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Queer Past, Queer Present, Queer Future

"Sometimes the very term that would annihilate us becomes the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political signification" – Judith Butler

"Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue" – Oscar Wilde

The term queer was first used in the sense we understand it today in 1991, by the North American academic Teresa de Lauretis, when she guest edited the feminist journal *differences* and titled it "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities". It had yet to take on the full cadence and colour of later theorizations, but this was its birthplace. In fact, de Lauretis would later abandon the term, claiming it had been mainstreamed by the very institutions it was meant to attack. As queer was emerging in the early 1990s, as a term pitched determinedly against the old guard of Lesbian & Gay, Judith Butler acknowledged that

> the assertion of 'queer' will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of investments (Butler 1993, 230)

So how has queer aged? How has it changed, or not? Does it still work? Who does it exclude? How is it currently understood, and how does that differ from the conditions of its emergence? In this essay I will offer a potted history of queer, providing the social, political and theoretical context in which queer theory emerged, and tracing its development up to the present, ending

with an overview of where queer theory is today. One of the aims of the essay is to suggest that, in a very real sense, there is nothing new about queer; that, in fact, as long as there has been a 'homosexual' identity there have been contestations over what exactly, that means, and what might be the relationship between that identity and the discursive regime within which it claims its intelligibility. This essay traces a kind of genealogy of queer energy, a trajectory of critical force that has always, in profound ways, been engaged with a broader social critique.

The Ultimate Question

At the end of his 1994 book *The Wilde Century*, Alan Sinfield claims:

> The ultimate question is this: is homosexuality intolerable? One answer is that actually lesbians and gay men are pretty much like other people, in which case it just needs a few more of us to come out, so that the nervous among our compatriots can see we aren't really so dreadful, and then everyone will live and let live; sexuality will become unimportant. The other answer is that homosexuality in fact constitutes a profound challenge to the prevailing values and structures in our kinds of society – in which case the bigots have a point of view and are not acting unreasonably. We cannot expect to settle this question, but the hypothesis we adopt will affect decisively our strategic options (Sinfield 1994, 177)

In other words, is homosexuality to be understood as nothing more than a variant sexuality, affecting only those individuals or groups who label themselves as gay or lesbian, or is homosexuality to be understood as a phenomenon with effects across the entire range of human sexualities – and, beyond that, across the entire range of human culture? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her 1993 book *Epistemology of the Closet*, calls these two views the *minoritizing* view, and the *universalizing* view. The minoritizing view, as the name suggests, sees homosexuality as of interest only to "a small, distinct, relatively fixed minority" – consisting of those people for whom it is an identity. The universalizing view, on the other hand, sees

homosexuality, or same-sex desire, as "an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities" (Sedgwick 1993, 1).

While this is a crucial distinction – as Sinfield points out, to take the universalizing view is to see homosexuality as a threat to society as a whole and to consider that homophobia, as such, is in some sense understandable – it is, nevertheless, not a simple question of either/or: either minoritizing *or* universalizing. Sedgwick argues that *both* are at work in our society at any one time. Indeed, the dynamic created by both views is one of her central hypotheses.

As is now well known by now, the word 'homosexual' was coined around 1869. Michel Foucault argues that the homosexual did not exist before this date. By this he means that the concept of 'the homosexual' names a personality type, a body type, a psychology that was hitherto unnamed. Further, in that naming a discrete and recognizable type of person is invented – the homosexual as a category of human being is invented, or discursively constructed. An identity is formed. From homosexuality as a sin that anyone might commit or a sickness that might afflict anyone, we move to the homosexual as a criminal and psychologically abnormal individual, with recognisible psychological and physiological characteristics.

This turning point from homosexuality or sodomy as a behaviour to the homosexual as a type or species is in a sense the start of the minoritizing view of homosexuality. It becomes regarded as being of importance only to a small number of people – those who fall within that identity bracket; the concept of homosexuality comes to apply, or is applied, only to those individuals so named, or who so name themselves. This is also the start of identity politics, and there were gay movements in Germany, and to an extent France, Britain and America, dating back to the late 19th century[1]. These movements were, for Foucault, examples of what he called 'reverse discourse', whereby the terminology concocted by psychiatry and the medical profession was employed as a self-definition and used to argue for the rights of those individuals.

Foucault writes that while the medical model sought to categorise homosexuals,

it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged,

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[1] See John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement* (Times Change Press, 1974); and James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (Arno Press, 1975).

often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (Foucault 1990, 101)

So the labeling of the homosexual worked in both ways – it provided the means of oppression and exclusion, but also the means for fighting it.

