

*But what is an eternity of damnation
compared to an infinity of pleasure
in a single second?
-Charles Baudelaire¹*

¹ Baudelaire, Charles, and Louise Varèse. 1970. Paris spleen, 1869. [New York]: [New Directions Pub. Corp.].

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--Blaise

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A Note on Queer Theory

Queer studies emerged as a radical and transgressive field made to interrogate the normative modes of understanding sexuality and gender that had been dominating the Left into the 1980s and 90s. The field itself is one constantly questioning its own intentions, definitions, and movements, one that is invested in creative ambition and steadily flowing discourses of weirdness, unintelligibility, and, of course, queerness. The term queer studies was coined initially for Teresa DeLauretis' conference at UC Santa Cruz in 1990. Since then, the field has developed and flourished, and has made its way into liberal arts campuses across the West with self-contained and interdisciplinary departments of its own.²

² Gary L. Anderson and Kathryn G. Herr, "Queer Theory," *The Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, 2007, 1188.

DECADENT DEPARTURES: THE QUEEREST DIRECTION

Is ecstasy possible in destruction?

--Arthur Rimbaud³

The New York City club scene of the late 1980's and early 1990s invokes images of sequined bodies writhing together in dark spaces, consuming the incessant beat of what was the start of the house music genre, and of rolled up currency held between heavily powdered nostrils and grimy bathroom countertops. The bodies acting in these sweaty, glittery images were often queer ones, children of the night longing for the beauty and escape found in a costume, a cocktail or in someone else's body cavity. These images are also invoked in *Disco Bloodbath*, the autobiographical account of the infamous lives of the New York City club kid James St. James.

“I remember once, Michael had a pool party and bought lots of little kiddie pools and filled them up with water, and after the ecstasy kicked in, everybody got naked. And Michael—buoyed by all the attention, and so carried away by his own spunk—broke the main water pipes and flooded the basement until it really was like a pool: a giant, filthy, germ-ridden cesspool filled with hundreds of naked drug addicts. Now if THAT isn't fun—I don't know what is!”

Embodied in this quotation is a queer embrace of the pleasureable, the disastrous, and the decidedly irresponsible. Michael is driven by his own pursuit of fun, a pursuit that destroys the basement they occupy. The other bodies are quite literally experiencing their own drug induced ecstasy in this “filthy, germ-ridden

³ Arthur Rimbaud, *Selected Poems and Letters* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)

cesspool”, a makeshift pool invoking the ethos of queerness; weirdness, hedonism and an implicit refusal of the codifications of the social order.

Temporally and historically aligned with the club kid scene and ethos is the familiar memory of New York City’s 1980s and 1990s junkie laden lower east side, filled with bodies injecting, hustling, and embodying socially stigmatized sensations of ecstasy and consumption. Although not necessarily queer, this period of history and the lifestyle I am invoking within it, does contain the queerness I see as politically useful. To further illustrate this, in addition to *Disco Bloodbath*, I turn to the novel *Zippermouth* by Laurie Weeks.

“I’m sorry you had to see me OD like that when we were having such a good time! I don’t know why I took all that dope. I guess the fistful of Valium impaired my judgement...I guess it is weird that I’m on Prozac AND Ritalin AND Valium AND heroin AND drunk!” (40)

“God I love everything, I thought, gazing out my window at passerby several stories below...Love leaked from my pituitary and converted on contact with my bloodstream into panic and I was swelling up, threatening to leave the ground and float off fast. I needed a cigarette, the tap-dancing kind, three feet long.” (48)

The narrator, fueled by her own psychological mania and the euphoria of drugs, exudes a queer narcissistic hedonism coupled with an ecstatic resistance to heteronormative sociality. Her overdose is not mourned but celebrated with humor, and her irrational, socially irresponsible pursuit of pleasure does not fill her with all encompassing shame but with ecstasy. These utterances are not composed but disorganized and playful and their content is immature and reprehensible insofar as it is not oriented towards personal or social responsibility or the narrator’s future.

These images act as departures for rethinking the radical potentiality of the

queer body as excessive, antinormative, and more concerned with present bliss than the interests of their futures, futures which are neither guaranteed nor necessarily different than the present. This temporal rejection of the future affectively rejects standards of the collective social consciousness. Unapologetically irrational and unwilling to accede to the norms of the surrounding city, they indulge in their excess, their downright queering of leisure, embodiment, and subjectivity. Indeed, *Disco Bloodbath* and *Zippermouth* both display queer characters who embody queer asociality; the queer refusal of the social order and its varying modes of obligation.

The *social* to which I refer here and in other places throughout my work encompasses both the familiar presiding structures and institutions under which we live, love, and work, as well as the ideologies, personal commitments, and collective temporal and spatial relations we absorb into our psyches and perform through our (in)actions. As Emile Durkheim explains in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, the individual's idealization of the collective consciousness (the social) and their consequential indebtedness to its values, encompasses the spatial obligation the individual has to the reification of the collective. (471) This spatial obligation manifests on the temporal axis as well; the individual is not only obligated to the collective in its immediate present, but to its historical legacy and its future potentialities. In short, the individual must comport to the order of the collective consciousness for the purpose of its present and future maintenance, and for the acknowledgement of its past.

These personal, sociopolitical, sociocultural dynamics have not always dominated modes of being, and rather, emerged contemporaneously with the

delineation of the public (politics and other collective institutions) and the private (the family and matters of the individual and domestic) realms, realms which have since been consolidated into the social itself. This consolidation is visible in sociopolitical movements and policies such as, reproductive politics, the welfare state, child protective services etc. Helpful for understanding the political/ideological implications of these institutions is tracing the origins of the development and separation of the private and the public, as Hannah Arendt does in the section of *The Human Condition* entitled *The Public and the Private Realm*. Situated historically in Greece, Arendt characterizes the private as the realm of the family, the woman, the child and the slave. This space was bound by obligation, work, “force and violence”, and servitude. The public, which was born out of the development of the polis or political sphere, was exclusively for men. Rather than by the violence and obligation of the private, the public was organized and structured through systems of “words and understanding”. (26) The men in the public were allowed considerable freedom, freedom from the obligations and necessities of the household/private. The woman and the child, however, remained at home, victims of rules, labor, and responsibility.

As I iterated previously, today, we do not see the same distinction between the public and the private as it existed in the Ancient Greece Arendt discusses. Today we are completely enmeshed in and ruled by what can be thought of as “the social” realm and its order. The social is in essence the command and violence of the household expanded to control not just the private sphere, but the entire body of private spheres, which make up what we call “society”. The social is invested in policing with violence, obligation, and necessity in the same way that the Ancient

Greek household was. Based on both a spatial and a temporal obligation to its own maintenance, the social casts subjects uninterested in this preservation as bad subjects.

One can identify this in nearly every familiar social institution. The expansion of the nation-state to rule and dominate even the most minute and intimate details of our lives forces us to feel as though we are responsible for the benefit of the present and future of the social as a whole, a feeling which is deeply internalized and manifested in political and social ideology.

The shift to the social is derived from the wish of the private sphere to cease their own suffering; a wish granted through the focus on justice, not freedom. This wish is again mirrored in the politics of the Left today. Social responsibility, justice, obligation to one another, and the push for higher commitment to the social order make the current state of Leftist politics constrained and lackluster. On the other side of the political and ideological spectrum one might suggest we have the Right, and in many respects this is true. However, after presenting the Left as a political ideology invested in control of the *individual* for the benefit of *society*, it is easy to identify the Right as invested in the control of *society* for the benefit of the *individual*. Separate from both of these political worlds is the radical world of the asocial; the resistance to any form of social order, control, or obligation. It is only within the asocial where radical (and for my purposes, queer and anti-capitalist) thought exists. The asocial is the political position away from economic necessity, the economic necessity that takes the form of production by laboring subjects. The asocial positions itself away from the prioritization of necessity all together. The asocial is interested in

freedom, not responsibility, relationality, not sociality. With regards to labor, the asocial is concerned not with the creation of jobs, the increased efficiency of human labor or the expansion of the welfare state. The asocial is more invested in a politics of zero-work/full automation, or the technological advancements necessary to induce the total automation of labor, the lack of work for everyone. The asocial is a move towards freedom and risk taking, individuality and pleasure, beyond the endless depersonalization and categorization of the social bureaucracy, and a move pushing against and away from spatial and temporal notions of obligation to the collective consciousness.

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With this understanding of the social and its omnipresence in mind, one might assume that within Leftist and post-structuralist/anti-capitalist theory there exists an asocial turn or analysis that runs deep in a discipline so invested in progression, deconstruction, and radical vision. However, in my first chapter, I illustrate the numerous ways in which notable, even canonized Leftist social theory remains wedded to the social's obligations and strictures. Indeed, even amongst those theorists who were both lauded and criticized for operating within and producing too radical a discourse, I have found deep seated attachments to values of the social order and its spatial/temporal modes of domination. However, these same theorists are met with critical anxiety due to their hints of asociality, an asociality, which does not in fact, exist. Chapter One, The Left: Asocial Anxiety discusses the discourses of these theorist's and their critics.

My second chapter focuses on the specificities of social attachment found

within queer studies and queer theory, critical discourses within which a commitment to radical breakings and antinormative theoretical trajectories is celebrated and is the basis upon which the discipline was created. Rather than resisting the social and its inevitable reification of the normative, the queer theorists I deconstruct in this chapter continually fall back onto the safety of the social order. Indeed, Chapter Two, *The Queer Cult of Collectivity*, reads prominent queer discourse for its fear of ideological disavowal of the social.

The third and final chapter makes a break from critical discourse analysis and moves towards a synthetic, creative mode. Understanding queer theory's aversion to asociality, the chapter introduces to the reader the fundamental theorists of the asocial turn. Following their introduction I synthesize their discourse with that of anti-humanist work abolition Marxism arguing for the two disciplines' logical and dynamic synchronicity, a synchronicity necessary to attend to for the continuation of the queerest and most anti-capitalist production of knowledge. In Chapter Three, *Not Gay As in Utopia, Queer As In Fuck Labor*, I argue that the asocial turn embodies the logics of anti-humanist Marxism, and such Marxism, in fact, embodied the ultimate queerness before queer studies evolved into a discipline.

