁵⁴

Here, Ahmed introduces desire lines and paths as a way to understand deviation and hold it with desire— a queer deviation is one predicated on the desire for alternative interactions with the normative, heterosexist landscape. She also emphasizes that there is a constant accumulation of forces or pressures acting upon a subject in an attempt to realign them—essentially, nothing is easy or without work. Ahmed discusses the pain of walking a line and the performative nature of being created by and (re)creating paths. Ahmed's work provides a good starting point for further thinking with her consideration of lines in relation to other lines. I want to think through what's happening overall when a desire line is held in the same thought as the line that was supposed to be followed. Dissonance is not deviation itself, but rather the clash or silence produced by deviating or not— it is the messiness involved in the negotiation

⁵⁴ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology : Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Durham : Duke University Press, 2006: 19-20.

A story of a school kid who cannot walk from one class to another in/on line, recounted to me as a child by my mother, is helpful to illustrate these ideas. My mother's elementary school had a yellow line painted on the ground that connected one class to another and indicated the path on which one was disciplined to walk; however, she could not walk the straight line, and that was a problem. When my mom strayed from the line, she, as Ahmed suggests, created a new line, performed deviance. Staying with Ahmed, we also know that the pressure pushing my mom to return to the line did not go away when she strayed. The sounds and fantasies that result from deviance and reactions to it contain fear, exhilaration, and desire. When someone strays from a line, the gaps— the distances between that new line and the straight line— between the walkers or (re)creators of each line respectively, contain desire. Dissonance contains the affect of desire, which is integral to the pursuit of queering relations.

While Ahmed's formulation would mostly be concerned with 1) the force acting on the child and 2) the landscape consisting of the lines drawn by deviant children's footsteps, I want to attend specifically to the dissonant noise as the product of the interaction between the new line my mom walked and the yellow line the other children reinforce. In other words, not only does a deviant line create a new landscape, and not only does a straight line represent a string of reference points for where the pressure is pushing a subject, but also the interaction of the two lines illuminates the affect of a landscape— the emotions and noise produced by lines

interacting and complicating our understanding of how ‘subjects’ move through a set of rules with one another in problematic, contradictory, or unpleasant ways.

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of ‘lines of flight’ with their *A Thousand Plateaus*, providing another site of theory from which this project sees potential through the line. They explain experience through ‘assemblages’ that refuse static notions of essence and instead embrace conceptualizing through mutating connections and the forming of ‘reality’ from those connections and relations. For them, some lines function to segment and set borders (at times strictly and binarily executed by ‘the molar line’, and at others more flexibly executed by ‘the molecular line’), and another line, the line of flight, functions to disrupt those lines. The molecular line executes what Deleuze and Guattari call a ‘deterritorialization’; however, that deterritorialization lasts for a moment until new borders are drawn. I contend that lines of flight work within a dissonant framework. Lines of flight represent a sustained dissonance, a dissonant framework, because they invoke a continued deviant potentiality— a deviance that does not resolve. Thinking inversely then, utilizing a dissonant framework, learning to employ dissonance, could be a way to implement a line of flight. A moment of deviation— discordance or brief dissonance— disrupts very little (it could serve as a transgression, but does little to transform). So, Deleuze and Guattari not only provide an entry into lines as resistance and potential, but also serve to bridge the theorizations of lines of power (those that border) and lines of resistance (lines of flight, of disruption) fashioning a sticky

territory that takes up lines as markers of both previous, perhaps normative, assemblages and of potentiality.

In *Cruising Utopia*,⁵⁵ Muñoz visualizes queerness as existing in a plane that can never be reached—a claim of having achieved queerness is actually a failure to do queerness. The horizon is never reached, and that is at the crux of Muñoz’s understanding of both queerness and futurity. Though subjects consistently gesture toward queerness through relating and becoming, queerness can never be actualized by a subject, which forces an analysis of the materiality of queerness in the now of relating and the ‘subject-in-process’. The conclusion of Muñoz’s schema resonates with a dissonant framework and informs how dissonant frameworks could converse with utopian visions. Would achieving queerness, as a solidified and stabilized identity, be the normalization of it? I argue that rejecting queerness as horizon actually functions to end queerness—or at least to reify norms—because it rejects a performing and doing of queerness that function through *processes* of subverting relationality. Thus, I equate reaching the queer horizon (an impossible task for actual queerness) with normalizing queerness; and, “normalizing the queer [reaching that end point] would be, after all, its sad finish.”⁵⁶ Working toward a horizon that can never be reached aligns conceptually with a dissonant framework, which will become apparent when this chapter elaborates on both the leading nature of dissonance and the lack of resolve—dissonant frameworks favor the utopian landscape mapped out

⁵⁵ For this project’s dissonant purposes I emphasize the image of horizon as a line.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Against Proper Objects*, 21.

by Muñoz.⁵⁷ A queer utopia, a *cruising utopia*, is shaped and imagined as a future which can never be achieved; conversely, working for that utopian project requires an immersion in the unresolved now with a constant sight on the potentiality imbued in the future.⁵⁸

One cannot underestimate the contribution ‘the line’ has made to our concepts of resistance, so this project argues for a framework that integrates how lines interact to produce noise and emotions. I turn to dissonance as the conceptual tool for understanding (and potentially incorporating for acts of resistance) the cacophony of relating lines. In other words, I think of dissonance as a way to represent the affective result of deviation from a norm, which is always, according to Butler, within heterosexist constructs. Thus, engaging with dissonance as a potential framework for queer relationality theory begs for an exploration of the material effects of deviation. Though I move through dissonance as a metaphor, I do not intend to only play with metaphors and analogies; so the experiential, sensational, and uncomfortable characteristics of dissonance— essentially how dissonance materializes— are crucial to approaching how the concept works with imagining deviation. Thus, we begin unpacking dissonance as a word, signifier, and concept, so we can imagine its potential to respond to the theoretical demands of queer relationality.

⁵⁷ This will be complicated in the conclusion of this chapter that specifically parses out the ‘framework’ part of dissonance by a quick investigation into the temporality of dissonant frameworks.

⁵⁸ This perhaps feels contradictory. I turn to a dissonant framework later as a tool for embracing such a ‘contradiction.’

A Quick Summary

While this piece is held together by the theme of dissonance, it has also worked up to this point without much of a tie. One thought might connect to another, but there is no obvious consistency between sections— they don't flow perfectly. I would like to suggest that holding the enmeshment of lines of navigation with lines of power (the discussion of each respectively bookended this conversation) in dialogue with the potentials of dissonant practice (the discussion of which filled the middle sections of this essay) can serve to guide us from an understanding of power to a practicing of resistance— thus leading us to the critical potential for an embodiment of dissonance. By reflecting on just a few different approaches to dissonance we can see how enmeshed dissonance is in key concepts of queer theory (that apply also to the subsection of relationality)— deviation/lines and queer landscapes, experience and navigation of oppression, and power and resistance. The very quality of dissonance I argue serves as part of its particular utility, expansiveness, may appear, especially by the end of a wobbly (intentionally wobbly in accordance with its subject and object of analysis, but wobbly nevertheless.) argument such as this, to be its downfall. But it is not an unfocused broadness, blurry or not! So I conclude with a little recap of the journey on which the consideration of dissonance has taken us, rather than another rehashing of its particular utility.

Lines can visualize and hear deviations. Lines represent the interaction of sounds metaphorically, through how partials interact to demonstrate gaps and moments of clash. In that way, lines connect already visual concepts to the aural

potentials of lines. To bring a scattered landscape of lines onto the same map, I take a moment here to briefly summarize. Lines are integral to dissonance, but arriving at dissonance does not require lines. For this project I set up dissonance in, and at times through, this conversation of lines because it provides a visual for queer relating and it can connect to temporal concepts (history is constructed normatively and envisions progress on a timeline, queering temporal logics to relations disrupts that line). In sum, lines have served as an entry point for digging deeper into the metaphor of dissonance, but they are ultimately irrelevant to how I take up dissonance in the following chapters. Chapters two and three do not require stepping through every part of the metaphor again.

Dissonance is a concept all about relationally, sound, experience, and practice. Dissonance is produced by sounds interacting, and it is representative of emotions at times or demonstrative of methods for creation that resist power structures at others. Dissonance can also be utilized in a material fashion through music like jazz and blues. Jazz's sociopolitical and historic context explicitly connects the theory and practice of music to lived, social, political and economic realities. Next, I move into how the metaphor and concept of dissonance that has been teased out in this chapter can be utilize it in the next two chapters within institutions where queer relationality has very real, affective, material consequences.

The Dissonant Framework

The dissonant framework does not stray far from dissonance as a concept—that is to say, its composition is ontologically the same—yet as I have emphasized throughout this chapter, they are distinct and necessarily so for this project. Beyond their ontological similarities, both dissonance and the dissonant framework attend to activity and relationality; therefore, as I approach their distinctions, it is important to remember that in any iteration or discussion of dissonance, relationality . That similarity is important to warn against potential readings of conceptual dissonance as dissonant in framework, due to their common construction of an alternative relationality because a dissonant framework is the mode of dissonance necessary to disruption and navigate through queer relationality in the way this project argues it does. Still, there are two main distinctions between dissonance as a framework and dissonance as a concept: 1) how those ontological characteristics are compiled, and 2) their temporality.

All of the various components worked through in this chapter serve as the building blocks to construct the concept of dissonance and though old bricks may sit at the bottom of the structure, the new materials at the top do not render those old bricks obsolete. The dissonant framework expands the discussion of how all those components are held, and actually requires they function together — such a function is dissonant, so tautologically stated, a dissonant framework functions dissonantly. Taking up a dissonant framework also requires an alternative temporality to the duration of a tone with a beginning and an end. Dissonance must either be sustained

(an embrace of an approach that suggests resolution can never be achieved) or must disengage with the prescribed construction of a temporality that follows an order that can be understood (it must inhabit the disorientation that cacophony and polyvocality breed). By embracing both approaches to temporality, a dissonant framework allows for contradictory alternatives to normative narratives of time.

These contradictory understanding of queer futurity and queer acting within different structures of time are in fact grounded in actual queer theory. Muñoz's concept of futurity situates queerness as horizon so that queerness can never actually be truly reached. His counter-normative temporality works within a dissonant framework that invokes a durational lack of resolve. For Muñoz, resonance never occurs and dissonance leads to more dissonance so the train continues toward the horizon. Alternatively, Stephen Dillon argues, "we might consider that queerness is not the futurity of an always-moving horizon; rather, it is all we have now."⁵⁹ Dillon builds his argument through the understanding of a temporality based in the assemblage of the wreckage of the past, and with that works with the dissonant framework of time that disengages with normative temporal logics with a disoriented affect. Dillon stands with temporal frameworks that "work against a notions of history as progress, and in its place, engage the repetitions, accumulations, and intensifications of time as it circulates, suspends, and speeds up."⁶⁰ Dillon's

⁵⁹ Dillon, Stephen. "'It's Here, It's That Time:': Race, Queer Futurity, and the Temporality of Violence in *Born in Flames*." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 23, no. 1 (2013): 49.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 43.

framework for dissonance most follows the methodology and praxis of jazz. Thus, the taking up of dissonance as a framework that holds the potential for multiple modes of performing dissonance simultaneously demonstrates its potential (or even its urgent utility) as a methodology for serving as and facilitating approaches to queer relationality. The dissonant framework is distinguished by its durational stance (it has particular temporal tendencies), and is also characterized by a concept that even when instantaneous, holds multiple temporal orientations. The ability of dissonant frameworks to think through temporality (on which relationality requires a stance to be taken, a mode to be inhabited) in such a complex, difficult way will prove integral to understanding and facilitating alternate relationalities, queer doings of relations.