But this turning point is also the start of the universalizing view, because at the same time as 'the homosexual' is being labeled and constructed in opposition to the 'heterosexual' (a word not coined until 1878), that discursive figure enters discourse in the widest sense, in a way hitherto unseen. In the decade between 1895 and 1905 there were over 1000 books published on the subject of homosexuality, and only a very small fraction of those were written by homosexuals themselves. Homosexuality had, in this sense, entered the domain of Western epistemology in a big way. The analysis of homosexuality and the homosexual becomes crucial to the subsequent formation, analysis and controlling of society, and is part and parcel of what Foucault has termed 'bio-power', defined as the governing of populations. As David M. Halperin writes:

> According to Foucault's analysis, civil society, scientific research, intellectual activity, and personal life are not in fact free zones from which power has progressively retreated since the Enlightenment, but colonized spaces into which it has steadily expanded, proliferated, and diffused itself (Halperin 1995, 19)

Foucault's famous example of this discursive colonization is the construction of sexuality as a field of knowledge that presents itself as a form of liberation but is in fact a method for greater surveillance. He takes as an example the received opinion concerning the Victorian prudishness and suppression of sex, arguing that far from suppressing sexuality, the Victorians actively pursued it and devised a system of categorization by which deviations could be labeled and a moral rating applied to sexual expression whereby individuals could be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined and normalized. For Foucault, the ascendance of psychiatry and medical models for sexuality was a strategy for expanding power beyond the realm of the public. Surveillance extended into the bedroom, into the private realm of desire, and

sexuality became the key for unlocking the secret 'truth' of the self within Western discourses. His most famous example of this new technique for controlling populations is the invention of the homosexual. The division of humanity into two categories – the homosexual and the heterosexual – was an artificial means of governing the chaotic multiplicity of human desire, or what Freud calls polymorphous perversity.

As such, according to Halperin

> 'The homosexual', then, is not the name of a natural kind but a projection, a conceptual and semiotic dumping ground for all sorts of mutually incompatible, logically contradictory notions. These contradictory notions not only serve to define the binary opposite of homosexuality by (and as a) default; they also put into play a series of double binds that are uniquely oppressive to those who fall under the description of 'homosexual', double binds whose operation is underwritten and sustained by socially entrenched discursive and institutional practices (Halperin 1995, 45-6)

The contradictions brought into play by the arrival of these two understandings of homosexuality are still at work in our culture today. One recent example is the U.S. Military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Indeed, Sedgwick argues that

> an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition. (Sedgwick 1993, 1)

Those contradictions, in many ways, can be recast in modern terminology by regarding the minoritizing view as in a certain sense exemplified by the term 'lesbian and gay' – whereby there is a discrete minority of people for whom same sex desire is a defining condition of their identity and as such much be assimilated into existing cultural norms. This view is often termed 'assimilationist', but we could also call it 'liberal' or 'humanist' as well. Conversely, the universalizing view is exemplified by the term 'queer', which sees societal norms as oppressive,

sexophobic and in need of radical change. We might also call this view 'revolutionary', or 'critical' or even 'postmodern'.

In America since the mid 90s a fierce debate has raged between assimilationist lesbians and gay men and radical queers. The assimilationists want gay marriage, inclusion in the military, the right to adopt children – i.e., equal status within the *status quo*. Queers, on the other hand, want nothing to do with the *status quo*, instead regarding the most vibrant and radical aspect of homosexuality as being precisely its opposition to normative sexuality and society.

Simplifying to the extreme, the assimilationists tend to be conservative, seeing nothing wrong with society as it is, apart from the fact that gay people are not allowed the same privileges as straights. As such, they tent to want only to be allowed a 'place at the table', to use the title of a book by Bruce Bawer, an American gay rightwinger. Queers, on the other hand, want to burn the table, they don't want society to accept them because they do not accept society. Like Groucho Marx, they wouldn't want to be a member of any club that would have them as a member. They reject society's norms and challenge existing modes of behaviour. Assimilationists want to fit in – hence the name. Queers want to celebrate not fitting in.

In a very real sense, this dichotomy has been around for as long as 'homosexual' has been used to name a type of person rather than a type of behaviour. Even in the late 19th century in Germany the movement for liberation was divided between those who called themselves third sexers, centred around Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who relied on the medical figuration of a 'female soul trapped in a man's body', and those who called themselves the Community of the Self-Owners, led by Benedict Freidlander, who rejected the effeminacy model, but who dabbled with Fascist politics and were virulently anti-feminist and misogynistic[2].