1

ASOCIAL ANXIETY

“Radical”, “revolutionary”, “jargon”, “impractical”, “social equality”, and “deconstruction” are terms commonly associated with the academic pursuit of philosophical truths and theories-- Left theory, succinctly. To the liberal intelligentsia, these are words used to combat the ideologies of the conservative Right, and are central to the lexicon of the edifying liberal arts university. They are words that contain within them the spirit of hope for a fundamental newness in society. These words are inherently *social* and adherence to them is constitutive of Left ideology. Those outside the precincts of the university, or of a different political stripe, expectedly, hear these words and cringe, think of childish dreaming, elitism, and dangerous disruptions to the institutions through/by which society is constructed and sustained. Both reactions are valid and even necessary for an understanding and analysis of the social. Still, removed from the bubble of academia and the university, and at times, within them, critics of the Left find phrases like “childish dreaming”, “elitism”, and “dangerous”, disastrous. Reasons for this reaction extend beyond the typical liberal reluctance to affirm radical politics. In truth, many who critique theories which deploy the affects of these words would self identify as radical more often than not. Their anxieties stem not from radicality but inhere in discourses that do not predicate themselves upon an ideological allegiance to the social order. Indeed, there is a spectre haunting the Left, the spectre of asociality.

The discourse analyses in this chapter are occupied with this haunting

spectre. From within an ideologically Leftist academic circle, discursive hints of social irresponsibility are met with fierce anxiety and reproach. After all, social responsibility characterizes the Left and distinguishes it from its conservative adversaries. Insinuations of asociality and anti-humanism within the Left are antithetical to its program and elicit full on panic. The following constitute a moment the Left feels besieged by its own people.

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One such Left theorist whose work in feminism and gender studies elicited anxiety during its initial reception was the highly-notable and ubiquitously cited, Judith Butler, philosopher and professor of Linguistics and Rhetoric at UC Berkeley. In a 1999 issue of *The New Republic Online*, Martha Nussbaum, herself a philosopher and professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, published “The Professor of Parody”, an article directly targeting Professor Butler and her works.

Nussbaum introduces Butler as “an American feminist” trained in philosophy and one who is regarded as “a major thinker about gender, power, and the body”. (2) Nussbaum cites as Butler’s influences the forerunners and inventors of modern critical theory: Foucault, Freud, Althusser, Gayle Rubin, Jacques Lacan, J.L. Austin, and Saul Kripke. (2) It would be difficult to find professors who do not regularly refer to and build upon the work of these figures central to the practice of theory. Nussbaum acknowledges Butler’s intelligence and concedes that her ideas and language operate outside the easy grasp of an uneducated layperson, calling them “ponderous and obscure”. (2)

Using Butler as a pointed example, Nussbaum generally argues that

feminist theory in the West is entering a “disquieting trend,” one that ignores international feminist and queer issues, and, more importantly to Nussbaum, one that makes a methodological shift from focusing on “the material side of life” to focusing on what she calls “a type of verbal and symbolic politics”-- a politics Nussbaum claims barely affects or relates to “the real situation of real women”. (2) Nussbaum is interested in engagement with “real” issues and “practical struggles”, those which she identifies mostly in legal reform. (1) Indeed, Nussbaum would rather Butler write about the experiences of “real infants” as they become gendered beings in the social world rather than use academic “jargon”. (8) She characterizes Butler’s works as “abstract pronouncements, floating high above all matter”, maintaining, without question, that such descriptions are inherently and indisputably unfavorable. (8) However, is unintelligibility or inaccessibility of discourse actually causing Nussbaum the most anxiety? The underlying cause for Nussbaum’s critique is Butler’s use of excessively academic language, excessive to the point of *indulgence*, a mode of being whose quality has been predetermined as negative by nearly all sides of the political spectrum.

Nussbaum reprimands Butler’s theoretical content as well, castigating Butler’s ideas of gender norm subversion as subversion for subversion’s sake, lacking the proper moral codification of subversion and therefore potentially ignoring prescriptions of “norms of fairness, decency, and dignity”, which could lead to “bad behavior” and “amoral anarchist politics”. (10,12) From these condescending puritanical valuations of the law, the “real”, tangible, grounded discourse, and morality, it is clear that the unintelligibility/immateriality and potential amorality of

Butler's and other queer/feminist academics is deeply troubling to Nussbaum and her notions of valuable activist or political work. Indeed, Butler manifests as a belligerent within the Left as a result of her discursive threat of immaterialist anti-humanism.

I begin with this critique in order to highlight queer theory's specific location within Left theory and to emphasize the fundamental objections, which follow Left theory through and through. Perhaps such disparagement is expected in response to the likes of Butler, after all, queer theory is predicated upon antinormativity. However, Butler is not alone in inciting such provocations. Regardless of interest in queerness, antinormativity, or any related frameworks, theory emerging from the Left faces denunciation consistently, denunciation sufficiently sourced from both the Right and Left, and denunciation based on theory's frequent asociality.

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Illustrative of the Left's abhorrence of academics straying from the dogma of the social is *Theory's Empire: An Anthology of Dissent*. The anthology contains a collection of essays, published in 2005, by a host of academics politically situated on the Left who collectively take issue with the state of Leftist academic theory; accusing it of excess, of creating the profession of the theorist, of relying on buzz words, of being irrational, of promoting academic elitism, and of stagnating political action, all qualms easily locatable in the anthology's table of contents. Nussbaum's critique of Butler in 1999 would fit perfectly into this anthology. Including Nussbaum would clarify not only the anthology's anti-Left, but its anti-queer stance.

The anthology's introduction claims that "theoretical discussions of

literature [have] become stagnant” and that theory itself has become perhaps more important or more valued than its analytical function—the ancillary has become primary, so the lament goes. (1,2) The introduction also pays much attention to the subject of the political relevance or utility of theory. The Left’s disavowal of the useless is seen here not only in regard to products of its critique, but to the methods and propagation of critique and analysis as a whole. What vexes the contributors to this anthology, however, is their perception of theory’s excessive, irresponsible, and potentially masturbatory tendencies. Indeed, the introduction reproaches theory for its “excesses”, its bids for absolution from responsibility, and its lack of attention to the practical, or perhaps more accurately, the sociomaterial. (2) Here, only within the anthology’s introduction, a deep attachment to the social and its core tenets is valorized and coveted. Indeed, phrases such as “nihilistic tone”, “grandiose ambition”, and “self-perpetuating glut” are used as weapons to discredit the methods through which Leftist theory operates. (4,2,7) The introduction asserts that theory need not turn to the past or classics, but must turn towards open discussion and logical argumentation. (7) The editors make clear their position on the “pretentiousness, general lack of seriousness” of theory and prioritize “logic, reason, and evidence”, concepts the editors believe are “indispensable to fruitful academic exchange” regardless of their fraught status as objective, or even, the fraught status of objectivity as a whole. (7,13) The pleas of the introduction read as a polemic for a legible, intelligible turn, vested in the bounds of the already inscribed notions of theoretical positivist structuring. Such reactionary gestures are bound to malign the transgressive and nonnormative desires of queered discourse.

The section *Theory as Surrogate Politics*, and specifically, the piece entitled *Oppositional Opposition*, criticizes theory's supposed lack of attention to hands on, "laborious" political action. (451) Harold Fromm adds to this critique in his essay and states that the professional academic hypocritically consumes technology in a "capitalist" manner while espousing and writing with Marxist political ideology. (455) Lamenting both theory's lack of grassroots action and its tendency to participate in the structures it critiques is an inherently contradictory set of denouncements. The emphasis on the more valuable labor of grassroots action illustrates a deep attachment to traditionally capitalist notions of productivity, and the Marxist narrative of revolutionary-striving. This is bourgeois-ification of Marx. There is an implication that the work of academic theorizing is more pleasurable, less useful, and therefore worthy of chastisement. Considering this capitalist position, critiquing academics for consuming goods is problematic at best and hypocritical at most. The critics are wed to capitalist logic even whilst shaming its participants. Furthermore, Fromm's critique is based on social logics of responsibility for the other and tangible notions of productivity.

Following Fromm's essay is Jeffrey Wallen's, titled, *Criticism as Displacement*, which offers a similar commentary. Wallen accuses the figure of the academic critic of "self- absorption" and of producing work lacking in attention to "social concerns". (477,478) Correctively, Wallen posits an ideal for theory as "socially engaged, politically effective, democratic, and liberatory". (479) Though he recognizes theory's attempts at uncovering hierarchies of power, he takes umbrage with contemporary theory's pattern of the mere exposition of "previously overlooked

signs of domination and inequality”. (480) Wallen understands this pattern as intellectually insufficient because it mostly elicits responses of confirmation, not interrogation. Again, we see his anxiety expressed as the ethicality of the self-congratulatory academic. The criticisms by the anthology’s authors such as Fromm and Wallen and Nussbaum are eerily similar. Both worry that in its tendency towards individual congratulation, academia is veering away from the spirit of collective responsibility and towards intellectual narcissism. The spectre of the social order’s moral and ethical codes marks a return of the repressed in the authors of this anthology. The spectre, which I identified at the start of my critique, haunts Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent. The faux adult reasonableness of this volume is a major instance of the social’s cloying grip.

In *The Rise and Fall of Practical Criticism*, a title already invoking the emphasis on the pragmatic and socially tangible, Morris Dickstein attends to deconstruction as theoretical method. Dickstein’s understanding of deconstruction contends that its rise to popularity through the works of Derrida, “gave rise to an intensely literary style, an artifact style, that mimics the self referential involutions of art’s relation to itself”. (64) Within this quotation, Dickstein’s distaste for self referentiality is already present, indicating a general distaste for modes of thought which do not attend to the greater social order. His tendency towards sociality becomes undeniable as he states, “The style of deconstruction reflects its rejection of the public sphere and the politics of liberal humanism”. (64) Clearly, Dickstein avows both liberalism humanism and its methodological attention to the public sphere. Implicit in humanism is the notion of responsibility to the other as well as the

maintenance of the social, here referred to as the public sphere. As explained through an analysis of Arendt's conception of the public and private spheres in the introduction, the social is the body comprised of the private and public's combination. Dickstein's reference to deconstruction's rejection of the public sphere suggests his own valuation of the acceptance of and responsibility for the social. Dickstein's valuation is again made obvious as he characterizes deconstruction as an opportunity for "self-display" and as an example of "the abdication of responsibility" and "cheerful nihilism". (76) Again, he references nihilism as in direct opposition to humanism and irresponsibility as in direct opposition to preserving the social.

Departing from the *Theory as Surrogate Politics* section, the section entitled *Restoring Reason* makes, perhaps, an even more obvious, potentially more conservative, critique. As suggested in the title, the section's thesis demands "the restoration of rational inquiry" to theory, a demand easily dismissible providing that those targeted on the Left have not chosen traditional modes of epistemology implied by the invocation of rationality. (525) Rationality implicitly denotes a positivist ideology more appropriate for the sciences. Nonetheless, the anthology's editors identify "assaults on rational inquiry" and caution of the "self-destructive potential" of such assaults. (525)

Not surprisingly, noted linguist and scholar Noam Chomsky contributes an essay in this section entitled simply, *Rationality/Science*. Denouncements here are based mostly on the methodology of theory, claiming its intellectual dishonesty and propensity for logical error. Chomsky realizes the already established critiques of the limiting nature of thought patterns of rationality and logic and acknowledges them,

only to continue to champion their value for knowledge production. He effectively mocks theoretical ventures into identity based readings and analyses, positing, “perhaps it is another inadequacy of mine, but when I read a scientific paper, I can’t tell whether the author is white or is male”. (535) Chomsky is clearly invested in the possibility of a separation of the author from their content. He simultaneously lauds science for its capacity to succeed at such a separation while subtly patronizing to theory for its lack of capacity to do so.