Finally, the dissonant framework destabilizes through contradiction. One form of dissonance, the result of inconsistencies between identifying and doing queer, exposes the problematic construction of a queerness based solely on identity— here, dissonance cues one into reading a co-opting of queer. Alternatively, another form of dissonance, as the affect of actually doing queer relating, demonstrates how queering can only be done if it extends beyond identity— here, dissonance sounds of the difficulty and excitement in exploring alternative engagements in relating. A dissonant framework functions as a system that intervenes in the definitional project for queerness through both positive and negative definition of it.

Chapter Two Destabilizing The Family

On July 5, 2017, *The Advocate* published David Artavia's article titled "This is What a Queer Family Looks Like" with a short blurb reading, "Nico Tortorella and Bethany Meyers are reinventing what it means to be family." Artavia has written for the magazine since 2013 and currently serves as its managing editor. Despite what the title may suggest, a picture capturing the embrace of two white people (who, I might add, pass the western-beauty-standards test with flying colors) starts off the article, prepping the reader for a highly palatable read—a story that will not stray from the white, heteronormative tales all too familiar in U.S. media. Artavia interviews Tortorella, a young, white, cisgender actor, and Meyers (also, young, white, and cis) about their polyamorous relationship. Tortorella identifies as bisexual and Meyers as gay, and they both engage in relationships and sex outside of the couple. Tortorella and Meyers do not label themselves with any classic relationship terms, but rather refer to each other as "family." Artavia writes, "it was at the beginning of Tortorella and Meyers's relationship when they realized their love didn't need to be sanctioned with names or labels. Even when they lived together as a couple in Los Angeles, they never called each other 'boyfriend' and girlfriend." ('we're family,' Tortorella says.)"⁶¹ Not only do Tortorella and Meyers claim family as their descriptor, but also Artavia puts 'family' in direct contrast to 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend.' With such a move, Artavia ignores all the complex negotiations involved in sorting through how

⁶¹ Artavia, David. "This Is What a Queer Family Looks Like." *The Advocate*, 2017.

people choose to identify their relationship— there is a lot in between ‘boy/girlfriend’ and ‘family,’ and family cannot be situated so simply as an alternative to other labels.

Artavia crafts the conversation with a consistent return to a discussion about labels and visibility, essentially positing those concerns as the most important ones in queer discourses and politics and allowing visibility to universalize LGBT experience. This allows Meyers and Tortorella ignore race, class, and gender. Meyers and Tortorella do not once acknowledge their privileged position within the LGBT community. The article tries to hold them up as champions for LGBT visibility, but fails to acknowledge at any point that the couple’s ability to exist in public spaces (and not lose their job or become more vulnerable in other ways) is contingent on their socioeconomic status, whiteness, cisgender, and able-bodiedness. Their ‘deviance’ does not cost them their livelihood or much of anything.⁶² They are highly legible representations of sexual ‘deviance’ who do little to actually threaten heterosexual order.

It is not that Tortorella and Meyers are somehow wrong or incorrectly using the label of family (especially considering the lack of historical fixity involved in the definition of ‘family’ and that family as a standalone is normative); however, there is a density to the word because of its historic slipperiness that no one involved in the

⁶² Queer relationality studies and dissonance could tell us this is an indication that not much queering is actually being done. Their deviancy is not affectively queer. it doesn’t sound, look, or feel dissonant. There are big stakes to relationality. Playing with a dissonant framework also exposes the necessary unrest and ‘difficult’ affect involved in queering relations. I would like to re-emphasize that the risk and affective result of it can be titillating and devastating.

interview attempts to address. Additionally, though it is unclear how far they consider their ‘family’ to extend (whether other lovers or friends are incorporated as family in their structure), Tortorella and Meyers use the language of family to claim an especially unique quality to the relationship they have with each other. According to the interview, they are family because they were destined for each other and defy the lesser labels of boy/girlfriend. Thus, it is the qualifier queer that puts their easy and natural understanding of family into question. The implications of claiming family and queerness at once, without truly addressing the historically oxymoronic nature and weight of ‘queer family’, is that the term’s significance, both its historic struggles and potentials, is neutralized and normalized.⁶³ Through this chapter’s analysis of Tortorella and Meyers’s claims to queer family, I will demonstrate the complexity of dissonance and the work it can do. Tortorella and Meyers’s identification with queerness is dissonant because they are in fact not performing queerness nor destabilizing relational norms; and at the same time, their failure to do queerness is exposed by their lack of contradiction in their taking on of ‘queer family’, the absence of a dissonant affect. The presence of dissonance in one place signals a failure *to*

⁶³ The ‘oxymoronic nature’ of ‘queer family,’ has been fostered in various ways. First, through a reproductive-centric model of the family and the characterization of queerness as non-reproductively focused (their sex is not saved for the marital bed and to make babies). Second, because queers have been cast away and deprived of housing by their families—the family is no place for their sexual deviancy. Third, because queers have been cast as pedophiles, their sexual deviancy marked as violent. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner expose how this anxiety is solidified in law. In their 1998 essay, “Sex in Public,” they discuss the 1995 zoning laws imposed on adult businesses in New York that kept them separate from schools and day-care centers (and houses of worship).

relate queerly, and the absence of dissonance in another marks their failure *to queer* relations.

The story of Tortorella and Meyers provokes important questions that must be considered before we can begin to ask what makes a queer family or a queering of family. First, how has the category of family been invoked historically to define groups of people— or on an even more basic level, how is the family constructed? This project has set up queer relationality as both the doing of queer relating and the queering relational norms. In other words, we ask, can relations be queer if they do not destabilize concrete notions of the subject and the fixed temporal norms of stable family structures? This chapter will start with the first question, but by redirecting focus toward what dissonance suggests we should focus on— the activity and relating that is perpetually happening in and through the family. To investigate that we begin by contextualizing the family, identifying its neoliberal iteration and logics, and how normative family structures/ concepts contrast with queer relating and queer understandings of relations. According to a dissonant framework, queer relating requires attention to the process of perpetual becoming. Next I return to Tortorella and Meyers to point to how they fail in the schema of a dissonant framework— I apply the dissonant framework to understand how they do not perform queer relationality. Then, I appeal to suggestions by academic, Liz Montegary and to the activist work of Ignacio Rivera as both an antidote to Tortorella and Meyer and a site through which we can see a dissonant framework actualized. Ultimately, I will pick pieces of the radical scholarship and work I find most compelling to work with in a

dissonant framework. In doing so, I respond to the second question presented by Tortorella and Meyer's story with dissonant possibilities.

Building the Family Structure

The 'family' has never carried a historically fixed meaning or referent. Its mutability, lack of fixity, and potential utility has been exploited by various hegemonic processes according to the dominant ideology of a ruling power at any particular time and place. I remain vague here intentionally to suggest the long history of the family, and how it has taken up vastly different forms over time and place, to leave room for historic openness. That is all to say, I am selectively focusing on constructions and material realities of the family in the United States, a nation-state deeply enmeshed with capitalism, racism, imperialism, colonialism, and heterosexism. The family carries out the work of power not only by forming normative subjects, but also by casting normative shadows whose perimeters establish which subjects can or cannot have access to the rights achieved by those properly formed subjects. In other words, the subjects within a family are tasked with disciplining a child so she performs 'girl,' and the conceptions of the family, its discursive significance— as determined by social, political, and economic laws and norms— convey the norm to which the performance of 'girl' is compared. This performance decides what happens to that girl if she does not succeed in 'girling'— the family both shapes and marks. That is to say the family serves twin functions: to reiterate norms onto subjects through quotidian, intimate relations and, on a larger

scale, to establish structures through which bodies striving to perform those norms circulate. As stated in the introduction to this project, the family serves as an institution that both constructs normative relationality, but also reinforces it through quotidian reiterations of normative relating. Again, both of those familial functions rely on the shiftiness of the family because such an ever-changing structure gains discursive power from its mutability (that is, when it benefits the dominant ideology). Meanwhile, homonormativity exemplifies a shifting discourse of family that benefits nationalism, capitalism, racism, and even heterosexism.

As Montegary comments in a footnote, “during the late 1990s, as the acronym LGBT was becoming increasingly common, the language of ‘LGBT families’ started circulating in the scholarly literature about the merits of lesbian, gay , and bisexual parents.”⁶⁴ How has the changing rhetoric and expanding category of the family not lead to the liberation of queers made vulnerable by the establishment of such a unit for organizing groups of people? Both Patricia Hill Collins and Jaspir Puar trace how the state’s shaping of legal and social constructions of what the family should or can be serves nationalistic purposes. Hill Collins looks at how six dimensions of the family— naturalizing hierarchies, establishing a multifaceted notion of home (which includes household, neighborhood, and country), imbuing ‘blood ties’ with significance, privileging membership, providing a structure for inheritance, and planning within a eugenicist framework— “demonstrate specific connections between

⁶⁴ Montegary, Liz. "Familiar Perversions: The Racial, Sexual, and Economic Politics of Lgbt Families." Rutgers University Press, 2018: 1.

family as a gendered system of social organization, race as ideology and practice in the United States, and constructions of U.S. national identity.”⁶⁵ That is all to say, the family functions intersectionally to privilege cisgender, white, straight people and works toward a unifying national identity that augments state power. This privileging will ultimately circle back to continue regulating sexuality and legitimizing racialized violence as well as serving other large systems through which power funnels such as capitalism and colonialism.

Jasbir Puar also argues for how the family serves U.S. nationalistic and imperialist causes, but she focuses particularly on how the United States’ normalization and limited acceptance of queer folks (or rather of LGBT people who are privileged in most every other way) works to paint a picture of ‘U.S. sexual exceptionalism.’ Puar writes that a “pernicious inhabitation of homosexual sexual exceptionalism occurs through stagings of U.S. nationalism via a praxis of sexual othering, one that exceptionalizes the identities of U.S. homosexualities vis-à-vis Orientalist constructions of ‘Muslim sexuality.’”⁶⁶ It is the incorporation of homosexual subjects, according to Puar, that allows for the building of a more cohesive national identity in waging war against Muslims, and it is the apparatuses or signs for such incorporation (such as gay marriage) that promotes white supremacist

⁶⁵ Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Rev. 10th anniversary ed.. ed. New York: New York : Routledge, 2000: 63.