According to Richard Goldstein in his recent book *The Attack Queers*, "this duality creates an abiding conflict between those who demand the freedom to be otherly and those who pursue the right to be normal"(Goldstein 2002, 11).

Those who criticize the diversity of queer culture and insist that we all act normal in order to be accepted are what Goldstein calls the Attack Queers – amongst them Andrew Sullivan, Camille Paglia, Norah Vincent, Michelangelo Signorile, Bruce Bawer. Their main

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[2] See Hubert Kennedy, *Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Booksurge Llc, 2005).

targets are those lesbians and gay men who marginalize themselves by refusing to conform to straight protocols: promiscuous faggots, SM dykes, drag queens, troublemakers.   Up for particular attack is a radical group called SEX PANIC, set up in 1997 in NYC by Michael Warner, Allan Berube and Eric Rofes, in order to counterattack the more phobic stance of the right wing gays, or homocons.

But the sex war raging in the States is, in many ways, a new face for an old battle. Social acceptance for homosexuals has always been fought by downplaying the less acceptable (usually sexual) aspects for fear of upsetting liberal sensibilities and offending the people whose acceptance we're seeking. One early example of queer energy, of someone who tied homosexual desire to a programme for social change, is Edward Carpenter[3]. Likewise, though in a different guise, Oscar Wilde's anti-establishmentarianism led him to sympathize with anarchist politics. He signed a petition in support of the famous anarchists, the Haymarket Martyrs, and described himself in one interview as "something of an anarchist"[4]. His essay 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', with its advocacy of socialism and individualism, has become an important anarchist statement; indeed, in the 2004 entry in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Wilde's essay is described as "perhaps the most memorable and certainly the most aesthetic statement of anarchist theory in the English language"[5].

Quentin Crisp's wonderful memoir *The Naked Civil Servant*, and the film of the same name, recall how violently Crisp was treated not only by straight society but also by the gay subculture who were desperately trying to pass as straight in order to avoid the type of violence Crisp encountered daily due to his extremely effeminate or flaming appearance, with his henna'ed hair, and, in his own words, "dumb with lipsick and blind with mascara". In a very real sense, it comes down to whether one wants to fit in, pass, be accepted, or whether one wants to reject normative society and live on the margins. Queer is about saying that either option is a political one. Not to challenge the normative values of heterosexual society is to maintain and perpetrate those values. But queer is also about saying that for some people it isn't even a choice, and those people have a right to live without fear of violence.

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[3] See Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (Verso, 2008).
[4] See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Hamish Hamilton, 1987, 273-310).
[5] See David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers From William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool University Press, 2006, pp.62-92).

In a pluralist and truly democratic society there should be room for everyone, not just those people who conform to acceptable standards of the dominant ideology. Because we do not yet live in such a society, there is a need to fight in order to defend people's rights to sexual self-determination, and that fight necessarily challenges the *status quo*. As Michael Warner writes

> Because the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts. The dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are (Warner 1993, xiii)

An identity without an essence

Whilst this division between 'lesbian and gay' on one side and 'queer' on the other is a relatively new phenomenon, the conflict it dramatizes has dogged the history of homosexuality for over one hundred years. As Warner comments,

> Queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear. Queer theory, in short, has much work to do just in keeping up with queer political culture. If it contributes to the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age, it may make the world queerer than ever (*ibid*, xxviii)

Before the term 'queer' came into common currency as a (dia)critical, affirmative and radical self-denomination, as opposed to a term of abuse from others, the term 'lesbian and gay' stood for progressive and radical political engagement with changing the ways homosexuality was

perceived and treated in heteronormative culture. The gay movement has always been torn by a conflict of interests between those who want social reform and those who want revolution. In this sense, 'queer' is just another name for those who want revolution, those who choose to live outside of and thereby challenge society's norms. According to Foucault

> It's not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into pre-existing cultures; it's a matter of constructing cultural forms (cited in Halperin 1995, 80)

As such, queer is nothing new. For as long as there has been a form of homosexual politics there have been those who wanted assimilation and those who wanted something else, some new cultural forms. What is new about 'queer' politics or theory is the sophisticated level of theoretical engagement, which has taken its cue from post-structuralism and the critical insights that has engendered.