Indeed, Chomsky disguises his fear of a devaluation of rational methods with concern for the potential of “irrational” methods to serve the powerful. Specifically, he credits rational inquiry with a potential for populist use, calling the Left’s distaste for rationality a deprivation of “the joys of understanding and insight” for “oppressed people”. (535) His anxiety is palpable at the close of the essay at which point he warns of “a path that leads directly to disaster for people who need help” should further abandon of rational inquiry continue. (536) It is useful to question the honesty of this professed populist concern, however, and consider instead that Chomsky simply fears an extinction of the rationality-based methods he employs.

Moving away from critiques based in methodology, the Anthology brings the reader to a section topically oriented around the academy’s analysis and utilization of social identity categories, aptly called, *Identities*. The introduction notes a contradiction in the way identity is discussed in academia, locating this contradiction between the simultaneous rejection of “stable” identities and their continued use and analysis under the title “subject positions”. (397) The editors

denounce identity as “either a shield or a bludgeon”, “short circuiting thought and replacing it with contradictions”. (397) The introduction even addresses identity as “a fairy tale...in which every character is situated in a place in the hierarchy of identities, while the value of individual contributions is judged on the basis of identity claims”. (397) The editors feel threatened, clearly, by a moral superiority that they understand as implicitly associated with identity politics or the plain use of identity as an axis for theoretical analysis/critique. Notions of varied identity break down the collective into multiplicities of subjectivities, which make the ethos of collective community more difficult to discern and manage.

In this section, Elaine Marks’s essay *Feminism’s Perverse Effects* attends to what the author feels is a hyper focus on the identifications of “racism, sexism and anti-Semitism” within literature as a means of constructing a new and limiting discursive practice. (420) Marks herself is a faculty member in both Jewish and Women’s Studies programs, and understands the conservative implications of her point of view, yet maintains that practices of reading that operate through factual and content based identification of sexism and other modes of oppression are lacking in literary authority and accuracy. (421,423) Indeed, Marks asserts that students who utilize this framework of analysis are revealing their “difficulty” with reading literary texts. (423) Rather than allow for a multiplicity of reading styles, Marks advocates for a more academically traditional method of literary analysis that condemns the now prevalent use of feminist reading practices.

Operating within a similar discursive framework, Lee Siegel’s *Queer Theory, Literature, and The Sexualization of Everything* apprehends queer studies for

its apparent reduction of philosophical and theoretical ventures to solely the sexual. Bluntly, Siegel writes, “we amount to more than penises and vaginas”. (424) Having already shown criticisms of immateriality and abstraction, the anthology’s editors still manage to take issue with Siegel, whose work focuses clearly on the material body. This inconsistency indicates that it is asociality, which characterizes the critic’s main concern, not materiality or immateriality.

Though Siegel begins with such a simplistic denouncement, he does understand the intentions of queer studies to create “a unifying theory exposing connections between sexual oppression, economic inequality, and colonialist domination”. (426) Still, he characterizes queer theory’s attention to the material body and its specific effects on the deployment of power and oppression as an “academic obsession”. (425) This focus on the idea of obsession is again mentioned with regards to queer theory’s attention and valorization of transgression as a means of subversion. Indeed, he labels the “obsession” with transgression a “route to power”. (427) It is this emphasis on the supposed goal of queer theory to attain academic authority and power that produces Siegel’s core anxieties. He contends that should this academic focus on sexuality and gender continue, it will fully replace other modes of critical analysis, acting as a discursive monopoly and behaving through the mechanisms which, queer theory originally intended to combat.

With regards to queer theorists in general, Siegel boldly states, “they are democracy’s dark side”. (433) He continues to uphold this criticism but provides more specificity; “The more you read the queers, the more their idea of ‘queer’ sounds like a new kind of oppressive ‘normalcy’”. (438) Though this appears to be a

critique of homonormativity and queer assimilationist politics, Siegel is specifically referring to the theoretical ventures and reading practices of queer studies. He is concerned with the potential for queer readings to become a standard mode of academic critique on par authoritatively with others. Still, the close of his essay brings us to a different, more interesting, criticism. Siegel firstly accuses queer theory of “sexual recrimination”, and follows by characterizing this recrimination as “a more instantly gratifying form of sexual indulgence”. (433) Moving away from accusations of non-democratic mechanisms, Siegel moves to an attack on the potentially indulgent nature of counteraccusations made on behalf of queer studies. A field predicated upon sex, sexuality, and pleasure, would presumably take no offense to such an attack. To close the essay, however, Seigel appeals to the logics that, perhaps, queer studies aficionados would understand; “sexualizing all of life takes all of life out of sex”. (440) If only this had been his argument from the start of the essay. It is clear that this final critique functions as an appeal to pathos, one last attempt to elicit an explanation or apology from the queer studies’ champions.

In the most explicit attack on asociality and on the de-emphasis on the subject in the *Dissent* anthology, Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller in *The Power and Limits of Literary Theory* aim “to counter some of the key claims and attitudes of anti-humanist literary theory”. (78) Like many arguments of this kind, that of these authors is prefaced with a strong distaste for constructivist anti-humanist criticism which, to Freadman and Miller, lacks a proper commitment to the individual and their agency and which does not “secur[e]...those values and conditions that are commensurate with humane and fulfilling lives”. (79) This commitment to individual

agency is seen as a necessary component to the practice of literary theory as well as to “social emancipation”, a term which presumably implies Leftist liberatory political pursuits. (79) Indeed, Freadman and Miller stress both the ethicality of theoretical attention to individual agency and its potential to produce an “emancipated subject”. (79) Through an Althusserian framework however, the notion of an emancipated subject cannot possibly exist. The notion of the subject is predicated upon the subject’s *subjection* under the institutions that Freadman, Miller, and all theorists on the Left seek to change or destroy altogether. (Of course, the difference in opinion present between these authors and Althusser is not surprising considering that Althusser is decidedly opposed to humanist theory.)

Leaving this point aside for now, as it will be dealt with at length in the following chapters, I will move to the authors’ contention that “[t]he ethical is presupposed in the political and that the ethical entails particular political imperatives”. (88) If humanism and ethics are consistent with social emancipation as Freadman and Miller have already stated, how is it also true and consistent to assert the ethical necessity of politics? Specifically, if the authors have voiced their interest in social emancipation, why make use of the political for the defense of ethics? The social and the political are hardly separate entities, and the author’s investment in social emancipation presumes an investment in political emancipation. To assert a valorization of both socio-political emancipation and ethics which are “presupposed in the political” is a logical inconsistency, which clearly demonstrates the authors’ fear of a break from the social. To Freadman and Miller, social emancipation merely consists of a neoliberal adjustment of the institutional oppressions individuals face.

The extent to which they rely on individual agency for this emancipation mirrors a neoliberal logic devoid of radical breakings or deconstructions.

2

THE QUEER CULT OF COLLECTIVITY

After setting forth the variety of attacks on Left theory and fears of its trajectories, discourses, and methods, one might suppose that queer theory, arguably theory's most radical, insurrectionary, and Left leaning branch, would be the area of theory most subject to attack; and in response to such an attack queer theory would proudly flout, perhaps even flaunt accusations of irrationality and excessiveness, due to its original intention of challenging normative modes of philosophical and analytical discourse. While queer theory initially championed these anti-normative intentions, scholars in the field slowly began to cling to modes of social intelligibility, often pursuing their critic's goals of responsibility, ethics, and obligations to materiality.

For now, however, let us recall Nussbaum's critique of Butler in; *The Professor of Parody*, and the analysis of it with which I began the previous chapter. Nussbaum attacks Butler's writing for its unintelligibility and her content for its immateriality and inutility in the practical or legal realm. Such claims of impracticality, Nussbaum argues, are evidence of Butler's anti-humanism, dangerousness, and general potentiality for the least normative understandings and analyses the Left had yet produced.

Nussbaum's analysis may have been correct, to a certain extent, and the accuracy of her charges is precisely what made Butler's early work decidedly asocial. Indeed, Nussbaum's anxieties surround Butler's continuation of the logics and

framework of Louis Althusser, the French structuralist Marxist, whose work is both widely lauded and widely criticized for its anti-humanist logics. Criticism of Althusser began almost immediately after his works was translated into English and popularized; as early as 1978.

That year, E. P. Thompson, a prominent Marxist literary critic and social historian, made clear how Althusser's discourse induced anxiety and distaste on the Left. In *The Poverty of Theory or An Orrery of Errors*, Thompson attacks Althusser for producing work that acted as a catalyst for a directional shift in Marxism, one which leaves humanism aside and argues against the necessity of the subject in the class struggle. Thompson goes as far as to name Althusser's Marxism "an intellectual freak". (3) With this specific criticism in mind alone, it is easy to understand Althusser's subsequent influence on queer theory, the most pridefully "freakish" field of all.

Thompson's main accusation, however, is of Althusser's knowledge production and its implications as being "exactly tailored" for "bourgeois elitism". (3) Thompson asserts towards the close of his book that, "Althusser has simply taken over a reigning fashion of bourgeois ideology and named it 'Marxism'". (153) Thompson derives his evidence for this claim from Althusser's "self-generation of 'knowledge' according to its own theoretical procedures." (33) Indeed, Thompson would rather Althusser rely upon material historical truths and "self-disciplined knowledge" to produce theory. (33) Althusser's supposed intellectually dishonest method appears bourgeois to Thompson because it mirrors that of "theology", it does not undergo the checks and balances of the material of historical practice upon which

Thompson places utmost value, and it, instead, practices “self-validating textual[ity]”. (33) This comparison to theological epistemology and *a priori* reasoning is contrasted to Thompson’s own assertion that Marxist theory ought to focus on “the real human object, in all its manifestations”. (44) His critique of Althusser’s Marxism has all the marks of an internecine struggle, notably high moral dudgeon and superiority. Paradoxically, Althusser is cast in alignment with conservative religious modes of thought that Marxism was developed to debunk.

Thompson is also critical of Althusser’s notion that responsibility as determining agency is a “humanist illusion”. (179) Indeed Thompson is insistent, throughout the book, upon the agency of the subject to produce its own ideology constructed of individual and class based morals and values independent of dominant structural ISAs. (175) “Values are neither ‘thought’ nor ‘hailed’; they are lived”. (175) Continually, Thompson emphasizes the necessity of the subject for the class struggle and for movement and elasticity of history; he touts “The crucial ambivalence of our human presence in our own history, part-subjects, part-objects, the voluntary agents of our own involuntary determinations”. (88) Thompson insists upon the necessity of the agency of the subject to impart and instigate class struggle. His Marxist narrative is deeply character driven and inimical to Althusser’s structuralist departures from this dogma.