⁶⁶ Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages : Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Tenth anniversary expanded edition.. ed. Durham: Durham : Duke University Press, 2017: 4.

ideology (both abroad and domestically). Puar (to expand on Hill Collins notions of what heteronormative families do) writes, gay marriage “is not simply a demand for equality with heterosexual norms, but more importantly a demand for reinstatement of white privileges and rights— rights of property and inheritance in particular— while for others, gay marriage and domestic partnership are driven by dire needs for health care.”⁶⁷ Here Puar hints to a contradiction (that between how the family serves racism and nationalism and what is potentially appealing about the family for vulnerable, queer folks) that proves sticky in the mission to critique an institution so ingrained in nationalism, racism, and survival.

For this project, I am most compelled by the family structure as solidified by “family values,” the ideology shaped by neoliberalism, as especially relevant for its antithetical relation to the queer relationality and dissonant framework with which I work. That shaping of the family is not only historically situated directly before the increase in LGBT family discourse, which will be discussed below, but also represents a clear ideological iteration of family norms to which LGBT family discourse of the 1990s responds and appeals for incorporation. As described by Foucault, “Liberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking. It is a type of relation between the governors and the governed much more than a technique of governors with regard to the governed,” and neoliberalism is the expansion of liberal economic analysis into any domain.⁶⁸ Neoliberalism depends on the notion of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

⁶⁸ Foucault, Michele. "14 March 1979." In *The Birth of Biopolitics* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 218.

‘homo economicus’ (the economic man) as an entrepreneur of himself and leads to the theory of human capital, which posits people as agential subjects who can increase their value through investment in themselves, all dependent on economic analyses of risk. That schema allows for the rhetoric of “family values” that situates individuals and individual families, rather than racist, heterosexist systems, to blame for their failure to form normative family structures.⁶⁹ A dissonant framework directs oppositional work to the framework of the neoliberal family defined above because it has an affinity toward a destabilization. The queer relating here, which counters neoliberal notions of the proper family, centers collectivity, removing the focus on the individual and destabilizing the privatized family structure that is privileged by neoliberalism.

I argue for a queering through disruption of the family unit as it is constructed structurally rather than considered through relating and becoming. Simply expanding what a family unit can include falls into the trap, which queer studies warns against of redefining the category. Redefinition only reproduces the same system of exclusion that perpetuates increased danger for those most vulnerable and continues to function within and appeal to neoliberal logics. This project works toward a methodology informed by queer relationality theory that selectively focuses on relating. By

⁶⁹ In her *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*, Melinda Cooper tracks the reinventions of Elizabethan Poor Law (a system for relief first introduced in seventeenth century England and Wales that enforced family responsibility) over time, and specifically in the context of neoliberalism, to highlight the ways in which neoliberal iterations of welfare have taken up the rhetoric of family responsibility (73).

understanding the family through its ‘functions’— by which I mean the naturalized and generalized actions of the family such as those laid out by Hill Collins⁷⁰—rather than its structure, this project finds its point of intervention.⁷¹ Turning to dissonant frameworks and strategies will help imagine how best we can queer the family and use the family as a tool of resistance.

Performance Anxiety, or the Failure to Queer

Now, I return to The Advocate article about Tortorella and Meyers, the self-proclaimed poster children for queer families. By working through all the ways in which they fail to actually queer family, hopefully some sort of negatively defined roadmap will emerge that can show where dissonance is not present in their so called deviance in such a way that undermines their claim to queer family and charts the

⁷⁰ Structural rhetorics are determinist and reify family norms whereas an analysis of ‘functions’ allow for a queering of relationality that attends to the process of relating, attacking the insidious nature of normative family relationality which gains its strength through repetition and the constant act of citing norms.

⁷¹ More effective in that they address the materialization of normative relationality played out in the site of the family.

potentials for an alternative, a dissonant deviance.⁷² Tortorella and Meyers's claims to queerness are established by two main arguments (one based on their individual identity and the other based on how they conduct their relationship): they are both not straight because they shake up gender and sexuality norms and they engage in non-monogamy. Their first claim to queerness is through identification as queer (it is structural, a set relation), and their second relates to how they conduct their relationship (the doing or relating). I focus specifically on the discussion of their relationship as polyamorous, which circulates both an understanding of queerness as identity and of doing (though the discussion of 'doing' is sparse). First, I discuss the ways in which the structural portrayal of their relationship fails to queer relations, and second, I will discuss how their doing of relating reifies heterosexist, racist, and neoliberal logics.

⁷² My argument rests on the notion that doing queerness and queering is materially and affectively different than identifying as queer. I steer away from evaluating Tortorella and Meyer's identification or performance of queerness (because my project works to decenter the subject), but I engage in a critique with their logics of a queer family as structural briefly in order to further emphasize my argument that queerness should be interpreted through relationality rather than identity. In other words, I arrive at a critique of their identifying as queer not to center a discussion of identity, but rather in service of building a more whole case (whole as in the large collection of many fragments not as in one unitary, solidified case) for how doing queer family can fall apart through the many processes of formation that attempt to stabilize queerness. Tortorella and Meyer's queer identification begs for critique despite my focus on queer relationality because they perform normative relations through their self-constructed stabilized queer subject identity that does not attempt attendance to relating and continual processes of becoming. A claiming of queer identity without queering family provides an entry point for dissonance and queer relationality in the Tortorella and Meyer interview and in normative relationality in general.

Tortorella and Meyers engage in little discussion of how they conduct their polyamorous relationship. In fact, their claim to queerness through polyamory is solely rooted in claiming the term. Tortorella and Meyers fail to deviate from the intentions to regulate sexuality enacted by the family with appeals to a closed notion of family that functions within the logics of privileging membership to a family unit.⁷³ As discussed in the opening of this chapter, Tortorella and Meyer's entire consideration of family rests on their especially fated relationship—they are 'family' rather than other relationship identifiers because of their specific attachment to each other that relies upon each of their membership to a family unit. The isolated closed notion of the family they perpetuate finds roots in the logics of a stabilized family unit. I must be careful here, though. It is not polyamory which centers the primary couple that fails queer relating, but the focused privileging of their primary coupleship through the rhetoric of family that reifies normative relating steeped in a history of racist and heterosexist compulsory monogamy. Dissonant frameworks require constant destabilizing within systems that attempt to construct stable images that solidify relational norms. Tortorella and Meyers fail to relate queerly for their appeals to stability, and their failure marks a potential entry point for imagining queer potentials that do not function that way. The only engagement they have with the

⁷³ That is to say, one which appears (at least in the presentation of the article) to prioritize the meaning of their primary coupleship in such a way that precludes the opportunity for a larger understanding of membership to a family. Their 'open' relationship may be conducted as such; however, the rhetoric and subtext of their statements privileging of membership to a family encapsulated in their couple undermine the potential for other formations of collectivity and family or rather other doings of collectivity and family.

potential that their family could extend beyond the heterosexual primary couple, that family could encapsulate a collectivity rather than destiny for each other, is with Tortorella's appropriation of the word 'tribe'. Tortorella briefly references the queer push to find family outside of one's biological family of origin, but he uses the language of 'finding your tribe.' In his glimpse of a moment suggesting family could extend to include relations of friendship, Tortorella invokes language historically referencing systems of relations that have been utilized by colonial power to demonize people who do relations queerly in the eyes of Western, white supremacist family logics in order to justify colonizing actions. So, not only do they fail to challenge the heterosexist, racist history of privileging membership to a family structure, but also the only semblance of an attempt they make to suggest they have a different, more queer understanding of family takes up a discourse that has been used to describe native peoples whom those privileges granted to white, cis, heterosexual men have worked to colonize and exclude from membership to a nation-state built on stolen land.

Even if their polyamory did not reify, through its structure, the norms that polyamory has the capacity to queer, they still do little to move beyond structure and identity. Tortorella and Meyers do not at any point address their rules and boundaries (a key component to open relationships). Ironically Artavia mentions that "Meyers also admits that due to a lack of examples of similar relationships, she had to teach herself how to navigate the rules." But what are those rules? Meyers and Tortorella may represent an example of a polyamorous couple, yet their lack of engagement

with the larger community of polyamorous people (and especially those who are polyamorous but may not be as palatable in popular culture) and their ethics behind non-monogamy does not exemplify queerness. Not explaining how they actually do polyamory further highlights their reliance on identity as the determiner of queerness and adds another spot where they fail to queer the construction of normative relations.

Tortorella and Meyers fail overall to talk about queer relating, but they do go there briefly to address the question of jealousy in polyamory. Artavia clarifies, “it’s only when they’re dating someone of the opposite sex that jealousy intervenes, mainly because there’s a chance of having a child, and they both desperately want to have a baby together.” First, jealousy of only heterosexual relationships implies a heteronormative validation of those relationships over others, and second, there is a higher value placed on relationships based on reproductive ability. Further more, Tortorella explains he probably wouldn’t mind if his sperm was used for Meyers to have a baby with another woman. The only real rule or guideline of their relationship is that together they will raise a child who is biologically related to both of them; thus, their relationship functions within heteronormative standards and logics considering it is built on a heterosexual, but above all else, biological conception of family. Tortorella demonstrates the exact heterosexist perspective he purports to oppose, the norm he wants to shake up. This centering of reproduction actively opposes a dissonant framework that leads to an alternative conception of futurity, which is rooted in a queer relationality that sees queerness as horizons and imaginings

for a collective future. The reproductive discourse invoked by Tortorella and Meyers makes no attempt for an extension of queer relating.

Their most blatant contradiction in how they purport to be a queer family comes when they enter a discussion of relationality and the activity involved in relating that is this project's focus. Hill Collins writes, "representing the genetic links among individuals, the belief in blood ties naturalizes the bonds among members of kinship network," highlighting the important role biology plays in shaping the family unit and naturalizing the subject formation attached to notions of kin and relation.⁷⁴ Hill Collins then highlights how conceptions of the family and family law have functioned to regulate sex for racist purposes. Hill Collins writes, "historically, creating White families required controlling White women's sexuality, lately through social norms that advocated pre-marital virginity. By marrying White men and engaging in sexual relations only with their husbands, White women ensured the racial purity of White families."⁷⁵ Thus monogamy within a family structure is posited as a way to ensure biological relations and purity of blood. Even though Hill Collins' writing took place before the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, which legalized gay marriage nationally, and the heavy focus on biology may appear to be shifting in popular discourses on the family, biology remains a significant factor and a common point in family rhetoric (Hill Collins points to the adoptee search for their 'real' or biological families as a signifier for such importance). Additionally, Tortorella and

⁷⁴ Hill Collins, 69.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Meyers hold on tight to the biological attachments of a family that have served the agenda of racial purity and been situated against polyamory. While they claim to reject sexual norms, Tortorella and Meyers do not actually reject the racist and nationalist purpose for those norms and regulation of sexuality. The specific focus on biology and blood ties is especially emphasized by the fact that their stance has more to do with his sperm and her egg (more than their planning a family together), and their ‘deviant’ sexual practice does not actually deviate much from the material effects of those rules.