Without Foucault, in particular, queer might never have happened, although it is a word he himself never used. (He died in 1984). What David M. Halperin shows in his book *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* is that Foucault's analysis of society enabled a way of thinking that allowed for sexuality to be seen as something to be challenged rather than as something to be embraced and accepted on the terms set down by society. Foucault famously declared that it's not a question of discovering or liberating who we are, but of refusing who we are, of resisting the norm. In a manner typical of post-structuralism, the concept of the homosexual was opened up by Foucault to expand and problematize its meaning. Rather than being an essence, it became for him a possibility of moving beyond the very notion of essence or identity and into a realm of experimentation with alternative ways of structuring society. What this means is that the notion of a homosexual identity, for Foucault, was another way of exerting power over individuals. It becomes something else to conform to. Instead, he wanted homosexuality to provide an opportunity for society to change radically and for new types of human relationships and ways of being to be explored, what he called a stylistics of existence that took the self as something to be constructed and not simply to be discovered and liberated. Halperin writes:

> Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence (Halperin 1995, 62, original emphasis)

For Foucault, it was the challenge of anonymous and promiscuous sexual encounters that provided new routes for being homosexual, ways which did not conform to the heterosexual assumptions about what constitutes a relationship, or what constitutes sexuality. But being queer is not prescriptive – and it is not being into SM sex, or fisting, or promiscuity that marks one as queer. Queer is whatever it at odds with the norm. Queer is about not simply imitating the norm but exploring alternatives, and as such it has an inherently political motivation that sees sexuality itself as inherently political. For this reason, sexuality becomes the terrain upon which most queer theory and practice works. But it does so by opening up the term sexuality and challenging its definitions and exploring the ways in which sexuality can be understood, and how we might dismantle or deconstruct our Western assumptions about what sexuality is. It was for this reason that Foucault focused on fisting, because it is a sexual act that does not use the genitals, but reinvents sexuality, or pleasure, as something non-genital.

For the same reason he was interested in forging new forms of relationships – ones that did not conform to heterosexual models of family and partnership. He proposed some form of adoption whereby any human being could adopt another – it need not, he argued, be a form of connection restricted to an adult and a child.

In a very real sense, it isn't possible to give a queer agenda as such because queer is about exploration and invention. As Halperin writes

> 'Queer'…does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of

representation, modes of self-construction, and practices of community – for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth and desire (Halperin 1995, 62)

As such, queer is a practice or process of critique, an ongoing challenge to whatever stands as the norm. And over the seventeen years since it emerged as a critical term it has come to stand for different things and be used to critique different aspects of contemporary life.

Like a rhizome

Today, some of the most interesting queer work is grounded in the understanding queer as, "a political metaphor without a fixed referent", to quote David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz. This, they argue, allows sexuality to be "intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference", something which provides for a more focused interrogation of "the social processes that not only produced and recognized but also normalized and sustained identity". As such, the political promise of the term resides "specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality" (Eng *et al* 2005, 1). This erotics of identity, this linking of sexuality to the wider socio-political field provides queer with a broad base from which to direct its critique. And this multiplicity is a direct result of the poststructuralist expansion of critique to become trans-disciplinary. Like a rhizome, queer has made its way into anthropology, philosophy, fine art, literature, film, geography, social theory, history, economics and aesthetics. It has informed, in its short history, many forms of pedagogy and knowledge. I would like, for the remainder of the essay, over a brief overview of where queer theory is at right now.

Challenging the 'homonormativity' of first wave queer theorists, who were seen as predominantly white, male and middleclass, a great deal of important work is coming from queers of colour, queers from non-white, non-Western countries and epistemologies[6]. What

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[6] A far from exhaustive list would include: Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (University of Minnesota Press 2003); Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Duke University Press 2000); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire and the Black American Intellectual* (NYU Press 2007); José Esteban Muñoz,

emerges from this work is a queer epistemology that "insists that we embark on expanded investigations of normalization and intersectionality" (Eng *et al* 2005, 5). Whilst the term 'queer' is noticeable by its absence in the 1997 volume *Sites of Desire, Economies of Desire: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, this collection of essays is nevertheless aware of recent theoretical manoeuvres of interdisciplinarity within the field of sexuality, and therefore "query both an easy essentialism and an easy relativisim by focusing on cross-cultural exchanges in sexualities – exchanges in meanings and fantasies as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies"(Jolly and Manderson 1997, 1)[7]. José Esteban Muñoz, for example, focuses on non-white performance art to demonstrate how rage functions to politicize these performances, which thereby come to represent "a bid to take space in the social that has been colonized by the logics of white normativity and heteronormativity"(Muñoz 1999, xii). Through a process of what he calls 'queer worldmaking', these disidentificatory performances dramatize a performativity that "willfully disavows that which majoritarian culture has decreed as the 'real'" (196). As a result, such performances offer "a utopian blueprint for a possible future while, at the same time, staging a new political formation in the present"(200).