However, Thompson’s attachment to the self-determined subject in Marxism mirrors the logic of the bourgeois *more precisely* than the theories provided by Althusser. Althusser argues that bourgeois capitalism, under the functionality of Ideological State Apparatuses, produces subjects that are interpellated to “ensure

subjection to the ruling ideology”. (ISA, 133) Indeed, Althusser notes that the competence of the labour power, i.e., labour power’s understanding of itself as a self-determined subject, helps serve the reproduction of labour power’s own subjection. (131) Furthermore, Althusser contends that ideology itself, “only exists by constituting concrete subjects as subjects” through the process of interpellation, and finally, that “there are no subjects except by and for their subjection”. (182) In light of these notions, Thompson’s insistence on the free-willed and self-determined nature of the subject or individual for the processes of class struggle, is an example of his own internalization of the ideologies of the bourgeois capitalist class. In fact, the logics of bourgeois ideology and power necessitate the belief in the self-determined subject for capitalist ideology’s reproduction. The class struggle does not require the subject, it requires only the maximum wage for the minimum labour hours. (131)

It is this Althusserian framework that continues in the early works of Professor Butler, a framework clearly worthy of anxiety as noted in both Nussbaum’s attack on Butler, and obviously, Thompson’s attack on Althusser himself. A close analysis of Butler’s early work makes manifest queer theory’s Althusserian origins which, contain an asocial logic.

One of Butler’s most famous, canonical, and renowned works is her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in which Butler creates and explicates the theory of gender performativity; the notion that gender is not a fixed set of characteristics predicated upon biological sex, but a constant and continued performance of actions, behaviors, and aesthetics. The book complicates and subverts solidified notions of identity, coherence, sex, and most discernibly,

gender. Butler's arguments are deeply rooted in Althusserian/Foucauldian politics, which seek to dismantle normative understandings of subjectivity, and therefore complicate traditional notions of being a subject, or for that matter, being a *good* subject, and have the capacity to resist the social order. At the start of her first chapter, Butler provocatively asserts that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility". (17) Butler asks, "to what extent do *regulatory practices* of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self-identical status of the person?" (16) The "regulatory practices" mentioned here can be thought of through the Althusserian notion of the deployment and internalization of ideology. Butler's use of the term "identity" in her argument functions identically to the way in which Althusser's use of the term *subject* functions.

Butler rejects normative methods of understanding the person and subjectivity by implementing an Althusserian analysis of the power that social institutions have to interpellate subjects. Butler takes this mode of analysis further and asserts that normative conceptions of subjectivity that rely on the concept of "identity", the category she is ontologically at odds with, exist as "an *effect* of discursive practices", not just institutional ideologies. (18) Specifically, of course, Butler is interested in identities based on sex and uses Foucault's theories on sex which disrupt its "artificial binary", the binary which regulates sexuality and "suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies". (19) Rather than attempt to

deconstruct and destroy the category of sex “so that women can assume that status of a universal subject” (and to invoke Althusser, become universally *subjected*), Butler seeks to destroy ways language and being create and make intelligible “the pregendered ‘person’, characterized as freedom”. (20)

Butler continues her view and complicates the very idea of “being” a gender or “being” a sexuality. These “beings” exist only in opposition to their binary opposites. Concluding the chapter with her now famous assertion, Butler states that “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity is is purported to be”. (25) Drawing upon Nietzsche’s destruction of the notion of the “doer” behind doing, and emphasizing his notion of “the deed [as] everything”, Butler makes clear that there is no solid gendered being behind the doing of the expressions of that gender. (25) This invocation of Nietzsche also resonates with Althusser’s inversion of “the order of the notional schema of ideology”. (ISA, 168) Althusser also emphasizes the deed as constitutive of the doer in his reference to Pascal’s quotation; “Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe”. (ISA, 168)

The implications of this Althusserian/Nietzschian claim are crucial not only to the study of sex, gender, and sexuality, but for the ways in which we conceptualizes the human, the self, and the social world we occupy. Destabilizing the notion of a pre social or pre gendered/performative self is a deeply anti-humanist and Althusserian claim which limits the notion of innate human identity, and which allows for imaginings of a total destruction of the social order as we know it. Abandoning the attachment to the self as a preexisting entity opens up ways of being or not being that are only predicated on action and performativity rather than on

inherent qualities. Hence, there is no necessity for an obligation to the self or the other or the social order it simultaneously creates and is created by because this self, this other, and this social order, are only constituted by their reification and performativity.

A continuation of her work's asocial implications is found in Butler's 1997 book *The Psychic Life of Power*, in which her use of Foucault's analyses of power and its means of deployment and subject making work to construct a framework for nonnormative resistance to the social's mechanisms of normalization and discipline. I turn specifically to the chapter entitled *Subjection, Resistance, Resignification* to showcase Butler's embrace of the asocial and potentially chaotic means of resistance to normativity.

Butler commences the chapter by noting that one cannot have a social subject without its subjection under power, and that, in fact, "subjection is, literally, the making of a subject". Clearly invoking Althusser's theory of interpellation, Butler clarifies that subjection functions as a kind of power which "acts on" the subject but also "activates" the subject as such. (84) Working with this definition and mechanism of the function of power, Butler moves to questions of resistance; "Where does resistance to or in disciplinary subject formation take place?" (87) Butler's invocation of resistance to subject formation and, therefore, the potential for a non subject, implies the resistance to the social itself since the social is the entity by and to which subjects are both created and subjected. Furthermore, by virtue of the subject's existence only as a means of its own "reiteration or rearticulation", Butler contends that the subject as an entity is incoherent and incomplete. (99)

This characterization of the subject contains within it a characterization of the social which, as previously stated, creates the subject and needs it to exist and deploy power; the social is potentially incoherent and incomplete, and thus, can be easily resisted and broken. Butler even anticipates methods of resistance to the social that fall to the temptations of normalization, as many Leftist modes of radical insurgence do, and wonders if we can reformulate resistance to the social “without that reformulation becoming a domestication or normalization?” (102)

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After analyzing Butler’s early and profoundly influential work, one might recall Nussbaum’s critique and posit that its main points (immateriality, etc.) are indeed, founded. Butler does not accede to notions of responsibility or legibility, and only concerns herself with notions of the fraught and unstable subject, a notion capable of deeply moving and asocial work. Nussbaum, at the time of “The Professor of Parody”, was correct, in the most satisfying way. Butler’s entire affect and theoretical schema shifts in 2005, however, only a few years after Nussbaum’s seething critique. Rather than accepting Nussbaum’s accusations and pridefully explicating their radical potentialities, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler refutes them and posits that the immateriality of feminist and queer discourse has a great potential for unearthing and enacting ethical modes of being a subject.

Butler begins by noting that the recent critiques of post-structuralist thought have been deeply rooted in accusations of the irresponsibility of post-structuralism’s lack of “self-grounding”. (22) Specifically, she explains that critics take issue with the tendency of post-structuralism to complicate the singularity of what it means to be

a subject and to divide it or make stable conceptions of subjectivity unintelligible, fragmented, or “incoherent”. (22) This incoherence of the subject under post-structuralism is seen as necessarily opposed to notions of “personal or social responsibility”. (22) Butler continues by refuting these claims and shows the ways that post-structural “ungrounded” subjectivity can, in fact, “work in the service of a conception of ethics and...of responsibility.”(22) This is an affirmation of her critics’ valuation of the responsible subject. In the face of criticism, Butler denies the criticism’s validity and refutes it, and, in doing so, placates the critics in an effort to smooth over conflict, to assuage any concerns over the supposed irresponsibility of the theoretical/philosophical discourses within which she participates. The logic Butler uses in this piece is one interested not in the radical potentiality of enacting *exactly* what conservative right leaning critics fear, but in deploying a desperately acceding affect and line of reasoning that places her in agreement with her critics, i.e., *to invest in a philosophical movement enmeshed with irresponsibility is deplorable, and post-structuralism certainly does not condone such an ethically devoid movement.*

Butler is not alone though, in her turn to the social, obligation, ethics, and responsible subjecthood. In 2005, the same year Butler published *Giving an Account of Oneself*, and the same year *An Anthology of Dissent* was published, a group of queer scholars published a collection of essays urging the entire discipline to self-reflect and become invested in modes of ethical discourse which would ultimately affirm the social and its order.

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In *What's Queer About Queer Studies Now*, a collection of essays published in a 2005 edition of *Social Text* and edited by David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Esteban Muñoz, notable queer studies scholars trace the narrative of the field's development and interrogate the potentiality of its upcoming directions. Together they identify the consumerization and normalization of queer subjectivity, and "demand a renewed queer studies" specifically focusing on interrogating its implications within global politics and hierarchies of domination. (1) Specifically, the issue focuses on assessing both the "epistemology" and "political utility" of queer theory. (1, 5) Additionally, the introduction to this issue emphasizes a renewal of affective modes of sociality such as "kinship" and "belonging", as well as much the inclusion of broader political categories like "empire, globalization, neoliberalism, sovereignty, and terrorism." (1)

Here is both an aspiration to improve queer ethics, and, by virtue of such an aspiration, a goal to decenter whiteness as the primary subject of queer theory. Benign as this goal may seem, one must wonder about the white paternal ethos behind it. Certainly, the notion that it is somehow the responsibility of Western queer scholars to impose a queer ethics onto the bodies of non-Western subjects is flawed. Additionally, if queer theory should take up issues of international regard, one could hardly support the initiation of these acts by Western educated queer scholars. The largely Western and white focus of the field is not unexpected when the field itself has its origins in Western academia. The solution to this issue, however, does not lie in the imposition of the theory upon others in the way that this collection of articles suggests.

Providing that the term “queer”, at its conception, “challenged the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects”, it is obvious that there exists an ideological inconsistency between the term’s origins and the ethical directions in which the editors of this issue seek to go. (1) The attention to the global impact and implications of queer studies is worthy of academic and activist attention, but attachments to these causes do not necessitate an attachment to social self-discipline, humility, and the reification of the affects which comprise the social order. The editor’s attachment to such ideological/behavioral ethicism is evident in the quotation below;

“An ethical attachment to others insists that we cannot be the center of the world or act unilaterally on its behalf. It demands a world in which we must sometimes relinquish not only our epistemological but also our political certitude. Suffice it to say that to appreciate “what’s queer about queer studies now” is to embrace such a critical perspective and to honor such an ethics of humility.” (15)

The obvious questions in response: Was queer studies formed as an answer to the world’s woes? Is to be queer to adjoin oneself to the figure of the religious martyr? Why is the commitment to responsibility so unwavering? And finally: Why are these affective modes forever those which demand utmost respect and worship, even amongst the theoretical and social sphere comprised of the supposedly least disciplined, most wild subjects?