In sum, I argue that Tortorella and Meyers fail to do queer family most gloriously through the ways in which they fail to reject heteronormative strategies of the family that can be found in law, social norms, and deeply intimate subject formation. That is to say, their problem is not the short comings in their individual queerness— though their claim to queer family relying on individual identity is problematic and reinforces the neoliberal construction and privileging of stable family structures— but that in their doing of queer family, they fail to challenge the core aims of power that are played out in the family, those that have historically shaped practices or structures resembling Tortorella and Meyers as deviant. They are allowed to function as a symbol of an acceptable queer family because only in structure do they appear queer. In reality, they do not challenge but embrace the intersecting and multivalence forces of power that make a dissonant sound in their formation of queerness as a deviant identity and make queer subjects (or subjects who fail to form normative families) more vulnerable, producing a dissonant affect.

Some Leading Notes

Montegary's work in *Familiar Perversions*, attends to the sort of problematics exposed by Tortorella and Meyers. She takes up a two pronged line of investigation that has inspired and helped shape my interrogation of the family: 1) how has the LGBT family reaffirmed racist and classist norms and 2) what sort of queer family politics can we imagine to resist/ do effective activist work? Montegary is especially concerned with the dangers of LGBT family activism that take equality as their mission. She asks, "how do we make sense of the ways in which the gradual incorporation of certain LGBT families into the national imaginary has only consolidated economic disparities and exacerbated racialized vulnerabilities?"⁷⁶ I see a partial response to that in the preceding analysis of Tortorella and Meyers. Tortorella and Meyers do not suffer the material consequences of queer vulnerabilities, they are the accepted ones. As I argue above, their 'incorporation' has little to do with structure and more to do with how their doing of family still works within racist, nationalist, and neoliberal logics. Montegary writes, "a queer family politics strives to pervert the next generation by encouraging young people to call into question the idea that a privatized version of family life could ever really fulfill all of

⁷⁶ Montegary, 4.

our erotic and non-erotic desires.”⁷⁷ Not continuing to question that idea executes a complacency, and resonates with Tortorella and Meyers’s story. Thus, I frame Tortorella and Meyers as functioning in consonance with hegemonic tools. The moment we strive for resolve (a consonance with norms) is the moment we abandon a strong (dare I say powerful?) characteristic of collectivity: the inherent contradiction and dissonances within the collective. Montegary’s work is about always creating new strategies, and that is the work that produces a maintained dissonance. Her orientation is one towards deviance and not about walking the same paths over and over again. Dissonant sounds beg for resolution and resonance, but when taken up as a framework, they must remain durationally unresolved. Similarly in Montegary’s framework, the goal is not resolution, but questioning. Her strategies are effectively dissonant. So, based on a model of dissonance, the key to encouraging deviance is to avoid the trap of reaching for a resolution such as ‘equality’ which is, by the definition of the workings of dissonant power, impossible.

Montegary provides an understanding for how the family can facilitate dissonance by resisting through its framework. Necessary to approaching the family as a site of resistance by taking up the frameworks of dissonance and entering at the site of reproduction, is an understanding of how families actually function both

⁷⁷ Ibid., 320 ; This feels scandalous and radical! Montegary elicits the fears which come up when trying to hold ‘queer’ and ‘family’ together (one way ‘deviant’ families can reproduce the logics of hetero/homonormativity is by defending the accusation that gay parents will make gay kids), to expose and then disengage with logics that center the subject (specifically the child vulnerable to the exposure of queerness) as the recipient of perverting, redirecting the attention to the activity of relating and finding potential in ‘thoroughly turning’ normative relating.

normatively and deviantly— how people do or do not perform queer relationality. With Tortorella and Meyers, the normative ways family can be done and reproduced unravel in spite of an apparently queer structure. Now, I turn to an example of doing family in deviant ways in order for the significant impact of the tools argued for in this paper to be made explicit. We turn to Ignacio Rivera who does family radically and queerly. Rivera describes themselves as “a queer, Trans, Two-Spirit, Black, Boricua, Taíno who prefers the gender-neutral pronoun ‘they’” and “is an activist, writer, educator, filmmaker, performance artist and mother.”⁷⁸ They engage the queer family as both a necessary platform for their mission and as a site wrought with potentiality to form caring networks for survivors of sexual abuse and for people who do not conform to gender and sexuality norms. Rivera goes further than most reckonings of the contradiction between queerness and sexual deviancy. The historic portrayal of queer sexual deviance has relied on establishing queers as the perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse; thus, when it comes to the conversation in queer family politics, sexual abuse has often been ignored if not displaced onto more vulnerable queer folks by LGBT families who do not queer relationality and claim to encourage deviance in/ through their families. Rivera works relentlessly to hold conversations about child sexual abuse (they acknowledge how sexual abuse can impact sex(uality)) with conversations about sex positivity.

A major part of their work revolves around “The HEAL Project,” which focuses on building community as a way to prevent child sexual abuse (CSA) and

⁷⁸ Rivera, Ignacio. "About" <https://www.igrivera.com>

increasing education about CSA to end it. Rivera calls the major educational facet of their project the “Toolkit.” This educational project is executed through workshops they run, but importantly it is a “community driven manual.” The Toolkit is not a simple formula or program Rivera sells, but rather a framework and guidelines through which a community can work to achieve higher levels of care and commitment to educating youth about abuse, sex(uality), and self-care. Rivera writes the mission-statement for education within The Heal Project:

Create a parent/caregiver Toolkit on how to use sex(uality) education as a tool to end CSA. Its aim is two-fold—train parents to pass along tools to children for self empowerment/healthy sex(uality) knowledge and move parents to create change in schools by pushing for comprehensive sex education.⁷⁹

They find the launching point for this sort of care within the structure of the family. Much of their focus on parenting comes from their role as a mother, and the sort of care and education, they see as a necessary part of that role. Key to the broad potentials of a queer family structure is their focus not only on the family as a place to queer family and education but also on the family as the headquarters to queer community and act with the intent of transforming broader social injustices. While their mission may be twofold, Rivera’s work through the institution of the family does queering in three ways: 1) it centers doing and relating over identity, 2) it focuses an alternative engagement with sexuality, and 3) it strives to end abuse by sustaining its efforts. I funnel those facets to Rivera’s queering through a dissonant framework, to

⁷⁹ Rivera, Ignacio. "The Heal Project." <https://www.igrivera.com/the-heal-project.html>.

understand the multiple temporalities they employ. The first two speak to the present as an assemblage of the wreckage of the past. Rivera's doing and relating occurs in the context of healing and the discussions that grapple with that pain. Alternatively, the third has more of an orientation to a temporality that considers queer relating so it is always geared toward a horizon and never reached. They want counter-knowledge to reproduce and continue to be sustained even perhaps with the understanding that abolishing abuse may never be reached. For Rivera, both temporal logics for doing queerness are necessary. A dissonant framework embraces the holding together of diverging temporal logics; therefore, Rivera's work exemplifies a method functioning within a dissonant framework, and a dissonant framework tunes one into key aspects of Rivera's work that cannot be lost in attempting to reproduce or learn from it.

While Rivera does not specify 'queer families' (here I am thinking more structurally— families started and shaped by queers) as the propellers of their initiative, the radical shift in how the family itself runs and what sort of knowledges the family circulates through a community and to their children queers heteronormative understandings of family. The HEAL Project does queer family by doing queer relationality. We find in Rivera's work a key to shaping a queer family that does not conform to strive for recognition or acceptance, but rather continues working towards social transformation. Rivera's project embraces those contradictions involved in the shaping of the image of queer subjects and finds the potential for liberation, healing, and care in a contradicting structure, "the queer family." Through their work, the subject is decentered and specifically displaced by

the subject-in-process and the activity of relating. The omission of situating a specific subject or structure of family to perform this work can be read as a refusal of logics for relationality that focus concretized subjects and presumed relations. In other words, the openness of Rivera's project facilitates an attendance to relating. Rivera's work does not abandon identity, but displaces it as a queer determinant, so as to preclude a co-opting of queerness.

Identity plays a key discursive role in Rivera's call for an intersectional approach that endeavors to focus on marginalized queer families and people with children. With respect to their "Toolkit," Ignacio notes:

The HEAL Project acknowledges the disparities in sex(uality) education, sexual health access, and resources available to people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI communities. We highly encourage everyone, especially those who belong to the above and other marginalized groups, to participate. We encourage the intersectional lens—race and sexuality; sexism and sex ed; desire and disability, gender identity and love, etc.⁸⁰

Queer activism around the family cannot exist only in privileged circles. An approach to queer family that does not focus on the participation of marginalized people and the centering of their perspectives and missions does very little to actually queer the family. A dissonant framework makes sense of this and rejects the misreading of that as purely a stable identitarian politics because 1) polyvocality is not taken up and 2) resolve can be reached too easily—dissonance would not be durational held in a framework. In fact, such a project would more likely than not reinforce the ways in which different identity groups get separated when their parallel forms of alternative

⁸⁰ Ibid.

engagement are key to their forming coalitions geared toward transformative resistance.