Roderick A. Ferguson also investigates the useful ways in which race and queer intersect and imbricate as discursive fields saturated with power. Using Foucault's nonhierarchical model of power as discursive technique, Ferguson offers the insight that "sexuality has a variety of deployments in which we might observe its constitution through discourses of race, gender, and class", suggesting that "if there is any point to the study of sexuality at all, it is in the observation and clarification of this insight"(in Eng *et al* 2005, 99). Jasbir K. Puar offers one such example of such a clarification of these intersections by exploring the war on terror and using it "to rearticulate what queer theory and studies of sexuality have to say about the metatheories and the

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Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (University of Minnesota Press 1999); David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Duke University Press, 2001); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (University of California Press 2001). Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey (eds) *Thinking Sexuality Transnationally*, a special issue of GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies Vol. 5 no. 4 (Duke University Press, 1999)

[7] Whilst the term 'queer' is noticeable by its absence in the 1997 volume *Sites of Desire, Economies of Desire: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, this collection of essays is nevertheless aware of recent theoretical manoeuvres of interdisciplinarity within the field of sexuality, and therefore "query both an easy essentialism and an easy relativisim by focusing on cross-cultural *exchanges* in sexualities – exchanges in meanings and fantasies as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies"(Jolly and Manderson 1997, 1).

'real-politics' of Empire"(ibid, 121). She criticizes what she calls 'queer liberalism' for failing "to interrogate the epistemological will to knowledge that invariably reproduces the disciplinary interests of the U.S. nation-state"(122). Through a reading of the sexualizations and racializations of the figure of the suicide bomber, she develops, instead of the concept of intersectionality, the Deleuzean concept of (queer) assemblage: a dispersal and disavowal of identity and the type of politics it engenders. "As a queer assemblage – distinct from the 'queering' of an entity or identity – race and sexuality are denaturalized through the impermanence, the transience of the suicide bomber; the fleeting identity replayed backward through its dissolution"(130). Within the figure of the suicide bomber – or monster-terrorist-fag[8] - especially at the moment of death (a death which is not only of the self but of the surrounding others) "the ontological affect of the body renders it a newly becoming body, queerly…Temporal narratives of progression are upturned as death and becoming fuse into one"(129). Queer and temporal rupture have been fruitfully intersected by other recent work. Judith *Halberstam's In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) ambitiously claims queer time and queer space as pressing contemporary concerns for understanding how queer lives unfold along trajectories radically different to those mapped out by heteronormative imperatives. Within queer space-time, "willfully eccentric modes of being" press forward and compel us into formulating "new temporal logics" that are not chained to the scripts offered by straight space-time: family, inheritance, child-rearing (1-2). This isn't all about utopian freedom, however; Halberstam also considers how AIDS has impacted on queer life-narratives and severely diminished the horizons of possibility for many gay communities, creating a new emphasis on the here and now (2). Whilst AIDS was very much responsible for the emergence of queer politics and theory, in the years since, due to changes in medication, perhaps, the virus is less present in writings about queer. The phenomenon of barebacking is appearing more and more as a controversial issue in the queer community[9], and in many ways is intimately linked with notions of time, of curtailed futures, of risked life-times.

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[8] Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster-Terrorist-Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots", *Social Text*, no.72 (2002), 117-48.
[9] See Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, May 2009)

In 2007, an issue of the journal *GLQ* entitled *Queer Temporalities* offered an overview of how the concept of time has emerged as an important and contentious concept within queer theory. How is linear time queered by something more insistent and insistently erotic, an interruption of 'straightforward' teleological life scripts? What does it mean to queer time? How do queer lives map time differently? What are the imbrications of time and sexuality?[10] Or, as Elizabeth Freeman, the guest editor, puts it, how do "marginalized time schemes" connect with "subjugated or disavowed erotic experiences, including male homoeroticism, same-sex marriage, interracial coupling, heterosexual feminine desire, mourning, incest, and paedophilia", which allows us to "reimagine 'queer' as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, or see the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even nonrelationality)" (Freeman 2007, 159). The queer production of nonrelationality has been taken up and developed in the work of Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman and William Haver.