Connecting this broad analysis of queer studies’ ideological positioning, one can see that queer studies behaves through the ideology of the social and is constituted by and through the enactment of responsibility. After all, queer studies is attempting to revise itself and remain within recognizable ethical bounds of sociality

in a congruous way to the acceding and placating logics of the liberal assimilationist position.

Teemu Ruskola's essay, *Gay Rights versus Queer Theory*, published in *What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?*, engages with the legal nullification of the anti-sodomy laws which emerged from the 1986 US Supreme Court case Bowers v. Hardwick. In June 2003, the Lawrence v. Texas case overruled the anti-sodomy decision and made room for the legal recognition of sexual behavior between gay bodies, and acted as a liberatory legislation for the homosexual community, whose sexual behavior was then decriminalized. Ruskola reviews the language of the Lawrence decision and critiques how the Court came to its decision, and what logics were used. (235) Ruskola asks if this decision liberated homosexuality and if liberation through state mechanisms is liberatory at all.

The critical rhetorical shift which allowed the Court to nullify its previous decision, was the Court's "interpellation of homosexuals as law-abiding subjects who are capable of intimacy." (237) No longer sodomites, homosexuals were regarded as legitimate sexual subjects, engaging in normal intimate sex in the privacy of their own homes. Ruskola is no liberal, however, and recognizes the problems that comes with this legitimization, as it acts as a mode of assimilation, a concept almost universally looked down upon within queer theory, as it positions queerness as another mode of heterosexuality, in a sense, and thus, loses touch with the imagined ethos of queer subjectivity. Ruskola's invocation of interpellation reads as Althusserian at first, but, if Ruskola truly abided with Althusser, his entertainment of state recognition for the purposes of gay liberation would have disappeared. Ruskola,

however, spends most of the piece torn between his belief in the necessity of state given rights and his belief in state opposition.

Ruskola, for example, includes in a segment of his essay a review of the achievements of the Lawrence decision, the decision which overturned the previous homophobic Hardwick decision. (237) Among the achievements Ruskola notes are the Court's acknowledgement of "the academic study of sexuality", as well as "the fact that virulent homophobia is not necessarily a global condition". (237) This congratulatory affect continues and expands to legal recognition as a whole when Ruskola wonders, "...Can we afford to turn down 'dignity' and 'respect' when they are being offered to us by the U.S. Supreme Court? After all, lacking those qualities can be positively hazardous to one's health". (239) The dignity and respect mentioned here are those qualities utilized by the Court to grant rights to homosexuals and are traits necessary for state legitimization. One can hear within Ruskola's question his reluctance to identify with such traits, but more urgent is his concession to their association with state determined survival. This concession is present throughout the remainder of his essay.

Ruskola posits that the emphasis on political recognition of sexual acts rather than identities has the power to create behavioral liberty to the most people, not merely those whose preferred acts are deemed respectable. (240) These statements suppose that Ruskola is in favor of a positionality occupying respectability's opposite; disrespect ability or irresponsibility, or, perhaps, indecency. However, keeping in mind his previous invocation of the necessity of state interpellation of gay subjects, Ruskola's stance becomes unclear. Still, Ruskola astutely mentions the

inevitability of the Court and state's designation of "'good' and 'bad' homosexual sex" by virtue of the Court and state's use of respectability, dignity and privacy to legitimize sodomy and other once taboo acts. (242) In contrast, Ruskola later admits the necessity of the acquisition of state granted rights to be seen as a "respectable subject". (242) Ruskola is aware of the normative associations this kind of subjecthood carries, yet cannot separate himself from its cloying grip. Ruskola clarifies this position, identifying what respectable subjecthood, "hard to resist", yet insists on "separating sexual acts from identities as much as we can, at least for the purposes of legal categorization". (245) The use of the phrase "as much as we can" contains within in it a compromised positionality, one limiting the bounds of possibility, and one continuously acceding to the powers of state recognized subject hood. In essence, Ruskola argues that although resisting this humanizing gesture by the state is preferable, the best we can do is alter the state's focus and legalizing rhetoric from one based on identity, to one based on the acts that often constitute the identities themselves.

Ruskola concludes his essay with this sentence; "After all, sex need not be about connection at all; sex can signify intense alienation and separation as much as connection." (245) Ruskola attempts to decenter the legal emphasis on connected intimacy as a criteria for legitimacy by queering sex; by emphasizing alienated sex as legitimate as well. Here, again, we see a specific choice on Ruskola's part to rightfully identify alternative modes of valuation with regards to connection and sexual bonds, but we do not see a moving away from the state, really, at all. Ruskola tarries with these notions, but drops them quickly. He favors a discourse surrounding

a legal rhetorical shift from the humanization of sexual acts based on their contingency upon normative “connection”, over a discourse which legitimizes sexual acts devoid of traditional notions of the intimate bond. This preference is one fearful of moving away from the state, the law, and the social. Ruskola, truly, comes close to rejecting these means of becoming, but prefers to champion slight rhetorical changes that will still operate within the framework of the law, thus, supporting the social order. The title of his essay *Gay Rights versus Queer Theory* may be more appropriately titled, *Gay Rights versus Queer Theory: Bringing the State Back In*.

Further exemplifying queer theory’s affirmation of the social is Martin F. Manalansan IV in *Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City*. A forceful attack on neoliberal capitalist spatial politics which disproportionately impact queers of color in urban spaces, Manalansan’s essay observes and analyzes the ways in which neoliberal ideology and practice constitute a “violent remapping of lives, bodies, and desires of queers of color in contemporary New York”. (42) The specific neoliberal practices with which Manalansan takes issue are increased privatization, decreased government regulation, surveillance, and the fracturing of welfare. (42) Enmeshed with these practices, Manalansan notes, is Lisa Duggan’s term homonormativity, a term and concept now ubiquitously understood within queer academic circles. Homonormativity is closely linked to queer assimilationist politics, respectability, and the state. Indeed, Manalansan explicitly asserts the prominent role that disciplining institutions like the police and government and even academia play in the deployment of neoliberal homonormative practices. (42)

While there is no doubt that neoliberal capitalism blatantly enacts violence

on queer bodies of color, anxieties surrounding neoliberalism reach much deeper as well. Before continuing, it is important to address that here there is no defense of the neoliberal regime, only an identification of its specific characterizations which produce anxiety, and in this case, Manalansan's and Duggan's anxieties specifically. Many of these anxieties (though certainly not all) in relation to neoliberalism actually are anxieties about concepts/modes like irresponsibility, excess, and consumption, which are concepts/modes that indicate bad and undisciplined social subjects. For example, Manalansan critiques mainstream gay culture not just for its violence and racism, a critique difficult to refute, but for its "enactments of consumption rituals—buying, eating, dancing, wearing, and yes, even fucking." (49) Following a similar logic, Manalansan warns of the "emergent narrative" "of the opulence and glamour" which neoliberal development has brought to what were formerly less affluent urban areas. (50) Opulence and glamour are hardly traits of which to be wary. Actually, Manalansan acknowledges the value of the queer "sex" and "leisure", activities on par with the logic of opulence and glamour, which characterized these areas prior to their development of shameful "opulence and glamour". (42) Moreover, Manalansan focuses on the excessive characteristic of neoliberal praxis, a characteristic if and when *removed* from racism, violence, and the power dynamics of the disciplining social order, become fun, queer, pleasurable, and hardly the issue at hand.

Interestingly enough, however, Manalansan's critique also takes issue with personal responsibility, a phrase found in a quotation of Duggan's (regarding the Audre Lorde Project) which he uses; [the project] "calls for expansive democratic publicness, combined with arguments for forms of individual and group autonomy,

attempts to redefine equality, freedom, justice, and democracy in ways that exceed their limited (neo)liberal meanings. They gesture away from privatization as an alibi for stark inequalities, and away from personal responsibility as an abdication of public, collective caretaking.” (53) How can one critique the ethos of personal responsibility of neoliberalism whilst critiquing neoliberalism’s utilization of forms of irresponsible excess and consumption? The answer lies in Manalansan’s and Duggan’s shared aversion to the personal and private and attraction/valuation of responsibility. Responsibility as virtue is to be extolled, provided that it applies to the collective; the social. Moreover, Duggan’s anxiety surrounding the potential absence of a collectivity of obligation to the other provides evidence for Manalansan’s and Duggan’s commitment to the social.

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This identification of the ways anxiety about neoliberal practice mirrors anxieties about bad and excessive social subjectivity is not a dismissal of the violence which neoliberalism does, indeed, enact. However, in order to correctly diagnose and destroy the problems caused by neoliberalism, it is necessary to understand how embodying bad subjectivity (by embracing the anxiety inducing traits) can aid in neoliberalism’s end. When and how can excess and irresponsibility be the queerest, least homonormative modes of being?

As one might imagine, the Lisa Duggan whom Manalansan references in his essay is a queer theorist of a similar ilk; a queer theorist whose attempts at radical visions and reparative justice push her towards a logic of collective responsibility and an affirmation of the social order, however new and improved and queer her

envisioned social order may seem. In *Beyond Marriage: Democracy, Equality, and Kinship for a New Century*, an essay intended to criticize the queer community's political emphasis on the acquisition of marriage rights, Duggan manages to undermine her radical abolitionist intentions with commitments to discipline and responsibility for the collective social. Duggan entrances the reader with an emotional anecdote involving her ex-partner and her's decision to register as a domestic partnership (prior to same sex marriage's legalization in the US in the summer of 2015) in the aftermath of the chaos of a 9/11 New York City. Duggan cites the "emotional and practical imperative" she then felt when faced with the notion of being unable to claim "next of kin" status to her ex-partner in legal and emergency matters, a common reaction after just avoided disaster. (1) Opening with this anecdote, Duggan plays on the reader's understandable emotions and concedes to the ultimate necessity of certain legal assimilation.

However, Duggan follows with a castigation of the prioritization of same-sex marriage amongst LGBT advocacy groups. Indeed, Duggan prefers the domestic partnership for its capacity to bring people together "whose lives are intertwined in ways that do not fit with one-size-fits-all marriage". (1) Supporting this argument is her observation that "nearly all" of the couples waiting to receive domestic partnership registrations were heterosexual. It is ironic, certainly, that the *inclusion* of *heterosexual* couples who *also* decry marriage is how she chooses to bolster her anti-marriage sentiment. Perhaps more ironic though, is her embrace of the domestic partnership at all.