In sum, Rivera's activism and visions for the family and community work within a densely dissonant framework! Not only do they work within the context of dissonant forces of power, but they also take up dissonant strategies, by embracing those contradictions to incorporate community care and noise into their activism. Rivera's work thusly offers insight as to how one can pursue projects of transformation and activism through a familial system of relations that takes up dissonant, queer frameworks to approach a variety of issues confronting marginalized families or take on these frameworks within queer families to fight disparities outside of the family. Dissonance does not preclude finding care and comfort in our familial relations, and this is where Ignacio Rivera's work intervened to get us to an understanding of dissonance as a social hypothesis located in a temporal orientation to futurity. Rivera's work with the family and its relation to community action injects our metaphor of dissonance with the potential of care and healing relations. Rivera's radical care and work toward healing survivors of child sexual abuse reproduces new familial relations by fostering conversations that may sound deeply unpleasant. Not only that, but Rivera breaks down the notion of family politics as distinct (private) from the community (public). Dissonant frameworks are imperatively communal and turn toward community strategies also because dissonance is produced through relations. So the question becomes: how can we work backward from Rivera's radical interpretation of queer family to see where dissonance fits in or how can we read a

lack of dissonance within the utter failure of Tortorella and Meyers to perform a public queer family so as to map out how dissonance can get us to queer potentials of the family like Rivera's and not celebrate or be fooled by those that do work to reinforce normative relationality? Thankfully, we don't have to start from nowhere. Dissonance filters strategies and highlights which aspects of them are disrupting the norm, and doing the queering.⁸¹

I argue that by thinking of the perpetual questioning and work suggested by Montegary and Rivera as a reproduction of deviance (a dissonance), new possibilities for queer relationality emerge— a dissonant framework can guide the taking up of those strategies. Reproduction is a particularly apt strategy in the site of the family (its enmeshment in family activity and discourse, has meant it has weaved throughout this chapter already). Reproduction can be considered in a present-centered temporal logic (it is always a current process and is executed through the material and ephemeral recirculation of the past) and in a future-oriented temporality (imagining queerness as horizon and not abandoning the social or the Child). As I mentioned in the first chapter while discussing Ahmed, deviation is tricky to sustain and especially tricky to reproduce because as deviations reoccur, the paths they trod get marked onto the landscape and a new norm can emerge. Montegary's idea to 'pervert the next

⁸¹ That is to say, we can begin to ask, does this strategy work dissonantly? If the answer is no, the dissonant model/ framework suggests we turn to other projects. Finding questions to check the efficacy of our activism or modes of resistance before executing something that might qualm guilt but in fact do more harm to vulnerable folks is really important.

generation' excites the mind in search of a way to sustain deviance. Pervert is deeply tied to the construction of the queer as pedophile. However, when invoked as a verb, it simply means "to turn aside from a correct state"⁸² Deviating is more aligned with the notion of 'going from.' Once you have gone from one line, a new line is made and the decision to deviate must happen again. With deviation alone there is the potential of relief, of reordering to achieve consonance. Perversion is more perpetual, and it accomplishes a consistent re-engaging, a continued turning and new direction, with any partial it interacts with. Perverting may be a thrilling tool to work with; however, it is of course not a strategy without its complications as Montegary would not deny and as Rivera exposes by working through the contradictions of holding CSA conversations with a sex positive, queer approach. Again, we see how taking up dissonance means not shying away from the complexities and difficulties characteristic of a dissonant affect.

Dissonant frameworks suggest that the reproduction of deviance requires consistent renegotiation— and negotiation continues to hold tricky contradictions. Any time a dissonance attempts to resolve in consonance— a deviation tends toward relief from the forces constantly pushing it to realign, to resolve— we must reject content affects and continue to find forms of dissonance. Deviation can be reproduced by the sustenance of dissonance, and so we can check our deviancy and our failure to deviate in ways that resonate with power by perceiving power through noise. In deviation there is 'unpleasant noise' (which we have learned is not necessarily

⁸² *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

unpleasant) and there is silence. Perhaps the silences of dissonance are replaced with a new noise—the noise of resonance. Representations of ‘queer families’ such as Tortorella and Meyers’ are heard as a resonant tone. We are made to find relief in their account. Resonant noises do not mean power has weakened. All they tell us is that power found a new way to keep subjects in tune when the dissonant noise gets too loud.

And yet, this may still feel too theoretical. We ask again: how do we ‘pervert’ and how do we sustain dissonance? We continue to attack the logics of the family and the familial reproduction of norms. When we feel comfortable in a family dynamic, we destabilize that. When we accept biology as that which connects family or find resolve in biological connections, we question that. In other words, we reject shaping our familial relations according to a pretty, settled tune and instead pursue reproducing relations and conversations that do not resonate with “family values.”⁸³ When queers who are otherwise privileged take up content as an affect the noise of their ‘in tuneness’ further drowns out the dissonant noise of the queers whose vulnerability to death is heightened. Queering family means sustaining dissonance by exploiting the potential of intimate, familial relations to pervert one another, to shape one another’s relational practices and doings of relations.

⁸³ Dissonance does not mean that we must be in pain. AFFECT As we have learned, navigating dissonance can be playful and liberating— that’s what we can look forward to in dissonant frameworks. At the same time, not finding resolve is exhausting, but employing dissonant methods are crucial and necessary political work. The idea is not to seek vulnerabilities marked by dissonance but to abolish a culture of complacency.

A Conclusion to Open

Rivera brings us a dissonant sound that will lead to another leading sound, or a potential direction for the role of dissonance and dissonant strategies in the family. As Montegary points to, recirculating notions of the privatized family will never get us to the liberatory potentials of the queer family, and those we have to understand the ways must extend past the idea of just individual family transformation. I do not intend to suggest that work is unimportant, however, it does not transform in the ways dissonance might. Dissonance is a tool for navigation, but it is also a framework for power and affect and the contents necessary to resist those. We do not simply appeal to dissonance without resolution for the personal transgression.

Thus, working through dissonance in an institution such as the family emphasizes the complexity of the metaphor, but more importantly, the material impact of the theory we want to sort through with it. It exposes how a de-centered subject who engages with identity carefully and with nuance can perform a queer relationality that queers broader discourses and practices of normative relationality. Alternatively, subjects like Tortorella and Meyers, who structure their queerness as spectacle and as stable, resolved, and isolated (even in the context of an open relationship) reinforce normative relations that further heterosexism and racism. This actually exposes how a construction of queerness inattentive to sexuality and founded in identity cannot constitute queerness as is described by a desire for alternate relations. Dissonant frameworks instead suggest Montegary's proposal for perversion

and Rivera's activism as successful due to their taking up of seemingly internally contradictory positions because they only appear contradictory when working within the logics of normative relating. The dissonant framework provides a way to interpret the success of each as predicated both on their apparent contradictions and the enmeshment of those contradictions with alternative approaches to relationality and the potential of embracing different temporal logics at once. The contradictory nature of 'perverting' and The Heal Project is constructed by normative relating that steers the attention away from the activity of relating to queerness as a static identity.

Through a dissonant framework the integration of apparent contradictions, a centered presupposed subject, and a normative and singular temporal framework (or multiple resonant ones) become exposed. Dissonance serves as a filtering system to conclude which doing of relations actually queer relations based on the degree to which a dissonant framework and all it involves is actually embraced—consciously or not and manifested through any identity. Again, queerness finds its deviant potential through alternative relating, not identity, and the family serves as an institution that attempts to construct prescriptive identity markers, but also as a structure especially equip to circulate radical, queer relationality.

Chapter 3 — Disorienting The University

This chapter explores two lines of interrogation in order to understand how dissonance not only permeates the university space but also negotiates questions provoked by the university and its contradictions.⁸⁴ First, how has the university as an orientation device been challenged by activists and thinkers within the institution—or what would it mean to introduce dissonance to the discourse of play and navigation within the institutional matrix of (dis/re)orientation?⁸⁵ Second, in the wake of the preceding question, how can dissonance inform our disruption of how praxis is constructed in a space fraught with contradiction? To answer both questions, I will pull from Critical University Studies scholarship that taps into and funkifies the ideological forming, self-glorifying, contradictory, and nevertheless potentially radical nature of the University. Those authors to whom I turn and am indebted include Dylan Rodriguez, Craig Steven Wilder, and especially Roderick Ferguson and Stefano Harney with Fred Moten. I will turn to Ahmed and university disorientation

⁸⁴ That is to say, not only will I find characteristically dissonant architectures, but also I will take up dissonant frameworks in service of sorting through the messiness so graciously provided by those interacting partials.

⁸⁵ I take up ‘orientation device’ as a function of the University for two main reasons. First, the University run programs that explicitly mark themselves as orientation. This notion of ‘orientation’ can be found both in official university schemes as well as student alternative or supplemental orientation strategies; thus, orientation forms as a complex system that works from multiple angles, producing conflict and permeating institutional experiences. Second, working through orientation as a theoretical concept will expose the way in which institutions such as the university execute broad decrees that establish who belongs in what spaces and who serves a threat to ‘the order of things.’ In both cases orientation plays out not only on the individual at the institutional level (students are orientated to their institution), but also at the broader heterosexist, nationalist, capitalist, and racist subject forming scale (the University is not the isolated institution many understand it to be).

guides (specifically analyzing the guide from my own institution) to draw out the connections and similarities between the functional logics of dissonance and disorientation. I will then put Ferguson’s discussion of student movements in conversation with Moten and Harney’s *The Undercommons* to better investigate how people within the university manage the contradictions pervading their existence. Applying dissonance to those seminal CUS texts will imagine new possibilities jumping off from texts meant to incite/ guide and interpreting those contradictions through a dissonant lens will aid our readings of them so as to better make use of their suggestions— so as to ground their philosophizing in the messy, material present. All of this will work to expose how the university constructs normative relations through a stabilized temporality with a short institutional memory. Ultimately, I use this chapter to explore the expansive potentials of the concept of queering relations I propose in this project.

Critical University Studies

With his 2012 article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Deconstructing the Academe: The Birth of Critical University Studies,” Jeffrey Williams coined the term ‘Critical University Studies’ (CUS).⁸⁶ In parsing out the term, Williams emphasizes the ‘critical’ as signaling an explicitly oppositional stance and compares it to fields like Critical Race Studies. That oppositional position of the discipline has

⁸⁶ It may be a new term and a field experiencing recent rapid growth, but there is a deep archive of work, scholarship and activism, executed within and against the university from a variety of disciplines, that has taken many different shapes.

remained a constitutive element of CUS work from its emergence as a field to its present, but the degree and form of its oppositionality has fluctuated. Williams argues that the field emerged in the 1990's and lists books that represent the scholarship of the field; however, around the time Williams published his article, a plethora of CUS scholarship that diverged from the critiques Williams highlights (such as Bill Reading's seminal text, *The University in Ruins*) emerged.⁸⁷ The work Williams discusses centers the corporatization of the university or nostalgic calls for a return to the untainted, purity of the University; conversely, the work taking center stage post "Deconstructing the Academe" shifted from a vague nostalgia to an historically rooted, renarration of the University, exposing (and rejecting the pattern of denial of) the ways in which it has facilitated and driven racist, heterosexist, capitalist, and nationalist projects. Thus, we can begin to see the different ways in which opposition, or criticality, has been taken up within the CUS framework. The scholarship, as in any other field, is divided, and I will specifically take up the more historically recent work written by radical scholars committed to sustained opposition— an opposition that has a more complex interaction with the past and temporality in general. The CUS I take up not only considers the wreckage of the past (with Wilder's work), which lives in the present, but also a future orientation like with abolitionist horizons (with Rodriguez's work). So, dissonance can aid in distinguishing the old and more recent branches of critical university studies; or rather, a dissonant framework can serve to

⁸⁷ Williams, Jeffrey J. "Deconstructing Academe." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 58, no. 25 (2012): B7-B8.

loosely encapsulate a nuanced CUS attentive to contradictions, relating, and varying temporal logics. The ‘new’ CUS has begun to poke at the problematics of thinking of the University in terms of its stages and movements— such a schema fosters nostalgia and denies long lasting racist and heterosexist logics that have fueled and been fueled by the university through and in between those constructed stages and movements. It understands the dangers of not only thinking through the University as such but also of approaching oppositional activism as such. While this new direction of CUS might be nebulous and hard to pin down, a dissonant framework allows us to accept and appreciate that and tells us to attend to the CUS literature that thinks more in terms of the extended temporality of relations and refusals to resolve. That provides a new angle to not categorize, but hold together under one framework, the new work by encapsulating their multiple methodologies, disciplines, and arguments. The application of a dissonant framework in this chapter serves not only to direct what CUS scholarship I work with, but also how then to work through queer relations once an archive of scholarship and activism is selected.