For Bersani, "the elaborating of certain erotic preferences into a 'character' – into a kind of erotically determined essence – can never be a disinterested scientific enterprise" because "the attempted stabilizing of identity is inherently a disciplinary project" (Bersani 1995, 3). By 'de-gaying gayness', gay men and lesbians have, he argues, almost disappeared, assimilating to the mainstream so much that "we have erased ourselves in the process of denaturalizing the epistemic and political regimes that have constructed us"(4). And we have done this to the point that "we have *learned to desire* from within the heterosexual norms and gendered structures that we can no longer think of as natural, or as exhausting all the options for self-identification"(6, original emphasis). Whilst recognizing that "unidentifiability is an act of defiance"(32), Bersani offers instead a reading of homosexuality that imagines "a curative collapsing of social difference into a radical homo-ness, where the subject might begin again, differentiating itself from itself and thereby reconstituting sociality" (177). For Bersani, homosexuality is queer precisely when it allows for this challenge to standard accounts of (inter)subjectivity in the interests of rethinking the concept of sociality, considering homosexuality precisely *as* anti-

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[10] Again, a by no means exhaustive list of titles would include: Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (NYU Press 2005); Elizabeth Freeman (ed) *Queer Temporalities: A Special edition of GLQ Journal* (Duke University Press, 2007); Heather Love*, Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

social phenomenon, with all the critical force that such anti-sociality generates. Taking this notion of queer anti-sociality further, Edelman suggests that, not only does queerness figure, "outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive', but also, more radically, 'queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure" (Edelman 2004, 3). Such a conception of queerness, he argues, "would deliberately sever us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of *knowing* ourselves and hence of knowing our 'good'"(5). In this severing of ourselves from the safe position of being an object about which knowledge can be gained, we start to see "not only that politics conforms to the temporality of desire […] but also that politics is a name for the temporalization of desire"(9). For Edelman, queer thus designates anyone who is "stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates", the most insidious of which is, for him, "the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism"(17). In response to those mandates, "the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such"(*ibid*). This resistence to the ontologizing of history focuses its energies on "the epistemological impasse, the aporia of rationality, the nonidentity of things", by, ultimately, "exploding the subject of knowledge" (in Freeman 2007, 181). Queer epistemology for Edelman is about "an encounter with what can't be assimilated to any systematic understanding, what doesn't conduce to the logic of periodization or identity", or what he calls "the queerness of time's refusal to submit to a temporal logic" (*ibid*, 188). Edelman proposes an understanding of queer that figures itself as "a nonteleological negativity" (*ibid*, 195) which, as such, insists on the transformation of what we take to be (fields of) knowledge.

William Haver similarly calls for a queer methodology or research which takes for granted that "there can be no authority", a queer research "which brings us to the inevitability of the erotic which it has been education's sole purpose to avoid" (Haver 1997, 292). Within the rubric of such an epistemology, relationality as such must be understood as "the site of pure interruption, at which we never arrive because it is never outside the here and now"(*ibid*). For Haver, queer theory must refuse to totalize the social field, and instead implement an interruption to academic business as usual. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Sue Golding and Michael

Hardt, Haver suggests that queer can usefully demarcate the limits of knowledge precisely by recognizing that it "can never amount to an epistemological capture of an object by an understanding on behalf of knowledge" (283). Locating queer theory's philosophical roots, Haver suggests that queer research could do worse than recognize that whilst it cannot do without concepts, those concepts do not correspond to the object named. There is always some remainder, or supplement, that reveals itself precisely in concealing itself, that constitutes a limit or interruption in the production of knowledge. As such, queer theory is most usefully employed in recognizing the ways in which pedagogy reproduces culture by creating 'good citizens', based on the assumption that there is "an essential correspondence between knowing and acting, between the True and the Good: the right thinking makes for right acting"(287). Following Deborah P. Britzman's work on queer pedagogy[11], Haver argues that "thought must confront its own essential and enabling insufficiency (290) if truly queer interruptions are to be made, ones that refuse epistemological respectability.