Still, Duggan continues by renouncing marriage. She asserts that "the right

to marry is a very narrow and utterly inadequate solution for the problems that most queer people face”. (2) She recognizes that the “state-regulated institution of marriage does not provide full equality” or “expansively remained forms of kinship that reflect our actual lives”. (2) Finally, Duggan advocates for the diversification and democratization of “the ways we recognize interdependencies, rather than enshrine the right to marry as a singular priority goal?” Duggan dislikes the prioritization of marriage for its limiting confines of intimacy, not for its allegiance to the state. In fact, as evidenced here, she advocates for a neoliberalization of state recognized partnership; a diversification of options that would mirror the plethora of options capitalism presents to us in the market. Nevertheless, Duggan insists that her issue with marriage is its manifestation as “the ‘private’ ideal deployed to replace public, collective social responsibility”. (2) She chooses not to take issue with the state’s involvement with partnership, and rather, seeks a framework of assimilation that provides for myriad options for state assimilation. If this commitment to the social is not lucid enough, Duggan further clarifies and emphasizes it through her necessitation of “collective social responsibility”. (2)

At times it would seem, though, that Duggan is at odds with conceptions of social responsibility, as she denounces marriage for the advocacy of “social discipline”, a phenomenon she characterizes as “conservative”. Moreover, she mocks the idea that monogamy/marriage is “an unalloyed social good”, and “the basis for a stable, happy, ‘mature’ adulthood”. (2) It certainly would seem that to mock normative maturity and developmental timeline conformity as well as social discipline would mock logics of responsibility to the collective. Duggan, nonetheless,

maintains her previously iterated commitments under the guise of “organizing for democracy and diversity”. It is apparent then that Duggan’s issue with the fight for marriage does not exist within its assimilationist ideology, but within its monopolization of partnership recognition and within marriage’s deployment of social discipline. Still, she finds herself deeply wedded (no pun intended) to modes of social obligation and order when they provide the modes of state recognized kinship she craves. It is not discipline and its synonyms Duggan is afraid of, but of irresponsibility, unrecognizability, and asociality.

3

NOT GAY AS IN UTOPIA, QUEER AS IN FUCK LABOR

Oh, queer theory. After expounding upon its consistent and constant affirmation of ideals which I have countless listed: collectivity, responsibility, humanism, socio-obligation and the like, one may question the existence of the asocial queer theory implied through critique and to which I have promised to attend in the introduction. The asocial turn in queer theory, as it is now commonly labeled, does indeed, articulate a politics of queerness which abandons the supposed political necessity of the aforementioned adjectives which define the social order. Removing the insistence on the social for queer politics allows for a *truly* radical break from straightness as such, heteronormativity, the state, conformity, capitalism, and all constricting/normative modes of subjectivity.

The authors discussed in the previous chapter affirm their allegiance to sociality, however, without ever directly addressing the proponents of its opposite. Their respective pledges to sociality's beneficial necessity for queer politics appear naturally and need no opposition to spur their expression. The social flows through their veins and is thus transposed into their various discourses.

There are scholars of queer studies, however, to whom this observation does not apply and within their work sociality is specifically defended and used as a rebuttal to asocial queer discourse. For two scholars, Jose E. Muñoz and J. Halberstam, both editors of the *What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?* collection, the asocial turn is briefly adopted, only to be spat out in exchange for a mutated and

tainted version of its original form. For Muñoz and Halberstam, asocial scholars are merely those whose ideas are toyed with, at times even commended, but ultimately are discarded.

Jose E. Muñoz, a lauded queer scholar, specifically combats the antiutopianism characteristic of the asocial turn in his book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. There, Muñoz argues for a reconsideration of the political utility of queer utopian imaginings through affective readings of queer performative and visual art. As early as the first page, Muñoz justifies his methodology of aesthetic analysis, and in doing so, his investment in the social; “Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations.” (1) This sentence from the introduction situates the fundamentals of Muñoz’ work succinctly. He is invested in queerness as a “doing for and toward the future”, and as an affective subjective mode whose ethos is temporally located in the not yet here. (1) Indeed, later in his book he explains, “The queer futurity that I am describing is not an end but an opening or a horizon.” (91) Muñoz’s stance on ‘social relations’ and his investment in their futurity situates him within socialism, the political ideology which is steadfastly characteristic of the traditional academic Left. As will become clear, the phrase “future social relations” as it relates to a hopeful reimagining of the social order is at the core of *Cruising Utopia*.

Muñoz’s utopian ideology acts as a counterpolitic to what he identifies as a queer pessimism defined by nihilistic antiutopianism. He recognizes the ways that utopic visions are “shot down” as idealistic and “prone to disappointment” yet

describes antiutopianism “as a poor substitute for actual critical intervention”. (10, 4) His logic is that while utopian idealism is prone to failure, the hope it instills and functions through is the affective mode necessary for queer imaginings. Indeed, Muñoz feels as though “critical idealism” as an academic frame is fading and transforming into a “romance of singularity and negativity” within the queer asocial turn. (10) Though Muñoz acknowledges the ways the asocial/antirelational turn in queer theory has worked to dismantle “anti critical understanding[s] of queer community”, he asserts that in doing so, asociality has become a stagnant, dominant discourse. (10) Looking to occupy a middle-ground ideology between communitarian exaltation and negation, Muñoz asserts that he is “critical of the communitarian as an absolute value and of its negation as an alternative all-encompassing value.” (10) Here Muñoz’s language exudes anxiety. His recognition that the community as sovereign is a flawed supposition situates him at odds with sociality. However, in his hesitance to completely disavow its sovereignty in queer politics, there is fear.

Though an advocate for queerness as an unknown, future dwelling becoming, Muñoz still manages to avoid the nihilistic nothingness of asociality. More specifically, the destruction of the social which asocial queer politics implies leads to an unknown as well but, an unknown not predicated upon a temporally futuristic creation of a new order. Indeed, he summarizes his book’s political intentions by stating, “*Cruising Utopia* is a polemic that argues against anti-relationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity.” (10)

Having just recognized the flaws of the essentializing nature of the queer community, Muñoz, however, takes back this recognition and replaces it with a

utopic/collective urge. This urge extends further in his championing of a “renewed and newly animated sense of the social”, and later, a “reconfiguration of the social” (18, 38) His language cannot help but invoke a collectivist affect. In fact, he specifically mentions the collective in a description for the book in its entirety as “...A flight plan for a collective political becoming”. (189)

Rather than seeking abolition and destruction of the communitarian ethos that has been shown to stagnate queer politics, Muñoz not only adopts collectivism, but the very liberalism he has come to reject, by advocating for social and communitarian renewal and reconfiguration. This positionality is one that assuredly does not elicit Left anxiety, and is one that would especially cause no concern on behalf of the authors referenced in the first chapter.

Continuing this logic of social affirmation, Muñoz articulates succinctly; “I see myself participating in a counter narrative to political nihilism, a form of inquiry that promotes what I am calling queer futurity.” (83) This assertion is brought on by his direct engagement with Lee Edelman’s asocial polemic *No Future*, a book discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Muñoz, however, concedes to Edelman to a certain extent, stating, “I agree with and feel hailed by much of *No Future*”. (91) Muñoz agrees with *No Future*’s stance on rejecting heteronormative assimilation and the logic produced by a widespread political commitment to the figure of The Child, but does not give in to the book’s dismissal of a reification of the social order. Indeed, he “refuse[s] to give up on concepts such as politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff”. (93) The refusal “to accept that which is not enough”, by which Muñoz means the present, is used to bolster a productive notion of politics

which manifests as a propagation of the social order. (96)

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, prominent queer theorist J. Halberstam (for whom I use ‘they’ pronouns) builds off of Edelman’s antisocial thesis in queer theory and applies his queer embrace of future negation specifically to the concept of failure. Using contemporary animated children’s cinema and feminist fine art as areas for analysis, Halberstam argues that failure is an inherent and necessary component to United States capitalism. Halberstam recognizes that queers have historically been read as failures to comply with the hegemonic forces, which compel subjects to reproduce, comport, and behave, and contends that failure is “a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique”.

(Halberstam, 88) They specify that the act of failing “exploits the unpredictability of ideology”; pokes holes in ideology’s all encompassing power by exposing the many ways it is breakable and flawed. (88) It is here that Halberstam invokes Althusser’s theory of the subject and Ideological State Apparatuses. Halberstam’s turn towards failure rhymes with the refusal of the subject under ideology’s grasp. Failure is a refusal to be hailed as a subject but is a refusal that does not embody a defiant affect, but that embodies the collapse of the self. Perhaps more obviously, failure within normative society is precisely a nonnormative act, and in that, can be a queer act. After all, heteronormative culture succeeds, leaving queers to struggle and deviate.

The book rests upon what Halberstam identifies as “low theory”, the method of locating alternatives of possibility within the counterintuitive and the negative, places where the opposing “high theory” of traditional academic discourse and queer theory do not usually venture. (2) They define low theory as “theoretical

knowledge that works on many levels at once”, that “turns through knowing and confusion, and that seeks not to explain but to involve.” (15) Through this modality of thought, Halberstam attempts to dismantle “logics of success and failure” which define our modes of being. (2) The binary that is drawn here between low and high theory is one that disavows the academic or professional component to theorizing based on an understanding of the academic method as incapable of really understanding the world. Displayed here is a disavowal present amongst the Left theorists in chapter one.

Pointing towards the ease with which failure comes to queer bodies under capitalist pressures, Halberstam gestures towards the multiplicity of rewards that may come with the embrace of failing and doing badly. (3) Related to this idea is the concept of illegibility or not being recognized or read as a normative body or subject. The queer has always existed in this liminal space of subjectivity, and the embrace of such holds political power and possibility. For Halberstam, these openings of thought are directed towards and identified in, as mentioned previously, the cultural productions meant for children, subjects also overdetermined with failure and, potentially, a kind of queerness. (27) Invoking Katherine Bond Stockton, Halberstam notes that occupying childhood “is an essentially queer experience in a society that acknowledges through its extensive training programs for children that heterosexuality is not born but made.” (27) Perhaps more concisely, Halberstam turns to the Althusserian understanding of subject making by ideological institutions. Halberstam recognizes the implicit embodiment of low theory within the functionality of childhood and understands this both as queer and as a starting point from which

queer subjects and queer theory can begin to move toward and exist within more radical frameworks.

With all of this being said regarding Halberstam, it is hard to imagine that they would occupy a political position, which accedes to the social order. However, their work falls short and nearly always returns to a reification of the social and a conservative affirmation of where Leftist queer theory stands today. Their work is certainly hopeful, an affect which avows the dogma of social ties, responsibility, and other structures of feeling, which always lead to further oppression and unoriginality. Their embrace of negativity exists only insofar as it can return to the productive and generative; it is decidedly not an affect or ethos of queer antifuturity and nihilism.