It is important to note the gaps in history, which CUS has yet to fill. Within CUS, the scholarship on the University and its ties to heterosexism have not garnered much attention.⁸⁸ By working with the existing CUS scholarship that exposes and

⁸⁸ I say this only to suggest there is potential scholarship and history to be worked through. Such work is highlighted by Jennifer Doyle’s *Campus Sex, Campus Security* and Ferguson in his conclusion to *The Reorder of Things*. The intent here is not at all to suggest CUS has failed in any way by attending to the University with regards to racism, capitalism, and imperialism, but simply to suggest there is still more terrain for the field to cover.

criticizes the ways the University has and does construct and further racial categories for instance, the imagining of how it might have, does, or will do the same sort of work for other systems of othering and disciplining, such as with sexuality, begins. There is potential to explore queer relations in two facets of the university: first, with respect to the vertical relation between the university and the student, and second, with respect to horizontal relations between students and so too between any subjects. Additionally “queering” can happen in two ways: a queering of relations and a queering through relationality. In sum, in this project’s discussion of queer relationality, the university serves to expose how queer relationality can occur at multiple levels. The vertical relation to the university can be queered (in that the relation is no longer normative but dissonant) and relations within the university can be queered (in that they no longer relate according the heterosexist logics). How can people queer relations within an institutional space that works to construct not only the normative relating to itself, but the discourse and knowledge production around relationality?

Orientations

With a CUS perspective, reading the university as a crafter of subjects, through a variety of technologies and through different systems of imagining subjection, becomes not only a more accessible task (thanks to dissonance) but also a glaringly necessary one. Thus, I first turn to ‘orientation’— a big player in queer theory (re sexual orientation) and theory regarding the abstracted notion of subject

interaction with the environment (as discussed in phenomenology)— as a technology of the university. Orientation as a signifier has two main referents: the orientation one has (something fixed or at least temporarily settled) and the act of orienting (such as say, a freshman orientation program provided for first year students as they enter college). The university crafts the image of a subject who is stable, isolated, and a concrete thinker; but more insidiously, the university directs relating, which is where this project enters. I separate these referents not to suggest they are distinct entities though— orientation, as a ‘set’ direction and a program of directing must be understood as a constant becoming or process in order to both understand how deep and entrenched its impact can be and also how resistance is possible. Looking back to the example of the freshman orientation with a skeptical lens, begs the question: what sort of extending or deep forming of a stabilized student (weighted by so many normative images produced by the university) is executed by an orientation program framed as neutral, broad, and helpful does— or, how does orientation continually occur within the university, perpetually affecting those inhabiting these institutional spaces? I locate this orientation within the university, by looking specifically at student resistance and counter-orientation⁸⁹ so as to pair disorientation with dissonance in order to explore an institutional space fraught with dissonance and

⁸⁹ I use counter-orientation as an umbrella term that covers any sort of orientation that is actively or passively, agentially or not, against a normative orientation. Working through the two different forms of counter-orientation and sorting them as dissonant or not will be necessary to demonstrate how queer relationality does not apply to any form of alternative engagement with relation, but only those that are supported by a dissonant framework.

investigate the affective result of that. So, I turn to Ahmed, who constructs a theory of orientation for us. Ahmed is a particularly helpful source for her turn to university institutions as spaces with and as architects of orientation. She writes, “we can also consider ‘institutions’ as orientation devices, which take the shape of ‘what’ resides within them.”⁹⁰ She uses that understanding to explain how the university as an institution is “white.” White bodies have been the ‘what’ that resides in the university, so the institution has taken the shape of whiteness, which she uses to explain why people notice when “four black feminists all happen to walk into the room at the same time.”⁹¹ Why do institutions function to orient in the way Ahmed describes? For Ahmed, orientations function to situate subjects in normative relations to other subjects, objects, and directions. The refusal to orient results in an alternative relationality, which is potentially queer. Thinking through how normative relations are formulated serves as an entry point for dissonance to guide how resistance can work to deconstruct the norm through alternative relations to those constructions. In other words, Dissonance will work for disorientation.

Ahmed distinguishes between disorientation and reorientation, and for reorientation, she turns to Merleau-Ponty:

“This reorientation, which we can describe as the ‘becoming vertical’ of perspective, means that the ‘queer effect’ is overcome and objects in the world no longer appear as if they are ‘off center’ or slantwise.’ In other words, Merleau-Ponty considers how subjects ‘straighten’ any queer effects

⁹⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 132.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

and he asks what this tendency to ‘see straight’ suggests about the relationship between bodies and space.”⁹²

Reorientations do work antithetical to ‘queer effects’ and are the results of tendencies. Dissonance answers Merleau-Ponty’s question through the notion that bodies seek resonance between themselves and time. It might feel too austere to reject a reorienting desire. This project’s vision for disorientation (akin to dissonance) suggests disorientation is the affective work that relating must do in order to resist. In other words, a dissonant framework may need to consistently seek disorientation and cannot cease upon reorientation.

Disorientation is something different than reorientation. Disorientation is not easy or pain free (though it is not entirely painful).⁹³ Ahmed warns us:

“Disorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one’s place, and an effect of the loss of a place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body. Disorientation involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach.”⁹⁴

According to Ahmed disorientation is dangerous— it is affective. It marks a shift from one orientation, but it does not hold the shift toward a new orientation. It’s an activity or affect of an activity, but not a position constructed as stable.

⁹² Ibid., 65.

⁹³ Here, I make a brief aside on the pain and violence of disorientation. Though I do not have the space to examine the pain of disorientation in this paper, that experience of disorientation cannot be overlooked. Disorientation can expand thinking; however, that often comes at a great cost.

⁹⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 160.

Dissonance can be defined as an unpleasant noise, but this project's interrogation of it yielded an understanding of it through its potential to navigate positions of marginality with multiple, contradictory approaches or methods; thus, approaching disorientation and its specific intensity within the university through a dissonant methodology suggests one approaches the uncomfortable experience of disorientation as a potential terrain on which to explore resistance. And, disorientation has in fact been taken up by student activists.

Understanding how the university operates through orientation, which in turn disorients (any time something is oriented, there is an outside to that orientation just as there is an exclusion involved in any inclusionary system), begs for a retort, an act of resisting that operation, of disrupting that function. Here enters a student-lead movement to counter university orientation: the creation of 'disorientation guides'. Mapping the history of disorientation guides is a little tricky. *The New Inquiry* warns us "since disorientation guides (and pamphlets assembled in a similar tradition) predate the widespread use of PDFs and websites for distribution, it's wrong to read this as if the students assembling the guides were the first to do so."⁹⁵ These guides are rooted in a history of student activism, and ignoring such a history denies the impact of counter-knowledges, which have been circulating within the university for decades,⁹⁶ but also this project's engagement with these texts requires an acknowledgement of the 'disorientation guide movement' as a distinct one.

⁹⁵ The New Inquiry, "Guides for the Perplexed." 2014.

⁹⁶ That denial perpetuates institutional myths that white-wash and neutralize campuses.

Disorientation guides solidify as a movement by establishing a consistent rhetoric of disorientation and following a similar form (they are mostly self-published, consist of short essays, and employ zines stylistically) across various campuses and sites of distribution). Approaching disorientation guides in the larger context of materials which do not explicitly appeal to disorientation guides is key to understanding and appreciating the logics and material effects of the work they do. At the same time, understanding the impact of a specific attention (an orientation) to disorientation is also critical. I consider those different perspectives (but not entirely distinct conceptualizations) important because of how I situate Disorientation Guides as the student activist companion to Critical University Studies. Additionally, multiple temporal angles speak to dissonance. I see CUS and disorientation guides as companions because they offer the same sort of oppositional response to the university—the retort requested by an understanding of university history and logics. I contend that CUS and disorientation guides have emerged, non-coincidentally contemporaneously.⁹⁷ While both the circulation of counter-knowledge materials/ re-orientational practices and critiques within the university of the University are certainly not novel ideas, each ‘movement’ respectively is gaining traction by establishing discursive and functional ties that are distinct from other student activist projects or other critical fields of study. They are rapidly growing now, and thus, demanding an urgent attendance.

⁹⁷ So, they might also go beyond companionship; or, perform a companionship that forms as a manifestation of their being different iterations of the same movement.

Working with Wesleyan disorientation guides as my case study, I put them in conversation with CUS and the concept of disorientation, to investigate their downfalls and moments of queer potential.⁹⁸ First, I look at the mission of disorientation guides and align them with that of CUS. Second, I work with ‘disorientation’ as the discursive focus of the guides. I argue that at times the ‘disorientation’ guides actually do ‘re-orientation’ work. At the same, I do not contend those re-orientations preclude disorienting work. So, I end my discussion of disorientation guides with the disorienting potentials I find by spotting where dissonance intervenes.

In the fall of 2014, the first Wesleyan University disorientation guide was published on the University Organizing Center (UOC) website. The guide features a general vocabulary for activists, retold institutional histories, and overviews for what different groups are doing (and thus ways to get involved in various causes). The letter from the editors for the second guide published in the fall of 2015 opens with:

Our disorientation guide attempts to build an alternative narrative to the Wesleyan administration’s sanitized version of Wesleyan’s institutional history. As freshmen coming to Wesleyan, it is convenient to trust that the administration is acting in our best interest, but skepticism is necessary to see more nuanced and complicated realities.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ I turn to the Wesleyan disorientation guide, not for its particularity nor for its ability to provide an ultimate model that well represents all other disorientation guides, but rather as an one object in a large catalogue of objects created with similar guidelines and sprouting from the same movement. The Wesleyan disorientation guides were published in Fall 2014, Fall 2015, Spring 2015, and Spring 2017).

⁹⁹ Wesleyan Disorientation Fall 2015

Their mission as detailed above reflects common threads in the emerging field of Critical University Studies (CUS). First, the endeavor to circulate an “alternative narrative” is also a key project of CUS. They both endeavor to retell university histories in order to achieve a greater institutional self-understanding. As the radical prison abolitionist and anti-racist scholar, Dylan Rodriguez, argues, intellectual practices have the potential to renarrate stories of the University. Rodriguez is a particularly interesting figure to call upon for his heightened contradictory position as both politically radical and involved with administrative aspects of the academy (he serves as the chair of the academic senate at UC Riverside). Thus, not only do his politics and work lend themselves to some manifestation of dissonance, but also they suggest a potential for radical action within the university. His perspective on the potentials of intellectual narration are especially provocative due to his positionality, in addition of course to his important arguments. Craig Steven Wilder in *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled Histories of American Universities*, also works to retell narratives exposing racist histories of the university that have been excluded in institutional narratives for decades. Wilder explores how universities are deeply enmeshed in the economies and logics of slavery. His work is deeply historical and archival, and so too is the apparent direction for the emerging field of CUS. The second major tie between the guides and CUS is found in its invocation of skepticism. Skepticism marks its oppositional stance, a key to any critical field and especially to CUS.