Similarly engaged with queer theory's origins in a certain critical philosophical tradition is the work of Sara Ahmed on queer phenomenology[12]. Exploring what it means to have a sexual orientation, Ahmed engages with the philosophies of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, designating queer the disorientations that allow normativity to take form. Queer, for her, thus has at least two senses: firstly, it designates what is 'oblique' or off line'; secondly, it describes specific sexual practices. It is a way "to disturb the order of things" (Ahmed 2006, 161). Sexual deviation is thus always already social, and therefore political, deviation: "queer as a sexual orientation 'queers' more than sex, just as other kinds of queer effects can in turn end up 'queering' sex. It is important to make the oblique angle of queer do this work, even if it risks placing different kinds of queer effects alongside each other"(ibid, 161-2). How might we understand the 'orientation' in sexual orientation as having a spatial dimensionality? What is a queer space? How is space or place queered? How do we understand concepts such as the queer urban? The epistemology of the cruising ground, or the cottage. Sexualized public spaces and public sex. Important work here has been done by Sue Golding, Michael Warner, Samuel R.

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[11] Deborah P. Britzman, 'Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight', *Education Theory*, 45: 2 (Spring 1995), pp.151-165.
[12] See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2007).

Delany and Paul Hallam, amongst others[13]. As David Bell and Gill Valentine describe it in their important volume *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, the work of Sue Golding "discusses the 'impossible geography' of the city as a site for reconfiguring counterhegemonic sexualities. Through a dense deployment of philosophy, physics, politics and pornography, she envisages the 'creative and wild possibilities' presented by 'the "elsewhere" of decadent urban life or the 'elsewhere of sexual mutation curiosity, as she also calls it"(Bell and Valentine 1995, 16). Delany and Warner offer sophisticated and provocative defences of gay public sex, whilst Hallam's explorations in Sodom are predicated on the understanding that "any city worth its salt has been called, at one time or another, Sodom"(15).

In his ruminations on queer space theory, John Paul Ricco insists that "The democratization of knowledge production and the articulation of queer (counter-)publics has always been a political aspiration for practitioners of queer theory"[14]. What he calles queer sex space theory

> foregrounds its discursivity and configures itself as simply one materialization of queer sexual insurgency and erotic itinerancy. It does this by citing that which forever eludes the capacities of identity, representation, and onjectification – mechanisms of referentiality and the evidentiary. It is in this way that the forms of theory and practice being put forth here are anti-normative, or more specifically, queer (i.e. difficult and nearly impossible to cite and site) (149)

One way Ricco suggests that queer sex space theory might disseminate is through other routes than the merely academic. Citing William Haver's comment that "it may well be that the university, or education institutions generally, will not be the site of queer research" (1997, 289), Ricco suggests activist networks, sites of 'alternative' culture and independent bookstores as

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[13] Delany, Samuel R. *Times Square Red Times Square Blue* (New York University Press, 1999); Golding, S. 'The excess: an added remark on sex, rubber, ethics, and other impurities' New Formations 19, 1993, 23-8; 'Quantum philosophy, impossible geograpies and a few small points about life, liberty and the pursuit of sex (all in the name of democracy)', in M. Keith and S. Pile (eds) Place and the Politics of Identity Routledge 1993; 'Sexual Manners' in V. Harwood, D. Oswell, K. Parkinson and A. Ward (eds) Pleasure Principles: Politics, Sexuality and Ethics, Lawrence & Wishart 1993; Hallam, P, *The Book of Sodom*, Verso 1993; Michael Warner, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Harvard University Press 1999).
[14] John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (University of Chicago Press, 2002)

outlets for such work, giving as an example the free pamphlets printed by QUASH (Queers United Against Straight-acting Homosexuals), a Chicago-based queer activist collective in the mid-to-late 90s. As such, this kind of queer sex space theory, in being non-archivable, embodies the risk of "anonymous modes of sociality that abandon situated identities as they become itinerant intensities", threatening the 'familiar, the recognizable, the recuperated, and the knowable – all of those anchors in which we think we find assurance of a self and a world"(Ricco, 152).

One of the first questions that arose from the reappropriation of queer as an affirmative and critical term was, "Can the term overcome its constitutive history of injury", given that "when the term has been used as a paralysing slur, as the mundane interpellation of pathologized sexuality, it has produced the user of the term as the emblem and vehicle of normalization"(Butler 1993, 223)? How have queer identities been forged by a discourse of shame? How has the reappropriation of 'queer' as a badge of pride reiterated its history as a shameful insult? What, indeed, are the cultural politics of shame? Eve Sedgwick attaches shame to queer performativity and theatricality in an attempt to rethink the nodalities that constitute it as a structuring fact of identity for certain ('queer') people (2003, 64). She suggests that in its integral role in the formation of queer identities, shame can inform and deepen our understandings of performativity and identity politics without reverting back to straightforward essentialism, or binaries of 'depth' and 'surface', especially in relation to 'camp'.