However, Halberstam takes issue with Lee Edelman's version of the antisocial queer project, outlined in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (and discussed in full later in the chapter) and calls for its "more explicitly political framing...a framing that usefully encloses failure". (Halberstam, 106) Halberstam argues that Edelman's conception of the most radical form of queer antifuturity is situated "between two equally unbearable options (futurity and positivity in opposition to nihilism and negation)." They go on to identify Edelman's options as not only unbearable but "bleak". (Halberstam, 121) Why are these options, which Edelman outlines so unbearable to Halberstam? What are the implicit ideological fears behind this assertion? And, certainly, is bleakness a characteristic to which we owe our automatic disavowal?

Halberstam mentions positive associations of failure throughout the book, calling for "happy productive failures" and others. (23) Though Halberstam

recognizes the power of “futility, sterility, emptiness, loss,...and modes of unbecoming”, they are quick to repudiate their own argument by urging for a fertile, constructive mode of failure. (23) Indeed, Halberstam wants queers to learn “to fail better”. (24) This invocation of a better failure begs the question, what does failing worse look like?, and even more so, what is the anxiety surrounding the worst possible mode of failure, the one from which Halberstam urges queers to move?

Halberstam is highly interested in the productive and generative outcomes of failure. It seems the way that Halberstam speaks of failure is the same way that people speak of success, an achievement leading to bigger, better and happier things. By arguing for a “more explicitly political framing” of failure, Halberstam is gesturing towards the social and political order’s need for recognition, validation, and legibility of the queer body and politic. In Halberstam’s continual affirmation of positivity and productivity is an anxiety surrounding the possibility of intangible, chaotic modes of being which are associated with the destruction and failure of the social order.

Equally constitutive of Halberstam’s turn back towards the social is their insistence upon utility. Within this invocation of utility, one can identify an underlying allegiance to capitalist production and Leftist conservation. Halberstam’s valorization of “usefully enclosing failure” implies a resistance to a tendency towards waste and lavish expenditure, i.e. the useless. The resistance towards waste is one that is equally resistant to the uncontrollable or unpredictable, qualities which cause and define modes of failing.

Though not explicitly mentioned in their book, Halberstam’s choice to

identify the failings within contemporary children's films carries with it an ideological commitment to the happy ending narrative, which is practically omnipresent in the child film genre. While it is true that "animated films for children revel in the domain of failure", that failure acts as a moralizing agent through which moralizing performatives are valued and expelled to the child as fairy tales have done for centuries. Halberstam's analysis is one that does generative work for the antisocial thesis in queer theory, but falls short in both its explanation and its archival curation.

Halberstam is not really very interested in actual destructive failure, they are interested in endowing failure with the same respect the social gives to achievement. It seems to be a linguistic/semiotic game they are playing; resignifying failure with positive and productive meanings. Indeed, it seems as though Halberstam is simply continuing to feed into the socialist collectivist, moralizing, rhetoric they seek to combat.

Acknowledging Edelman's stance on such a form of negative queer theory, Halberstam writes, "Edelman's negative critique strands queerness between two equally unbearable options (futurity and positivity in opposition to nihilism and negation). Can we produce generative models of failure that do not posit two equally bleak alternatives?" (121) Evident here is, of course, Halberstam's commitment to productivity, but also evident, is their contradictory dismissal of Edelman's bleak and unbearable options between which Edelman strands queerness. Perhaps it seems too obvious a critique, but if Halberstam does, indeed, find something worth aiming for in the project of queer failure, why then would the concept of bleakness be repellent? Is failure at its core not characterized by bleakness? In essence Halberstam's discourse

is torn between the embrace of failure and its counter productivity and bleakness and the generative, hopeful modes of being which produce and reify the social order.

In contrast and if not utterly clear at this point in the chapter, Lee Edelman, a main figure in the asocial turn, urges for the embrace of the queer refusal of the social order. Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, the title from which Halberstam and Muñoz draw their critiques (and a title which invokes the language of asociality unabashedly), puts forth both a discourse and theory which move far beyond the productivity Halberstam requires and beyond the romantic notions of utopian communitarian becomings Muñoz longs for. Edelman's notion of queerness rejects these and other nouns associated with the social. Edelman writes "...Queerness should and must redefine such notions as 'civil order' through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity". (16-17)

The crux of Edelman's argument and its methodological axis lies within the refusal to honor temporal obligations to reify the social. To delve further into this refusal's significance, let us recall the introduction's brief reference to Durkheim's notion of the social: the spatial/temporal obligation the individual has to the reification of the collective conscious. (Durkheim, 471) Undoing this temporal commitment implicitly denies the valorization of the future as a political necessity. Truly, once one has lost this commitment, the realm of politics begins to crumble completely. It is by the crumbling of the social stuff upon which anti-queerness was founded and through which it is continually reified that queerness exists.

As iterated, Edelman's discourse does not temporally orient itself towards the future, a temporal space dominated by heterosexual social values and limits.

Edelman locates the political orientation towards the future within the symbolic figure of The Child, a figure universally protected and defended, one whose celebration is considered nonpartisan and apolitical. Edelman cites the use of The Child within both conservative and liberal political campaigns to illustrate its political neutrality, its unquestionable value insofar as The Child is read as innocent and is ideologically representative of the future and the social order's reproduction and affirmation. This is evident, as Edelman points out, in political campaigns and the bipartisan emphasis on the future of the nation's children and the irrevocable valorization of the lives of children in general.

Edelman names this unquestionable political valorization reproductive futurism, the term upon which much of his criticism is based. Reproductive futurism is, as Edelman describes, the heterosexual logic of reproducing the social order in the future through the preservation of The Child and through the "privileging of heteronormativity", so much so that this ideology makes "unthinkable" the possibility of any resistance or opposition to its dogmatic and straight universality. (2) Edelman wonders what a resistance to reproductive futurism and its unrelenting ideological and political commitment to the social order would look like and posits that this resistance would, indeed, be the most radical and queer position to occupy. Edelman asserts that "however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains at its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order". (2) Removing The Child and what political orientations come with it removes structural affirmation and characterizes the "social order's death drive". (3) Edelman desires a queerness that

embraces the stigma and negativity surrounding queerness and rejects the liberal assimilation into the social order and the future it so dearly loves. *No Future* urges the queerest position, one which resists “every social structure or form”. (3) Because politics itself is such a structure, a structure to which much of Muñoz’ and even Halberstam’s attends, Edelman disavows politics as such entirely; “...The burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy...”(17).

It is important to consider that Edelman’s orientation away from the social is the direction of queer studies as a field of discipline and discourse. Queer studies does owe it to itself and it’s radical reaching origins to find queer, weird, odd, and definitely, asocial positions to occupy and live through.

Present within Edelman’s polemic is the Althusserian abolition of the subject which logically and mechanistically follows asociality. Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses are constitutive of the social order in that they are structures which create subjects and which deploy ideologies of order, comportment, reification of capitalism, and the collective. As evident in the following quotations, Edelman and Althusser invoke the same understanding of the subject and its position under the social and its ideology:

The subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set outing order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief. (Althusser, 170)

Acceding to this figural identification with the undoing of identity, which is to say with the disarticulation of social and Symbolic form, might be well described... as ‘politically self-destructive’. But politics (as the social elaboration of reality) and the self (as mere prosthesis maintaining the future

for the figural Child), are what queerness, again as figure, necessarily destroys—necessarily insofar as this ‘self’ is the agent of reproductive futurism and this ‘politics’ the means of its promulgation as the order of social reality. (Edelman, 30)

Here, Althusser maintains his thesis that “there are no subjects except by and for their subjection”. (182) Mirroring this, Edelman invites the queer “undoing of identity” (undoing of the subject, since identity as a mode of subjectivity acts and exists only under the social) to articulate a logical continuation of Althusser’s notion of the subject. Edelman uses the language “Symbolic form” and the social which are easily recognizable translations of Althusser’s language, “Ideological State Apparatuses” and “material ideological apparatus” in that both sets of terms describe the ideological order under which individuals are made ordered, social, subjects with socially, ideologically determined identities. The subject, in the Althusserian sense, only exists by and through its subjection as iterated on multiple occasions. Edelman’s assertion that the self is an agent of reproductive futurism/politics is simply a queer interpretation of Althusser’s assertion. What is implied in Althusser’s discourse is the necessity for the destruction of the subject and thereby the destruction of subjection and the social order; a destruction Edelman vigorously advocates for and within which he locates the queerest position.

The initiation of the asocial turn in queer theory, in truth, began with the earlier discourse in Leo Bersani’s *Is The Rectum A Grave? And Other Essays*, a book whose title only touches the surface of the affective and theoretical oppositional politics contained within its pages. Bersani’s dissatisfaction with normative modes of queer politics are situated in the following quotation:

“...A certain reflection on the sexual opens the way to a dissolving of the

sexual in that impossible relation, and in doing so doing it encourages reconfigurations of the social far more radical than those contemporary queer attempts to present as revolutionary, as seriously threatening to the dominant social order, such reformist, harmless, and familiar ‘innovations’ as gay marriage, public sex, or the corporate charities that have arisen in response to the AIDS epidemic.” (51)

Unsurprisingly evident here is a complete distaste for assimilation. Bersani inspired Edelman, no doubt, but initiated asociality not through a political polemic, but through an analysis of gay sexual practice, specifically of cruising. Like cruising, S&M, public sex, and other nonnormative sexual practices “are generally condemned outside the circles that engage in them”. (59) However, the act of cruising’s anonymity, impersonality, and brevity are what makes it politically provocative. Bersani notes that while cruising is condemned in equal force to S&M and public sex, their condemnation alone does not “certify their relational inventiveness”. (59) Indeed, the very mechanisms and dynamics at play within S&M and public sex practices are not inventive at all and merely mirror power dynamics and mechanisms with which we are familiar in society. (59) This differentiation in mechanism is what bolsters cruising’s privileged location in Bersani’s pronouncement of asociality.

In “Sociability and Cruising”, the essay most strikingly useful for the asocial turn, Bersani uses the terms sociability and relationality in interchangeable ways at times, using them without reference to the social order, but with reference to interactions between bodies, generally. Indeed, he begins the essay with “the associative process itself”, a process of interaction from which pleasure is indubitably derived. He calls this process “pure relationality”. (46) Distinct from associations made within social groups, relationality allows the individual to act freely upon their own desires without bearing the burdens of social constraint. Sociability, however, is

a mode of relationality which restricts the individual's "character, mood and fate".