Those are the main discursive or methodological ties to CUS that the Wesleyan guide makes, and its methods and intentions will continue to build and clarify as the analysis of them proceed. So, what actually are the intentions of disorientation guides, what are the material implications of the different forms that disorientation takes, and how this project can pull from critical university studies in tandem with a dissonant framework to extend the potentials of activism that discursively centers (dis/re)orientation? How do disorientation guides frame their work? How do they purport to ‘disorient’—or rather, what material effects do they imagine disorientation producing? To see how the guides themselves posit the function of disorientation within their schema, I look at the notes from the editors.

The editors for the first Wesleyan disorientation guide in the Fall of 2014, write:

After two semesters of disorienting orienteering, the magnitude and multiplicity of institutionalized injustices were impossible to ignore... Thus, I made it my mission to gather all the folks who had navigated this jungle before us, acting as my cartographers as we worked together to create a map for you.¹⁰⁰

Here, the goal to lead the disoriented is made explicitly clear. Each contributor to the guide has experienced some sort of disorientation in their activist pursuits at Wesleyan. Thus, the map is shaped through the experiences of people who have learned paths to walk by which they can act deviantly. The map is a collection of potential directions, or routes for one to take. The editors though are also sure to emphasize the imperfections of their map and that they do not intend to lead blind

¹⁰⁰ Wesleyan Disorientation 2014

followers. That is to say, they have forged new paths for themselves when confronted with disorientation, so the result of their attempts to navigate deviant paths are affectively dissonant. But how much can such a landscape of already navigated paths do— whether followed blindly or not— to guide new forms of deviation? Can explaining the ways people have deviated and found ways to clash with university systems of orientation, or find for themselves relief from a disorienting experience really provide space for new imaginings? The mission as stated above produces resonance, which in orientation discourse is not dissonant, but resonant. In the first three Wesleyan disorientation guides published before 2017, the section on sexual assault contains a brief Wesleyan history/ timeline, a list of resources and activist groups and a slightly longer narrative with general information about Title IX. None of the material on sexual assault in those guides suggests a disengagement from university administration— they just guide the student through it. Dissonance does make an intervention here, but first, that potential downfall of the guides requires an interrogation into the second deployment of disorientation the guides use: they themselves are supposed to disorient. While the guides are created by disoriented folks in an attempt to sketch some sort of map and unify a fractured activist scene so as to lessen obstacles facing the eager activist, the guides are also created with the intention of undoing university orientation. I invoke undoing because it leaves room for different forms of shifting orientation. In other words, to question what it means to disorient means to push on the rhetoric that sets disorientation up as *the* alternative to orientation. Disorientation and re-orientation are both alternatives, but they are not

synonymous. Re-orientation (as I worked through with Ahmed earlier), serves as a form of resonance, and by this point in this project, it should be clear why resonant relating and becoming do not do queer work. Re-orientation is not supported by a dissonant framework. But, while I would like to push back on the theoretical framing disorientation guides posit because they are mostly re-orienting devices, I would also like to suggest they do in fact have disorientation moments, which I will get to after a brief recap with an infusion of dissonance.

In sum, there are essentially two invocations of disorientation (two theoretical framings) in the guides that can at times oppose each other—the mission is twofold: to guide those disoriented and to itself disorient (in other words, undo the orienting done by the university). They can appear contradictory (and in fact they are), but that contradiction does not cause a standstill. That contradiction is similar to the contradictions found in Critical University Studies, which I will sort through with Harney and Moten and Ferguson in the following section. So, where does a dissonant approach lead us and how does it assure us this contradiction in disorientation guides is one to take-up and explore? The concept of ‘dissonance’ provides the subject within the university many options in the face of disorientation. Dissonance sees potentiality in the apparent contradiction of a dual mission *to guide* disoriented folks and to do disorientation, which may appear to complicate activism in a way that undermines it, but actually materializes in those goals and imaginations.

The 2017 Wesleyan disorientation guide diverges from the other guides significantly in its tone and form. Though the other guides aired out issues students

had with the university, they did not feel as urgent and seemed more geared toward general education by framing their suggestions within the system. Conversely, the 2017 guide approached with a strongly oppositional tone. The whole guide opens with a recap of the previous semester and specifically focuses on Wesleyan administrators Antonio Farias and Michael Roth's collusion with Scott Backer, a perpetrator of sexual abuse (he was accused of propositioning a 15 year-old student for sex at his previous school) and the dean overseeing sexual harassment and assault cases through Title IX. The guide explains how students the previous semester tried to remove Roth and Farias, have been mobilizing to fight for better mental health resources, and created a student union.

In the previous disorientation guides, the sexual violence section contained references to campus resources and basically explained the difficulties in being a survivor and in pursuing any sort of justice or help. They gave brief institutional accounts of how sexual violence has been treated by the university, and then provide a map for the disoriented survivor. The previous guides, essentially served to re-orient students—they were orientations with a twist. The spring 2017 guide took an entirely different approach that essentially abandoned appeals to institutionality. The guide reads, “at a university that consistently fails survivors of sexual and gendered violence, we need to formulate alternative modes of justice, community accountability, and healing that can operate outside of the institutional framework.”¹⁰¹ The guide argues for the application of Transformative Justice (TJ), affectively queers

¹⁰¹ Wesleyan Disorientation Spring 2017, 47.

relations within the university. TJ asks students to engage in an alternative form of relating that rejects university structures of a justice process, and instead supports the ways in which community responsibility can be done through relations.¹⁰² Through the 2017 disorientation guide, students disrupt the way the university shapes normative relations. The university's construction of student's relating regarding sexual assault only perpetuates sexual violence. University systems of adjudication function to deny any opportunity for 'repair' by rejecting queer relating and community care work. So, the 2017 disorientation guide proposes hints at a potential dissonant strategy, but they do not yet work within a dissonant framework.

The disorientation guide movement has not yet run its course, so I turn to other student movements to understand how student activist movements have culminated and what have been their material effects. Understanding a historical and systematic unfolding of student movements with power can identify similarities between the approaches of past movements with disorientation guides and can further aid our understanding of the potential downfalls of disorientation guides. This project thus is greatly aided by the Roderick Ferguson's archival work. I turn to Harney and Moten first for their work on the university, and to begin drawing a more clear method for queer relationality in the university.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Focusing Back on Relations and Attending to Time

Harney and Moten make a poetic, subversive addition to CUS with their *The Undercommons*. Their second essay, “The University and the Undercommons,” of seven within the book, begins to sketch out— in an abstract way— what the ‘undercommons’ actually is. They suggest the ‘undercommons’ is the underground of the university, it is a place of refuge for those who have been constructed as not belonging in the university and a pool in which counter-knowledges circulate, where true ‘study’ happens.¹⁰³ Harney and Moten imagine an ‘undercommons’ to the university that is composed of the ‘maroons’ of the university. They endow it with possibility for radical thinkers who are “in but not of” the university; however the potential they imagine is not so easily accepted or interpreted.¹⁰⁴ Both Moten and Harney write from well-sitting positions within the university— they are both successful professors, performing professionalism— so their message to be in but not of is met with suspicion. Secondly, Harney and Moten’s tone and form complicates the position of their book. The tone and form of their work refuses normative academic writing standards— it jumps around and performs a poetics. The book itself is quite confusing, and its lack of clarity does the work of its goal to navigate alternative modes within the university (it affectively performs the undercommons).

¹⁰³ First, the concept of ‘not belonging’ will be worked through in detail later. Second, their discussion of study actually occurs mainly in a later essay, “Debt and Study.” True study for them does not happen for credit but in the discussion that circulate outside of the commons.

¹⁰⁴ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons : Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Fugitive Planning & Black Study. Wivenhoe ; New York ; Port Watson: Wivenhoe ; New York ; Port Watson : Minor Compositions, 2013: 26.

At the same time, ‘decoding’ the book— figuring out what it actually says by having conversations about it— requires, or at least is significantly aided by, access to the language of and space for academic discourse. Harney and Moten make references to academic texts without much context, placing the onus on the reader to understand major parts of their argument.¹⁰⁵ A frustrating tension emerges between their desire to oppose the commons with their radical call and their taking up of unclear language and academic references without much context.

Harney and Moten take up contradictions involved in refusal which can be read through a dissonant framework. While that tension may block some from embracing their work, it is that exact contradiction (or hypocrisy to put in the most condemning language) Harney and Moten must take up in order to impress their argument and incite a dissonant framework. They highlight the necessity of digging into the contradiction of working within and against the university whilst still working toward abolition, a non-resolution in its imaginable form.¹⁰⁶ I read their approach as a dissonant one— one that embraces unpleasant, unsatisfying contradictions and does not seek immediate or near future resolution. Their work

¹⁰⁵ Of course, those conversations are not limited to university spaces, to the commons; however, Harney and Moten’s use of them does suggest academics are their target audience. It would make sense for that to be the case because that is the language of those who are taking refuge from the commons; but in doing so, *The Undercommons*, performs the exact elitism they aim to critique, or expose as a place of subversion.

¹⁰⁶ Of abolition, Harney and Moten write, “what is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society,”42-3.

supplies this project with an entirely new and provocative understanding of the university. They embrace the possibility of radical thinkers in the university, and that exciting potential can only happen by inhabiting a contradictory position. A radical abolitionist position for Harney and Moten must come with an acceptance of contradiction.

Frustrations for the reader do not end with Harney and Moten's methodology but continue through the materiality of their argument and the possibility of employing their suggestions. Dissonance can keep helping and will actually tie this all back to relationality. A major thesis of their argument is that "the only possible relationship to the university today is a criminal one."¹⁰⁷ Harney and Moten sort through the ways in which deviant people can navigate working and moving in and through the institution. They write:

In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of – this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university.¹⁰⁸

Even if the reader accepts contradiction, how can they actually execute criminal work and survive within the university, maintain their position in the undercommons—which must be formed in contrast to the commons?