In a useful summary of writings on queer shame, Tavia Nyong'o notes that "accounts of shame tend to fall in one of two camps, therapeutic and transfigurative". In the former camp, he places Patrick Moore's *Beyond Shame* (2004) and James Gilligan's *Preventing Violence* (2001), although the latter, according to Nyong'o, "moves a great deal further than Moore toward the transfigurative approach developed in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Robert Reid-Pharr, and now Kathryn Stockton"(in Freeman 2007, 403) [15]. In exploring the meeting point of 'queer' and 'black', Stockton "permits her texts to apply themselves to her", calling for "new modes of

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[15] Patrick Moore, *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality* (Beacon, 2004); James Gilligan, *Preventing Violence* (Thames & Hudson, 2001); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2002); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (NYU Press, 2001); Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Duke University Press, 2006).

reading that break down the distinctions of subject and object animating many identity projects"(404).

Queer shame has, of course, emerged in response to Gay Pride, and Matt Bernstein Sycamore, one of the original founders of the Gay Shame activist group in New York and San Francisco, gives an account of their activities in 'Gay Shame: From Queer Autonomous Space to Direct Action Extravanganza'[16]. Gay Shame was a queer anti-consumerist direct action group. Much like the early 90s homocore/queercore groups, or the Riot Grrrls, it was characterized by a DIY/Punk aesthetic/ethic and a rage against the 'off-the-peg' identity of the commercial gay scene. Focused around music and 'zine culture, this aspect of queer living is defiantly non-academic, non-institutionalized, and as such currently underwritten/under-researched[17]. Tied in with this is the emerging field of queer economics[18], in which the cooption of lesbian and gay identities and politics by late capitalist models of consumerism is seen to dismantle any necessary or immediate link between dissident sexuality and socialist or Left politics.

Since Butler used aspects of cross-gender behaviour to exemplify her theory of gender performativity in Gender Trouble (1991), transgender/transsexuality has emerged as its own field or discipline and as a consistently queer challenge to gender binaries. As Jay Prosser has noted,

> In its earliest formations, in what are considered its foundational texts, queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of transgender […] Seized on as a definitively queer force that 'troubled' the identity categories of gender, sex, and sexuality – or rather revealed them to be always already fictional and precarious – the trope of crossing was most often impacted with if not explicitly illustrated by the transgendered subject's crossing their several boundaries at once: both the boundaries

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[16] See *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, Mattilda, AKA Matt Bernstein Sycamore (Soft Skull Press, 2004), 237-262.

[17] See Bill Hsu, 'Spew: The Queer Punk Convention' in *Postmodern Culture* Vol.2, No.1, 1991; Alan Sears, 'Queer Anti-Capitalism: What's Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?' in *Science & Society* Vol.69, No.1 (2005); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Beacon Press, 2003).

[18] See Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed (eds), *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Communism and Lesbian and Gay Life* (Routledge, 1997); Joyce Jacobsen & Adam Zeller, *Queer Economics: A Reader* (Routledge, 2008); Hennessy, R., *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (Routledge, 2000); Morton, D., *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader* (Westview Press, 1996).

between gender, sex and sexuality and the bound that structures each as a binary category (in Stryker and Whittle 2006, 258)

Post-Butlerian queer performativity finds itself most dramatically played out within the movement across genders and the refusal to acknowledge – except in the most critical way – gender dimorphism[19]. On the other hand, performativity, and its anti-essentialist concept of constructed gender identity, does not, in many ways, speak to a transgender community for whom an essential, 'true' and inappropriately bodied gender holds true, providing a position from which to work towards recitifying the biological 'mistake' via radical surgery. This is not a conflict that will be settled any time soon, and critical queer energies will be deployed, no doubt, on both sides.

Ultimately, and in conclusion, the ongoing problem with queer, which is a problem Derrida predicted for deconstruction (from which queer gets much of its critical energy), is the ongoing threat of institutionalization that occurs when a critical term enters the academy, a taming of the critical energy, a domestication, a declawing and detoothing of its sharpest assets.

Queer, if it names anything, names a critical impulse that can never, must never, settle.

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[19] See any of Kate Bornstein's work; also, Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (CRC Press, 2006); Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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