(46) Bersani writes, more explicitly, "We can escape 'the solitariness of the individual' and enjoy 'the pure essence of association' only if we renounce, at least momentarily, the acquisitive impulses that draw us into groups." (47) Moreover, social group dwelling, not relationality, necessitates a removal of the desires by which the individual enters groups in the first place. The desires referenced being desires to act on non-standard or unacceptable impulses. Imagining a party in which one changes from cluster to cluster of people allows one to understand the freedom of association, within which one can experience "the freedom of bondage", the bondage of group obligation and sterilization of desire. (46)

It is this control of desire that makes sociability "an ascetic conduct". (48) Naturally, one must engage in self-discipline within social groups for fear of being castigated for inappropriate behavior. Bersani recognizes that the self-disciplining required by sociability does evoke pleasure, though, "It is not the disciplining itself that is felt as a pleasure, so it would be a mistake to speak of sociability as a form of masochism. Indeed, if there is a pleasure accompanying the shedding of our interests, it is the nonmasochistic one of escaping from the frictions, the pains, even the tragedy endemic to social life". (48) Important here is Bersani's emphasis on social life's tragedy, a tragedy which is implicitly caused by the social order itself. Social/relational interaction is pleasurable because, if only for a moment, one can separate oneself from the pains of being a subjected, social subject.

Here there is congruency, once again, with Althusser's framework of the subject who does not exist without its being subjected by institutions, ideologies, and

orders. On the loss of desires which occurs in these interactions Bersani writes, “Once stripped of those interests, we discover a new type of being, as well as a new type of pleasure. The pleasure does not serve an interest, satisfy a passion, or fulfill a desire. It is an intransitive pleasure intrinsic to a certain mode of existence, to self subtracted being.” (48) The language used here, “self subtracted being” invokes the freedom from subjection that would occur by virtue of the loss of the subject as such. It is the pleasure of the absence of obligation and responsibility of the social order that he has already described as filled with pains and tragedy caused by its constrictive grip. Removed from the social you lose the social self; the ultimate pleasure. There is no obligation or responsibility.

At this point, Bersani begins his engagement with and analysis of gay cruising as a framework of understanding the subjectless relational mode of interaction. He refers to cruising as a form of “impersonal intimacy” which necessitates a deliberate “avoidance of relationships” and which creates openings for a “new relationality”. (60, 59) Mirroring the disappearance of the subject and thus subjection, “In cruising...we leave ourselves behind”. (60) Cruising, through which one can “glimpse the possibility of dismissing moral worthiness itself”, and the theoretical framework Bersani is birthing through its reference, is a queer anti-humanist model. (60)

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A common critique of Edelman and Bersani’s turns away from the social is their ostensible use for a justification of capitalist neoliberalism due to their rejection of responsibility as such and their abandonment of the collectivity by and through

which the neoliberal irresponsibility may be defeated. Those who make this critique, however, reduce neoliberal capitalism solely to the workings of the market and ignore discipline's vital role in capitalism's functionality. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 2, prominent queer theorists revel in discipline which not only supports their adherence to sociality, but their adherence to one critical component of capitalism. In their continued denigration of consumption and the market and by prescribing collective communitarian discipline, these theorists deploy neoliberal capitalist ideology, though to this they are blind...

Daniel Bell explicates this split between the erratic market and the disciplined labor sector in his essay *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* which, identifies the structural and ideological differences that lie between the Western capitalism's culture of promiscuity and anti rationality (market based consumption) and its social and labor structure which boasts the opposite, efficiency and rationality. (19) Evidence to Bell's claim is found within the cultural acceptance of change, novelty, and progression, as well as the economic valuation of growth, spending, and consumption. Socially, however, Western behavior is indubitably dominated by notions of delayed gratification, work, and self-discipline; notions propagated by the necessity of scheduled labor. Moreover, modes of being as a laboring subject sharply contrast with modes of being a consumer. Indeed, these values invoked with regard to the social structure, according to Bell, have been utterly rejected in the cultural sphere, a rejection he credits to the *fundamental qualities of the capitalist system itself* (italics added for emphasis). (19)

Capitalism's bifurcation has its roots in the 1920's acceleration of mass

production in which Western economies “continued to demand a Protestant Ethic in the area of production—that is, in the realm of work—but to stimulate a demand for pleasure and play in the area of consumption.” (38) Ultimately, Bell understands cultural capitalism as a disjointed mode of economic and social governance. On one hand, capitalism is based on principles of hard work, “efficiency, least cost,” and “functional rationality” while on the other sociocultural hand it encourages consumption, expression, and anti rationality.

The affective disjointedness of late capitalism/neoliberalism calls into question the logics of the anti capitalist sentiments expressed in prominent queer theory. To be a good queer, certainly, one must disavow capitalism, expose its violence, and seek to dismantle and analyze its neoliberal particularities. Upon further consideration of this ubiquitous stance, however, it becomes clear that social loving queers are only critical of one side of the capitalist coin, that is, the side reveling in irresponsibility, consumption, and immediate gratification. In their celebration of the figure of the hard working, responsible, Leftist-queer-activist-academic, socially bound queer theorists reveal just how capitalist they really are. They nurture labor as long as its fruits are reaped for the benefit of the community; the social.

It is now clear that queer theory’s asocial turn is decidedly anti-capitalist in that it refuses the disciplined order necessitated by the domain of work. This refusal is accompanied by a desire for the destruction of social collectivity/obligation and, therefore, a refusal to reify the social and/or capitalism in the future. What remains is asociality’s embrace of the freedom and pleasure of a labor free capitalism comprised only of the joys of consumption and freedom. Indeed, the asocial framework

ultimately leads directly to the destruction of capitalism as we understand it. Anti-humanist Marxism provides the language and theory necessary to continue this framework and implicitly affirms it and queer asociality's synchronous logics. To date, however, attention has not been given to the elective affinities between queer theory's asocial turn and anti-humanist Marxism. The day this attention is deservedly given is here.

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Antonio Negri, an Italian autonomist Marxist notable for his post-work and anti-humanist interpretations of Marxist ideology, situates his demanding and provocative analysis and asocial reinterpretation of Marx's *Grundrisse* in *Marx Beyond Marx*. Negri's unorthodox critical developments follow an antagonistic logic which asserts that the working class shall not achieve revolution through the control and domination of the bourgeoisie, but through a radical destruction of it and of capital, in order to create space for total liberation. (150) Negri's autonomist Marxism follows an asocial, Althusserian logic, uninterested in the typical notions of humanist Marxism, which include a reversal of the dynamics of capitalism so that the proletariat owns the means of production and thus creates *a new social order*, a new inversion of capitalism, rather than destroying it entirely. Indeed, Negri notes that "working class power is not the reversal of capitalist power, not even formally." (150) Rather than revolt against the capitalist classes and structures and replace them with homogenous order and sovereignty of a different breed, Negri asserts that working class power lies in "the dissolution of all homogeneity." (150)

Negri's disavowal of homogeneity is again found in his understanding of

the social individual as a “multilaterality”, a noun bearing the unpredictable directional and behavioral possibilities of the working class individual once freed from capital. (149) Freedom from capitalist subjection and therefore notions of socially produced subjectivity and *being a subject at all*, does not come with “any uniform and flat scheme for organizing social reality”. (150) In fact, schematics of uniformity are those schematics directly opposed with Negri’s vision of a liberty which unfolds “a totality of possibilities”, a “wealth of alternatives”, and “a network of streams of enjoyment”. (150) Negri’s words are reminiscent of Althusser’s critique of the subject as embodiment of working class agency. Ultimately, Althusser’s and Negri’s anti-humanist structuralist analyses of Marx synchronize in their resistance to a humanist obliged collectivity; the social.

Indeed, Negri actively criticizes the logics of socialism, a derivation of Marxism which insists upon the use of the social to achieve revolution. Socialism’s emphasis on the function of labor itself reifies and affirms the political economy’s law of value; “Socialism keeps alive, and generalizes, the law of value. The abolition of work is the inverse mark of the law of value.” (166) As stated, the key to Negri’s Marxism is the abolition of labor and the automation of the means of production. Through this mechanism, the “proletarian auto-valorization”, the worker can begin to reap more of the market’s goods with less labor, ultimately, none at all. (166-7) The absence of the exploitative dynamics of the wage-labor exchange necessitates “the destruction of capital in every sense of the term”. (169) With full automation of labor, the former “subject”/former laborer no longer operates in the social. Subjection, as it is currently understood, no longer exists, because the subject, as defined by

subjection, ideology, and capital, no longer exists. If we understand the social and capital as Ideological State Apparatuses, their abolition refuses subjectivity. This imagined scenario is precisely *not* socialism or capitalism. It is, rather, “the positivity of a free constitution of subjectivity”. (169)

Negri’s analysis is consistent with Edelman’s emphasis on the refusal of politics and the refusal of reproductive futurism’s reification of the social. With fully automated labor and its anti-humanist queer temporality in Negri’s words, “all utopias become impossible”. (169) Collective obligation, order, and form become void and utopian imaginings become completely unnecessary. Specifically, there is no temporal urge for utopic imagining and, in Negri as in Edelman, the political positionality of this ideology is in its location in the present. For Negri, class struggle becomes a refusal of work endlessly, aiming only for the consumption of goods and accumulation of capital in the proletariat. For Edelman, the queerest insurrection lies within the negation and refusal of utopian longing, only in the refusal itself. Indeed, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one”. (Edelman, 17) Negri’s refusal of work and utopia operates the same way. His Marxist logics rest upon “the intensity of the contradictions that are contained in the concept of the world market”; the ability for the proletariat to demand more wages for less pay being the contradiction. (Negri, 151)

The asocial turn in queer theory has met its logical Marxist partner. Together Negri and Edelman constitute an asocial, anti-humanist discursive partnership which contains radical capacity to resist heteronormativity and collectivity, socialism and capital, through the dissolution of the sovereign subject.

THERE IS A BIG SECRET ABOUT THE SOCIAL: MOST PEOPLE DON'T LIKE IT

*We're often described as depraved, decadent, and revolting—but oh,
they ain't seen nothing yet.
-Total Destroy⁴*

Ultimately, abdication of the social's sovereignty, utopic visions, and labour rest upon the desire for the loss of the subject and on affect of nihilistic dissatisfaction. It would be foolish to suppose that these notions would be welcomed with open arms. Social conditionings to move towards something, to become attached to our subjected subjectivity, and to desire the recognition that comes with labor, are so utterly entrenched in the social psyche, that any suggestion of abandoning these conditionings produces pervasive fear. This fear is not a fear that functions like the child's fear of ghost stories. Rather, this deeply engrained social fear is the fear of the loss of self-recognition, and recognition by the other. Removal of occupation and class based identity leaves the individual supposedly purposeless, floating without meaning. The same threat of subject-devoid purposelessness haunts the loss of each of the conditionings I listed above. Therein lies the anxiety.

Rather than offer a suggestive mode of operating in the future as other conclusions might, I offer the radical possibility for the present disavowal of the social, the collective, labor, and the subject. This is not a prescription for action, per se, but a prescriptive calling for an asocial reading against the collective's pervasive

⁴ "Baedan," *Journal of Queer Nihilism*, no. 1 (2012)

influence on queer studies and Marxism. After all, turning against this influence can elicit distinct enjoyment, once the anxiety is soothed. Where can rejecting the ethical superiority of collectivity and labor take the individual?

—“Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.” (29)

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