In their proposition for criminal relationality— it is the criminal relation, not necessarily a criminal subject. I interrogate that concept through a dissonant framework so as to densify it and provide an understanding of how one can apply it to

¹⁰⁷ Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

sorting through the failures and potentials in student activism.¹⁰⁹ I do not think through a “criminal relationality” literally here, but rather point to how it invokes a temporality which is both constructed and unstable, yet simultaneously sustained and thusly key to understanding how queer relationality and dissonance play into *The Undercommons*.¹¹⁰ Moten and Harney make an explicit invocation of the criminal body who is racialized as black. Black bodies in the university, just as they are understood to be criminal, are also understood as bodies that do not belong. Dissonant frameworks expose and destabilize the construction of the criminally marked subject, and they allow for an embrace of the criminal relation that is a process, a becoming, and a site for performing an alternative relationality— one that queers relations.¹¹¹ That queer relationality not only requires fugitivity from the commons, but also finds potential in an embrace of it. Dissonant frameworks suggest we perform a sustained lack of resonance in order to survive and also find avenues for resistance that refuses

¹⁰⁹ The construction of a criminal subject is crucial to expose the white supremacist logics undergirding the university. The criminal subject hints at the material consequences which are steeped in the circulation of racist discourse and a history of racist practices. In other words, the racialized aspect of the criminal is integral to investigating the depths of enmeshment between the university and racism; however, for my entry into dissonance, I focus on the criminal through its relationality to systems, which is raced, and classed, and queer. In other words, investigating the construction of the criminal in conjunction with the university in depth does not fit within the confines of this project because it requires entering into a discussion of the Prison Industrial Complex and a deeper genealogy of the construction of criminality.

¹¹⁰ Harney and Moten do draw out those connections between the prison and the university to criminality through understanding the university as one of many ‘correctional institutions.’ They say all institutions are correctional and specifically the university and prisons are exaggeratedly so.

¹¹¹ Here a queerness of relating complicates queer as a term.

incorporation, which functions in parallel to Harney and Moten's argument. Harney and Moten do not say exist outside to the university. Their lack of belonging is not the result of a criminal *act* but rather a durational relationality of criminality— one that occupies the temporality of a dissonant framework and that finds a position not entirely separate from the commons but under them.¹¹²

My engagement with *The Undercommons* does not focus on literal interpretations but thinks about how, through dissonance, one can use it to imagine queering relationality within the university. My method works with Nick Mitchell who explains in an interview with *Undercommoning*:

When I think about the undercommons not necessarily as an existing coalition or collectivity we can bring to bear, but as a set of questions about how to use the institution and how to refuse the ways in which the question of our relationship to the institution and how to refuse the ways in which the question of our relationships to the institution is given to us in advance, I think can be an extremely generative formulation.¹¹³

The Undercommons does not provide us any sort of guide to resistance within the university; rather, it provokes questions with which we can work and apply to questions and problems posed by CUS and student activism. This thesis does not turn to Harney and Moten for a stand alone piece but for the skeleton of a methodology to approaching questions proposed by critical university studies scholars. Harney and Moten's concepts are helpful tools for connecting the navigation of the University

¹¹² Through this understanding I suggest Harney and Moten's call to refuse interpellation is not actually an impossible call to exist outside of the system of subject formation, but a spinning of it toward an occupation of a dissonant stance.

¹¹³ Mitchell, Nick. "The Fantasy and Fate of Ethnic Studies in an Age of Uprisings: An Interview with Nick Mitchell." *The Undercommoning* (201

(and experiencing of the University) to my discussion of dissonance— they can function as a text through which we can profuse dissonance. Reading Harney and Moten through dissonance makes us ask about and push back on stable, consonant understandings of temporality and relationality in approaches to the university.

In his seminal CUS book, *The Reorder of Things*, Ferguson discusses the student movements of the sixties and seventies in order to map a new form of power that he argues has emerged in reaction to/ formed alongside student movements.¹¹⁴ Ferguson’s argument provides an understanding of how power functions to learn from and work with the university, so as to understand the position of the university in ‘larger’ power working. Ferguson explains how many student movements were "founded on contradiction: the dynamism of minority communities, on the one hand, and the desire for institutional forms that would ultimately restrict and arrest their dynamism, on the other."¹¹⁵ Ferguson offers an explanation for why student movements from the sixties and seventies failed or sizzled out by taking up Foucault to work through how power learned from student movements to reformulate. Ferguson writes “The Lumumba-Zapata experiment, like many of the other minority student movements of the day, represented an attempt to maneuver

¹¹⁴ With his analysis, he follows in line with two disciplinary (the discipline being CUS) standards: 1) to place the university as not isolated but in fact a system that is not simply shaped by but itself shapes epistemic epistemological constructions, and 2) to engage with the different forms of institutional relating— appeals to institutionality and alternative engagements with institutions.

¹¹⁵ Ferguson, Roderick A. *The Reorder of Things : The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference*. Minneapolis: Minneapolis : University Of Minnesota Press, 2012: 104.

difference for oppositional purposes.”¹¹⁶ Ferguson argues the university incorporates minoritarian difference in order to quell liberatory potential and also take it up for its own purposes. That oppositionality was founded upon identitarian (Black and Latina/o struggles) difference. Though not inherently a problem to form a coalition based on identity, such a coalition must be attentive to dissonant relationality or it falls to the incorporative strategies of power.

In the Lumumba-Zapata movement there is an intent to take up resources, but the intent is not to steal. If we do not follow Harney and Moten’s warning, their resemblance of a prescription for action— that is, if there is no attendance to the perspective of subversive movement through the university constructed by Moten and Harney— movements like those discussed by Ferguson play out. Reading those movements through the lens of Moten and Harney, exposes how they fail not only through their appeal to institutionality— though that certainly is a problem— but also in a larger, perhaps more nuanced way: they do not take up the proper relation. The student movements tried to take university resources, but they did not try to steal them. The university grants their demand for the third college, but it does not function in the way they envisioned. I read the downfall of this liberatory mission as failing due to its institutionality, but mostly understand it failing for its lack of a durational criminality. Harney and Moten’s is not your typical deviantly transgressive approach to the university it’s actual criminality. That serves as an entry point to interpreting their text as an argument for a queer relationality (functioning through a dissonant

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

framework which in of itself carries a specific temporality and affect). And, if they are not read through a dissonant framework, two important lessons may be forgotten when performing criminal relation. Contradictions may be abandoned out of fear they cause movements to fail and the durational temporality involved in maintaining and working through dissonance may not be considered. Both of these are ultimately necessary for student movements.

A Non-Conclusion

Ferguson concludes his diagnosis of the new biopower and incorporation of minoritarian difference with a consequent prognosis: sexuality is, and will be, the next administrative focus of the university

We might think of sexuality's engagement with the twists and turns of administration as archival powers's latest affair with minority culture and difference. As such, sexuality inherits the universe of problems outlined in the preceding chapters, a universe established out o power's negotiations with the upheavals of the student movements around race and gender.¹¹⁷

So disorientation guides and their work to disorient sexual violence administration are urgent. Queer studies, can look to Ferguson's framework not only because it posits sexuality as the next frontier for university administration, but also because it speaks to the struggle an ultimate failure of a movement fed by the desire to engage in an alternative reationality with the university. The Lumumba-Zapata fails to queer relations not only because, according to Harney and Moten it is not criminal, and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 209.

also, according to dissonance, it does not explore contradiction or aim for durational lack of resolve. Disorientation guides have to learn from that.

What all of these parts together tell us is essentially to not think of disorientation guides as finding a conclusion. Disorientation guides can serve as the initiator or adjustment to a relationality. They can occupy both the temporal logics of a movement concerned with the present as it is composed by an assemblage of the wreckage of the past and the future. Any conclusion or solution through disorientation guides would serve to reorient relations toward a normativity new in name but historically consistent in logic. I argue for the use of disorientation guides to think of how horizontal relations can do queer relationality— and for the use of them to execute that— but also how they can queer vertical relations to the University through a dissonant engagement informed by the language and questions asked by Harney and Moten. All of that leads to an understanding of the University as a potential site through which dissonant frameworks complicate relationality and queerness as an identity, through its specific tools geared toward constructing relations and enforcing relations through admin.

Coda Dissonant Debrief

The specific affects, tones, and materializations of activist strategies and theoretical concepts, which I have aligned with the temporality and characteristic of dissonance, give this project its material stakes, urgency, and titillating potentiality. At the same time, I have gestured, throughout my work, to the emphasis I place on queer relationality's destabilizing affects. Through this project's attention to queer relationality (the doing of queerness through relations and the queering of relations themselves) in conjunction with the fact that queer relationality (or for that matter any relationality) spans institutional spaces and times, the potentiality of dissonance as a framework to deploy can remain a close companion to queer relationality, extending far past the reaches of this paper's archive and exploration. Thus, in keeping with a dissonant framework, the question to pose in this coda that refuses an ending is: in what ways is the dissonant framework destabilized, enhanced, or limited as it travels with queer relationality beyond the specific context this paper address and in which it was written?

The possibilities are unimaginable, unwritable, and thus, never graspable. They are fueled by excitement. Activity emerges from excitement, and dissonance incites movement. I have found great pleasure in seeking confusion and have sought to incite excitement for destabilizing in the institutions and contexts I have inhabited. My project has worked with dissonance, but has no means exhausted it. Not only can

dissonance enter other sites, but it can also be rebooted with more attention to other defining fields as long as remains relational, contradictory, and durational status. At the end of the first chapter, I briefly mentioned detailed how a dissonant framework can provide a way to read when identity and the claiming of queerness is not in tune with the material reality of the subject who is claiming and when a queer subject conceived as in process moves in radically dissonant ways. I gestured to both of those possibilities throughout the project; however, I never engaged much with the complexity of that system. There are nuances to dissonance with which I could not engage, but they are nevertheless tantalizing possibilities to ponder.

The problems dissonance poses to itself are already introduced through the current gaps of this project. The questions continue to multiple. Dissonance cannot be glorified. Dissonance incorporates pain and can describe material, corporeal sufferings. My project does not intend to put a positive spin on that. I do not propose dissonance to all subjects-in-process. Though becoming through dissonance serves the urge to explore potentiality, dissonance does not have to be so integral to one's ideology. Dissonance can be taken up for very specific projects, and abandoned if it no longer suits them. A more thorough exploration of dissonance would give a better account of that pain, and its deep, bodily experience and affective presence.

When dissonance destabilizes identity or structural understanding of relation, it can be jarring. If 'wholly' employed, a dissonant framework does not allow for a new resolve. When there is no place to turn to, no where to arrive at, that can be the feeling of the loss of legibility which could be tied up in identitarian logics that

suppress the act of becoming. And with its lack of resolve, dissonance denies the possibility to stop moving, to stop becoming. Dissonance destabilizes notions of identity, and through that, destabilization provides constant becoming, being and doing, as the only alternative.

In the course of writing this paper, dissonance has consumed me. It has been my playmate and kin. I have submerged myself in dissonance for this project and can attest to the titillating dissatisfaction as a result. Through this project I have fed my confusion and found queerness in the process of becoming with and from it. While I remain deeply skeptical of the transformative potential for academic work intended for credit, I do also embrace the disruptions that occur in and through it. If not transformative, dissonance and its negotiation with queer relationality can be disruptive.

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